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Poetics and Maieutics: Literature and Tacit Knowledge of Emotions

Stefán Snaevarr

Abstract

The theme of this paper is the idea that imaginative literature can disclose our tacit knowledge of emotions. It does this with the aid of such devices as metaphors and similes. The kind of insight we get thanks to the disclosive power of literature is akin to that which Kjell S. Johannessen has called 'knowledge by familiarity,' Frank Palmer 'knowing what' and Charles Taylor implicitly 'the result of articulation.' I defend the theory that at least some important emotions cannot be understood (or even exist) outside of behavioral contexts and that this understanding is mainly tacit. I try to show that certain works of literature can disclose this kind of tacit knowledge, not least because of the productive distance to this knowledge imaginative literature gives. Further, I use several examples from imaginative literature to show how poetical metaphors, poetical similes, the *Verfremdung* and other poetical devices disclose tacit knowledge of emotions.

Key Words

articulation, disclosure, emotions, Johannessen, Lakoff, literature, maieutics, metaphors, Palmer, tacit knowledge, Taylor

1. Introduction.

In this paper I want to show that poetics need maieutics. The reason is that imaginative literature can disclose the tacit sides of our knowledge about emotions.^[1] Literature helps us bear forth the knowledge we are pregnant with; it is our spiritual midwife like Socrates of old, hence the title of this paper. Thus literature does not necessarily increase our knowledge but rather helps us articulate our tacit knowledge, a knowledge we already possess (there is a sense in which that kind of knowledge possesses us!). I think that this theory explicates the widespread intuition that literature tends to deal with some kind of intuitive knowledge, knowledge that cannot be adequately expressed in non-literary, prosaic ways. Among those who have had this intuition was the Norwegian poet Johann Sebastian Welhaven, who said that poetry expresses the ineffable.^[2]

Let me briefly outline the themes of this paper. First, I will discuss the concept of tacit knowledge. The second theme is the question of whether our knowledge of emotions tends to have tacit sides, a question that is answered in the affirmative. The discussion about the second theme is woven into an attempt to show how imaginative literature can make us aware of our tacit knowledge of emotions. This attempt is my third and most important theme.

2. A Wittgensteinian Brand of Tacit Knowledge

As is well known, tacit knowledge is a kind of knowledge that we cannot adequately express in propositions. This is a sort of implicit or intuitive knowledge. Among the paradigmatic

examples of such knowledge are our diverse types of know-how. A biker and a swimmer have know-how, which enables them to cycle and swim without necessarily being able to explain their know-how with the aid of propositions. And we certainly cannot learn to swim or cycle by acquiring propositional knowledge; we acquire the skills in question primarily by trial and error. Actually, if we try to cycle or swim consciously and in the process apply propositional knowledge to the task at hand, we risk losing our control, fall off the bike, or drown.[3]

Our knowledge of the way people walk is basically tacit. I can know a certain person's way of walking with somnambulistic certainty, but I cannot express this knowledge in propositions in such a way that my hearers or readers can individuate his walking without having seen him or her walk. The same applies to our knowledge of faces, as Michael Polanyi indeed emphasises. He was inspired by *Gestalt* psychology in his analysis of tacit knowledge. The *Gestalt* theorists maintained that we could recognise a physiognomy (in our case a face) as a whole without being able to identify its parts. Polanyi then famously said 'we know more than we can tell.'[\[4\]](#)

However, Polanyi is a lesser source of inspiration to me than Wittgenstein and his followers. Wittgenstein never used the expression 'tacit knowledge,' but there is no doubt that it was on the tip of his tongue:

§78. Compare *knowing* and *saying*:

how many feet high Mont Blanc is-

how the word 'game' is used-

how a clarinet sounds-

If you are surprised that one can know something and not be able to say it, you are perhaps thinking of a case like the first. Certainly not of one like the third.[\[5\]](#)

These remarks have been a tremendous inspiration for the Norwegian Wittgensteinian, Kjell S. Johannessen. He thinks that besides know-how there is a brand of tacit knowledge that he calls "knowledge by familiarity" (I will refer to this by the abbreviation "KF" for the remainder of this paper). The knowledge of the way a clarinet sounds can be an example of such knowledge. Johannessen maintains that KF is "intransitive," i.e., it is a type of knowledge that cannot be entirely transferred to other means of expression. The knowledge in question is closely connected to experiences of certain kinds, for instance of music or of *Gestalten*.[\[6\]](#) It is obvious that knowing how a clarinet sounds is not know-how, in contrast to the ability to play the instrument. Knowing the sound of a clarinet is possessing tacit knowledge *about* a phenomenon. We show by our actions that we possess know-how, but the same does not apply to our possession of KF. In some ways the KF is closer to propositional knowledge than to know-how. Just like propositional knowledge, KF is know-that, not the ability to perform certain tasks. Secondly, this kind of knowledge is autotelic, i.e., has its aim in itself, and cannot be used for anything except to be related to by the knower in

experience and reflection. Thirdly, KF can only be acquired by personal acquisition and must be personal knowledge.[7]

I think that Johannessen is on the right track.[8] It seems to me that our knowledge about faces and ways of walking is KF. It is tacit knowledge, it is knowledge about something, and it is definitely not know-how. At the same it almost goes without saying that this kind of knowledge is pretty practical.

Be that as it may, Johannessen says somewhat surprisingly that linguistic devices, such as metaphors and analogies, play a certain role in hinting at our KF. Actually, Johannessen does not use the expression "hinting at KF," but I think it is fairly obvious that it does not make sense to say we can explicate tacit knowledge in a satisfactory manner, only hint at it. Interestingly enough, Wittgenstein himself says that in describing a musical passage, we only hint at it.[9] When I talk about the articulation of KF, I mean, by 'articulation,' something in the direction of hinting at KF, making a sketch of KF or disclosing KF. The tools for the articulation are metaphors, analogies, similes, literary devices, meaningful gestures, and the like.

Now, saying that language plays a role in the articulation surely sounds like a contradiction in terms. Admittedly, Johannessen is bit unclear on this issue. It is not clear whether he thinks that the linguistic devices *must* play a role in the articulation of all forms of KF, or whether their use is optional, or whether there are forms of KF where language has no role to play whatsoever. I think it suffices to say that there are cases of KF where language plays an important, perhaps necessary, part in the articulation and that there might be cases where language has no role to play. My hunch is that language plays an important role in the articulation of our knowledge of faces, ways of walking and, as we later will see, in our tacit knowledge of emotions (this list is hardly exhaustive).

Let us look at our knowledge of faces. It does not make sense to say that person P knows John's way of walking or his face unless there is a way of putting forth assertions like "P knows John's way of walking" or "I, P, know that this, here, is John's face." Only with the aid of such linguistic means as assertions can we discern between knowledge about faces/ways of walking and pure reactions to them. That Fido barks happily whenever he sees John does not mean that he knows that this is John's face (*mutatis mutandis* the same holds for the dog's reaction to John's way of walking). Seeing the face (or the person walking) triggers some reaction in Fido, but he hardly possesses the concepts of a face and a person. Therefore, he cannot be said to subsume what he reacts to under the concept of a face. Thus, he does not really know John's face, and even if he does possess such knowledge, it would not be a paradigmatic knowledge of a face. Paradigmatic knowledge of faces and similar things would be knowledge possessed by a minded being endowed with linguistic competence and mastery of concepts (that the knowledge, which this being possesses, has pre-conceptual foundation is altogether another matter). One of the reasons for this is that the concept of knowledge was created to account for the knowledge that such a being possesses. The burden of proof is upon anybody who thinks

that non-minded beings possess conceptual knowledge, at least of the abstract kind.

The upshot of this is that some kind of language, a symbolic system that provides the means for the creation of assertions, plays an essential role for the constitution and understanding of at least certain kinds of KF. [10] This fact points in the direction of language having a role to play in the articulation of this type of KF. However, assertions that are literally meant and/or understood play an essential role in informing us about the fact that John has a face and thus determine it as a certain object of which one can have KF of. In contrast, these kinds of assertions are not of any great help when it comes to give information about *how* his face is, which is the proper domain of KF. Assertions of this type are not very successful in describing John's face or for that matter his manner of walking. Try to make people recognise a face they have never seen on the basis of descriptions alone and you are almost certainly bound to fail (that is, unless the face has some strange individual mark like a huge wart). Try to make people visualise correctly such an unknown face solely on the basis of descriptions and your attempt is doomed. Such descriptions alone cannot help us to identify John's face/way of walking, even though they can be a part of the articulation of our KF of the face/way of walking. I can probably describe *types* of faces and manners of walking with the aid of literal assertions, but I can hardly individuate a face/way of walking in that fashion.

Here, meaningful gestures can come in handy; pointing at John can do wonders in identifying him. Similes and metaphors improve the situation. For instance I can say, "He walks like an old cow" and thus use a simile. [11] And when describing his face I can say metaphorically, "He has a beaver's face." There are cases where such metaphors and similes are apt and cases where they are not. It would usually not be apt to call a toothless person's face "a beaver's face"; a round face with two very prominent front teeth would be a hot candidate for the "beaver face" title. So we can at least make sketches of our tacit knowledge of faces with the aid of such metaphors. What metaphoric sketches would I need to make in order to articulate my propositional knowledge that $2 + 2 = 4$? Assertions like "two and two equals four" do the job nicely. And if I describe my pencil as being literally white and seven centimetres long, what is left out in this literal description, which would require hinting with the aid of metaphors and meaningful gestures? The answer to both questions is "Nothing." So there are cases where the articulation of KF requires figurative language; propositional knowledge usually does not meet such a need.

There is one aspect of the articulation of KF I have not mentioned. As the good Wittgensteinian he is, Johannessen stresses the role of examples in such an articulation. To give yet another example of my own making, I cannot explain what baroque music is solely in words, even though I instantly hear that certain musical pieces belong to that genre. But I can give examples of baroque music – some pieces of Italian baroque on the one hand, and some pieces of German baroque on the other. Additionally, it would be advisable to give examples of borderline cases, and even examples of

rococo and renaissance music as an instructive contrast. Later we will discover the importance of concrete examples for the KF of emotions.

3. Palmer's Know-What and Taylor's Articulation

KF has a cousin called "know-what," a brain child of the English philosopher and Wittgensteinian Frank Palmer. "Know-what" is a third type of tacit knowledge, alongside know-how and KF. According to Palmer, our knowledge of emotions is what he terms "knowing what," which differs from "knowing that." We can know *that* sadness is caused by too little serotonin in the brain but at the same time have no inkling about what it feels like to be sad. In order to know that, we must, of course, experience sadness. Such knowledge is not necessarily propositional, for it does not involve the ability to provide descriptions. Rather, it involves the capability to recall or even imagine experience. Propositional knowledge has the form "know that p," and the object of knowledge is a true proposition. But if we have "know-what" about a phenomenon, then the object of knowledge is an experience, not a proposition.

Interestingly enough, it does not really make sense to equate the mere experience of depression with knowing what the experience is like. It seems absurd to maintain that there is an equivalence between "I am depressed" and "I am knowing depression." However, there is no such absurdity involved in equating "I have experienced depression" and "I have known depression." The fact that the past-tense statements are equivalent suggests that this type of knowledge requires a certain distance. If I understand Palmer correctly, this is the reason why literary works can express "know-what"; whatever the nature of such a literary expression is, it is not the same as the subjective experience of emotions. A book has no feelings and can therefore provide us with a distance to our own emotions. I think this is quite correct; as we will see later, this distance is productive in the sense of producing insights.

Palmer says that Shakespeare would not have been able to write *Hamlet*, nor could readers understand the play, if there was no way of getting into the mind of a depressed person and seeing the world through his or her eyes. In actual fact, even though "know-what" is non-propositional, it is not entirely ineffable; witness Johannessen's analysis. The ability to say it, amounts to showing, and showing requires talent and imagination. He contrasts showing with telling, the latter being a simple description of states of affairs like "I am not feeling very well, my wife has left me." Poems that are worth their salt do not just contain the poet's descriptions of his or her state of mind but rather show it with the aid of images, metaphors, and such literary devices as rhythm (he seems to be using 'showing' in the sense of 'disclosing,' a fruitful use indeed). In order to show what love or sadness is, we need something akin to the condition of poetry.^[12] Imaginative literature helps us to imagine what it means to experience such emotions, and thus know what they are, Palmer says.^[13]

It does not require great imagination to see that Palmer's "know-what" is a kind of tacit knowledge, a third kind alongside know-how and KF. It is closely related to KF, but

perhaps somewhat closer to propositional knowledge than KF. The reason is that "know-what" consists in the classification of phenomena ("This is depression"), just as propositional knowledge often is ("This is a table"). In contrast, KF does not give us classificatory knowledge. But the nature of the "know-what" classifications is obviously different from that of the propositional ones. Propositional knowledge is in many cases knowledge of that which is somehow tangible or objective, for instance, tables. (It can also be knowledge of that which is objective, but not tangible, for instance, mathematical theorems). In contrast to this, "know-what" can only be knowledge of the subjective. Further, it goes almost without saying that we know propositional and "know-what" classifications in a different fashion. Be that as it may, I think that Palmer's contentions are by and large correct and that they are in harmony with those of Johannessen, whose contentions which I have mainly endorsed.

As I have already hinted, Johannessen does not explicate the concept of articulation. Perhaps we can get some help from Charles Taylor, not because he necessarily uses the term in the same sense as the Norwegian philosopher, but because his concept of articulation is fruitful for my undertaking. What, precisely, is an articulation in Taylor's scheme of things? We can start by stating what it is *not*. It is not the finding of a technical term for a feature of some engine or plant, which one can easily identify with an adequate description: "the long metal part sticking out on the left." Although Taylor, to my knowledge, nowhere says so explicitly, articulation is *not* explication of the meaning of terms with the aid of logical analysis. When I articulate something, I am seeking a language to identify how I feel or to make clear how a thing looks or what was peculiar about a certain person's behaviour. A linguistic articulation can make us explicitly aware of phenomena we previously had only an implicit sense of. Taylor talks like articulation is a process that leads to formulation. By formulating some matter, we bring it to a fuller and clearer consciousness, we identify the matter in question, and thereby grasp its contours. An articulated view is a view where certain distinctions are being made. These distinctions give the phenomenon articulated certain contours; to focus on it in an articulated fashion is to find an adequate description of it. At the same time, an articulation does not describe things independent of itself (the articulation) in the manner of a description like "This table is brown." An articulation alters the object at hand in a certain way. It shapes and reshapes its object; in some sense it constitutes it, but at the same time must be true to it. In the case of a genuine articulation, we can only by hindsight know what it was we tried to identify. What we had an implicit sense of only becomes clear after we have articulated it clearly and can look back on our attempts at articulation.^[14]

Let us look again at the role articulation plays in our emotional life, according to Taylor. Articulations are like interpretations in that they are attempts to clarify the import things have for us. Further, emotions, at least those that touch essential human concerns, are partly shaped by the way we articulate them. The descriptions of these emotions that we tend to offer are not simply external to the reality described, leaving it unchanged, but rather constitutive of it. Thus when we

articulate an emotion in a new fashion, often the emotion also changes. Let us say that I am confused over my feelings for a woman. Due to articulation, I come to see this feeling as fascination and not the sort of love on which a relationship can be built. The emotions themselves have become clearer, less fluctuating, have steadier boundaries. Think about a person who has felt very guilty about a certain practice and who has later come to maintain that there is nothing wrong with it. The quality of the feeling of guilt changes; it may disappear completely. If the feeling does not disappear, it has changed because the person now understands it as a kind of residual reflex from his or her upbringing. The person in question no longer accords the feeling the same status, that of reflecting an unfortunate moral truth about him or herself.^[15]

It is hard to understand exactly what Taylor means when he says that articulation both constitutes changes and is true to the object. But it might become clearer in the light of Max Black's contention that metaphors constitute and reshape objects and, in the process, deepen our understanding of them. Black maintains that metaphors constitute and reshape objects and at the same time can give us insights into these objects. Let us imagine that we describe a battle with the aid of metaphors that originate in the vocabulary of chess. This would lead us to stress certain aspects of the battle while downplaying others. The chess-related metaphors filter and transform that which is being described; for instance, they filter out the emotional aspect of the battle.^[16] This is quite correct; metaphoric transformations can give us insights. These transformations are at least partly of the same kind as reshaping due to articulation, and therefore it is plausible that articulation can provide us with insights. Furthermore, Taylor's concept of articulation can be fruitful for my project not least because he sees articulation as being a means for making implicit (tacit?) knowledge explicit. I think that poetical metaphors, similes, and other literary devices may help us articulate our emotions and, at the same time, shape, reshape, and partly constitute them. So, presumably, these devices can reshape our knowledge of familiarity, while articulating it. I will later give a concrete example of this in connection with my analysis of some well-known Shakespearean metaphors and similes, as well as of a poem by August Stramm.

Notice that "the Taylorian articulation" is an articulation of a person's *own feelings*. We will see that "the Johannessenian articulation" is an articulation of our knowledge by familiarity of emotions, regardless whether they are our own or others. Moreover, whatever cognitive insights Taylorian articulation can lead to, it cannot be "know-what" of emotions, since "know-what" has to do with the nature of a given emotion (the "whatness" of, say, wrath). However, I think that "know-what" and Taylorian articulation are mutually dependent. In order to acquire "know-what" of emotion E, we must be able to experience it, and that experience would be impoverished if it were not an articulated experience. Articulation can help us to understand what given emotions really are. I, for instance, get a clearer understanding of the nature of true love versus fascination thanks to my articulation of my feelings towards the woman I mentioned. And in order for us to be able to articulate in a Taylorian fashion, we must have "know-what" of

at least some emotions. (Obviously, we cannot articulate a feeling as being the feeling of depression unless we know the "whatness" of depression or some related emotions).

In the next section, we will see why knowledge by familiarity is essential for our emotional knowledge. In that context we will see how Taylorian articulation and "know-what" can be brought in harmony with the idea of knowledge by familiarity. We will also see that the devices embedded in literary works can be useful when we acquire "know-what," articulate our own emotions, and articulate our KF of the emotional world.

We have discovered that there are at least three types of tacit knowledge: know-how, knowledge by familiarity and "know-what." We can acquire "know-what" thanks to the disclosive or showing function of literature. Further, we can articulate knowledge by familiarity with the aid of literary devices; at the same time, (Taylorian) articulation is an important tool for the understanding of emotions.

4. Some Remarks on Imaginative Literature

I want to add some comments on imaginative literature, its nature, and its disclosive capacities. It goes almost without saying that metaphors, similes, and even concrete, non-abstract examples tend to play a greater role in imaginative literature, especially poetry, than in other types of discourse, written or verbal. As is well known, they are among the most important devices of imaginative literature. Therefore, I will hereafter refer to metaphors, similes, stylistic devices (including the use of rhythm), and concrete examples, etc., as "the devices." My aim in this paper is to show how these devices as used in literary works can make us aware of tacit sides of our knowledge about emotions.

Works of imaginative literature are works where the devices dominate and are indicators of literariness; the more clout they wield in a text, the better reasons we have to call it a work of imaginative literature.^[17] But the concept of imaginative literature has blurred edges: Are, for instance, the Icelandic sagas works of fact or fiction? Further, there is a thin line between imaginative literature, on the one hand, and religious and philosophical texts of the poetical kind, on the other. An example of that kind of religious text is *The Gospel According to Saint John*; Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* will do as an example of poetical/philosophical work. Further, there are poetic modes of expressing oneself in daily life or in political speeches, even in scientific discourses. That the borders of imaginative literature are porous can be seen from the fact that the devices are used outside of these borders. But we have discovered that imaginative literature can give us a unique productive distance to things. Actually, some of the devices strengthen this distancing function of imaginative literature, most notably the device of *Verfremdung* (estrangement), which is supposed to create *Verfremdungseffekt*, i.e., the effect of estrangement (an excellent device for disclosure, indeed). To use one of Victor Shklovsky's examples, Tolstoy estranges our workaday world and our particular society by describing it in a short story through the eyes of a horse, thereby making the readers aware of things they previously took for granted.^[18] Estrangement creates a distance to the subject of the work of

literature.

Creative poetical metaphors also augment the distancing effect; they actually often have an effect of estrangement. Take, for instance, Shakespeare's creative poetical metaphors in Macbeth's famous monologue, "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more; it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."^[19] These words estrange life, disclose it anew, make us look at it with new eyes thanks to the distance to it that we get. (That the distance is productive can be seen from the fact that it produces new ways of seeing life.) This increases the distance to the subject we already have, due to the fact that these are the words of a fictive person, not a statement put forth by a living individual who is making truth-claims with his or her statements. If the latter were the case, then we would become immersed in evaluating the claims or explaining why the claim-maker made the claims or make fun at him or her, or what-not. In neither case do we get any productive distance to the text, a distance that lies in between the myopic immersion and the hyperopic explanation.

Be that as it may, even though there are creative poetical metaphors to be found outside the realm of imaginative literature, they do not have this particular effect of augmenting productive distance. And after all, is not imaginative literature the true realm of *creative poetical* metaphors? Such metaphors as organic parts of works of imaginative literature can disclose the tacit dimension but hardly the know-how part. As far as I know, nobody has ever learned to swim by reading poetry! We are left with KF, "know-what," or even some hitherto unknown type of tacit knowledge. I will try to show that literature can be of help in articulating KF and "know-what."

5. Actions and the Tacit Knowledge of Emotions

Johannessen quite correctly says that our mastery of emotional concepts tends to be tacit; our knowledge of emotions is to a large extent KF. In order to show this, Johannessen once again seeks Wittgenstein's support. Wittgenstein was correct about there being more consensus concerning our judgments about colors than our judgments about emotions. To be sure, we learn to employ both types of concepts in a similar fashion, i.e., with the aid of examples. The difference lies in the fact that the situations where we learn how to master emotional concepts are much more complex and less perspicuous than situations involving most other kinds of concepts. The situations in question are difficult situations of human existence in which other people are involved. In such situations, an experienced person with a keen understanding of other people can teach the less-experienced one by giving him or her the correct hints. The experienced person can, for instance, ask his or her less-experienced friend to notice the fact that a man in their presence is shifty-eyed and his hands shake every time a stranger is present. (Notice the importance of concrete examples.) Now, the experienced one can point out to the inexperienced friend that the man's body language, including his facial expressions, can mean different things depending on the context. If the man in question has been apprehended for

shoplifting, his body language may be interpreted as expressing his fear of the consequences. We can also think of a context where he reveals to us the secret of his unrequited love for a certain woman, in which case we can guess that his body language expresses his unhappiness. Then again, we can think of a situation where our nervous friend is waiting for a person he does not want us to meet. In that case, we can interpret his body language as expressing uneasiness.

So we see that the correct use of emotional concepts is a function of the understanding of the complex interaction between bodily expression and facial expressions, on the one hand, and the nature of the situation, on the other. But this complex cannot be grasped with the aid of rules that have no exception. Therefore, the understanding of other people can only be acquired with the aid of correct judgements, Wittgenstein says.^[20] This means that our understanding of other humans is determined by paradigmatic couplings of types of situations and emotional expressions. Actually, the person who knows the working of the human mind operates like a judge who works within the framework of a judicial system where the case law principle dominates. In such a system, certain rulings of court become precedents and the paragraphs of the law book play a lesser role. What Wittgenstein calls judgments are analogous to the judgments passed in courts of this type. The world of emotions is a world where case law rules because our knowledge of emotions is KF. Contrast this to our propositional knowledge of the physical world; it can be grasped in propositions about iron laws, laws that allow no exceptions.

Now, the Wittgensteinians have been accused of overestimating the importance of behavior in our emotional life. One of their critics, Robert Solomon, maintains that certain emotions do not involve behavior. Among them are guilt and resentment; it belongs to their essence that they refrain from expression.^[21] But if envy and resentment had never been expressed in public, then every envious and resentful person could have his or her own private concept for envy and resentment. And what criteria would we then have of them really being envious or resentful and not just imagining that they are in those emotional states? Further, I might believe that I have friendly feelings towards someone, but at the same time my actions towards that person show that what I mistook for feelings of friendship were actually feelings of paternal-like warmth, i.e., I treat my friend like a child. Chances are that actions typically give us important clues to the nature of at least some of our emotions. Is not scrutinizing our actions the best way to find out whether we really love a person or are just infatuated, or even simply fond of that individual? I might sincerely believe that I am in love with Ann, while I systematically betray her, never caress her, and even beat her now and then. Another person could point out to me that my actions contradict my belief. Or I might discover by analyzing my own actions that I am not really in love with Ann, although I believe the contrary. I might discover that I was only infatuated with her or that I simply wanted to dominate her.

However, the Wittgensteinians certainly can be criticised for not drawing a clear-cut line between non-meaningful behavior

(hands that shake) and meaningful actions. As the reader has discovered, I deliberately refrain from using the term 'behavior' and instead use 'acting' in order to underline that I am no behaviorist. Actions certainly play an essential role in our emotional life, as my examples show. Whether pure, raw behavior does, I would not know.

The upshot of this is that there are at least some important cases where observing and analyzing actions in a given context play an important role in understanding emotions. Here is where my analysis of imaginative literature comes into the picture. I maintain that literature can give us insights into the peculiarities of the aforementioned contexts. Literature often describes unique situations, in contrast to nomological science, whose business is to generalise. We tend to think that great literature provides us with unique descriptions of the unique (!) and that the value of literature lies in, among other things, this descriptive ability. Let us look at the following quotation from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*:

Never did anybody look so sad. Bitter and black, half-way down, in the darkness, in the shaft from the sunlight to the depths, perhaps a tear formed; a tear fell; the waters swayed this way and that, received it, and were at rest. Never did anybody look so sad.[\[22\]](#)

Janet Martin Soskice has a point when she says that the sorrow thematized in this quotation is a private, particular sorrow, which must be illuminated with the aid of *this* particular metaphor, not any old metaphor.[\[23\]](#) This also illustrates the personal aspect of emotions, the fact that an emotion is something that only a given person can have. This is an aspect that no analysis of emotions in general may forget but that is hard to incorporate in analysis. The particular ability of imaginative literature to disclose the unique, not least the uniquely personal, comes in handy here.

We find some good descriptions of Wittgensteinian contexts in *Egill's Saga*, one of the great Icelandic sagas of the Middle Ages. Its chief protagonist, the Viking and bard Egill Skallagrímsson, was at one point in time a mercenary in the forces of the Anglo-Saxon king Athelstan. Egill's brother was also at the Anglo-Saxon court and got killed in a battle. The saga contains a marvellous description of the mighty warrior's reactions to the death of his brother. Egill sits down in front of the Anglo-Saxon king with his head bowed. He draws the sword in and out of the sheath – it is implied that he is wondering whether or not to slay the king. At the same time, he lets one eyebrow sink down right to the cheek and lifts the other up to the roots of his hair. This masterful description of the great poet's actions, facial expressions, and body language is then tied to a description of his temper and looks.[\[24\]](#) The interplay between these elements helps us to understand that he expresses wrath and sorrow.

In actual fact, the saga's description increases our insight into what it means to express feelings with the aid of actions, body language, and the like. Such examples show us that actions and body language are context-dependent, not least because the writer does not force us to accept a given interpretation. We, the readers, have to interpret Egill's actions and facial

expressions in the light of the description of the situation and the character. Further, the saga does not provide us with any new information about emotions; at least not with information we could not have gotten either from experience or from non-narrative and non-fictional sources.^[25] What the saga does is articulate our KF about certain emotions, in this case, anger and sorrow, by giving us a concrete and unique example of the way such emotions can be expressed, *cf.* the role of examples in the articulation of KF. Moreover, it gives us an opportunity to become conscious of the fact that there are no formulas for our interpretation of other people's emotional behavior. In practice, most of us do not apply any formulas in such cases, but we almost never think about that fact until we are confronted by a great literary work like *Egil's Saga*. Being a story, not a part of our lives, gives us the necessary distance from these issues, a distance that helps us to take a reflective stance to them (compare Palmer's analysis). Thus, imaginative literature awakens us from our dogmatic slumbers.

6. The Disclosive Power of Similes and Metaphors in Literature

Let us see how the use of similes can articulate our gentle, cozy feeling of warmth in a snowy landscape. This is how the Swiss writer Robert Walser does it:

Und warm ist es in all dem dichten weichen
Schnee, so warm wie in einem heimeligen
Wohnzimmer, wo friedfertige Menschen zu
irgendeinem feinen lieben Vergnügen versammelt
sind.^[26]

In my rough and tough translation:

And it is warm in all this thick soft snow, as warm
as a cozy room where peaceful people are
gathered for some fine, sweet entertainment.

Walser's simile is very apt; it really fits the feeling of tranquility we often have in such a snowy landscape but usually lack the words to describe in an adequate fashion. Notice that he discloses something intangible – the feeling of tranquility in a snowy landscape – by comparing it to something more concrete, the doings of peaceful people in their homes.

It is common knowledge that metaphors are of even greater importance in literature than similes. And as we remember, Johannessen correctly assigns metaphors an important role in the articulation of KF or at least some kinds of it. He emphasizes that they are of utmost importance in the articulation of our knowledge of emotions, due to the tacit nature of that knowledge. I want to add that it is not a coincidence that our emotional vocabulary is soaked with metaphors, both dead and alive. Think about "being down" or "being in high spirits," two dead metaphors. Such cognitive semanticists as George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and Zoltán Kövecses say that certain emotional concepts are

metaphorically structured.[27] These concepts are not clearly delineated in our experience and must therefore be comprehended indirectly, via metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson use the concept of love as an example.[28] This emotion is certainly not clearly delineated from other emotions: there are unclear boundaries between loving someone and just being fond of him or her. (We could add between loving a person or being infatuated with her, *cf.* my earlier example.) We get a better idea of love and other emotions by seeing them in the light of physical phenomena, which are more clearly delineated.[29]

This is where metaphors enter the stage because, according to Lakoff and Johnson, "the essence of a metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another." [30] Thus, in the metaphor "Love is a journey," we understand one kind of thing, an emotion, in terms of another kind, a process of physically moving through space.[31] Walser's text fits nicely into Lakoff's scheme of things, because in that text a certain emotion is likened to something physical. And even though Walser uses the marker "wie" (as), which indicates a simile, Lakoff would probably call it a metaphor, because he does not think that metaphors are primarily linguistic. They are cognitive by nature and can be expressed with the aid of various non-linguistic and linguistic means, including similes.[32] Whatever the merits of this analysis, Lakoff and his friends are on the right track when it comes to the importance of metaphors for the understanding of emotions.

Lakoff and his former associate Mark Turner say that poetical metaphors develop and extend conventional metaphors. "Death is a dream" can be a poetical extension of the conventional metaphor "Death is sleep." [33] This is quite an intriguing idea and can be supported by an example from the writings of award-winning Icelandic author Einar Már Guðmundsson. He shows us how we can make a poetical extension of the conventional metaphor (and oxymoron) of "deafening silence," which indeed is a (dead?) metaphor for a certain emotion:

The silence.

It is a blind man with a stick. It plays a drum solo by the kitchen sink, flushes the toilet and turns the raindrops, lashing against the windowpanes into speakers with pulpits like humps on their backs, continually raising their voices.

Louder, louder, louder, until they end up sounding like a male voice choir singing part-song, so overpowering that floor cloths cover up their ears. [34]

The author uses striking and original metaphors to articulate our intuitive understanding of this emotion, the feeling of an overwhelming, "loud," silence. We could say, in a Lakoffian fashion, that the author develops an everyday metaphor ("deafening silence") by creating new metaphors on the basis of it. Notice also that he uses concrete phenomena (the sound of a toilet flushing, the sound of raindrops on windowpanes, and so on) as means for throwing light upon something

abstract and intangible, i.e., the emotion in question. Further, he uses one of literatures noblest tool, the time-honored *Verfremdung*. Now, the effect of estrangement is supposed to make us aware of things that we take for granted, and we certainly do take our tacit knowledge for granted. This includes, of course, our tacit knowledge of the feeling of deafening silence. The Icelandic author's use of *Verfremdung* may make us become aware of this knowledge.

Anyway, we have learned from Lakoff and his colleagues that metaphors provide us with an indispensable and indirect understanding of such a slippery phenomenon as love. [35] Furthermore, Johannessen is right about our needing metaphors because of the tacit nature of emotional knowledge. (Notice that we often say, "I cannot express how much I love you." Is it because our emotional knowledge is tacit?). So it is no coincidence that literature is full of metaphors for emotions. Think about that very gospel of love, *Romeo and Juliet*. The play brims over with metaphors concerning love: Do I have to remind my learned readership of "Juliet is the sun"? [36]

Does not this metaphor articulate the feeling we have that the loved one somehow shines and is at the centre of our universe? (Notice that I use metaphors like "centre of our universe" in my attempt to give a sketch of Shakespeare's metaphor. It can hardly ever be fully explicated.) Does not the great bard articulate a similar feeling in his famous "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate." [37] Both in this simile and in Romeo's metaphor, Shakespeare gives us an opportunity to see something intangible, the feeling of loving admiration, in terms of something more physical, the weather of a summer's day and the sun. With this, of course, Lakoff's analysis is in accord.

Moreover, these metaphors can help us to articulate our emotions in the Taylorian sense of articulation. I might, for instance, articulate my own love for a certain woman with the aid of Shakespeare's beautiful metaphors, while at the same time the emotion slightly changes. I might connect the emotion (my love) to suns and summer days, so that whenever I feel my love for the woman, I also feel the warmth of a nice summer's day. I did not have that feeling before the articulation, so the emotion is not exactly as it used to be. At the same time, my understanding of the emotion has deepened. I know now that there is a distant relationship between the happiness I feel whenever I am with the woman and the blissfulness I felt as a child on beautiful sunny days (I come from a country where the sun hardly ever shines!).

My educated guess is that such poetic metaphors and similes help us to articulate our tacit emotional knowledge. There must be a reason why poetical metaphors for emotions are so widely used, both in ordinary discourse and in imaginative literature. My theory could be an explanation for this. The theory of the productive distance, provided by literature, can also explain why we often feel that poetical metaphors for emotions in literary works tend to articulate emotions better than such metaphors used in other contexts.

I have still not given any example of how a literary work can, as a whole, be of help in our articulation of KF. Such an

example can be found in Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken." The speaker in the poem says that once he was faced with choosing between two paths in "a yellow forest." In the last lines of the poem he says:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.[\[38\]](#)

This poem is usually interpreted as being in its entirety a metaphor for the choices we make in life. Life is metaphorically seen as a journey, and the speaker in the poem has chosen to live in a different fashion from ordinary people. The poem has a bittersweet quality; it seems to express that strange ambivalent feeling we often have when we contemplate the existential choices we have made. We might feel that we by and large made the correct choices, but there is a slight sadness in us. It is like we also mourn the moments lost by not choosing other paths. Frost helps us clarify these feelings by presenting us with a vivid, concrete picture of a wanderer in a wood. More precisely, he helps us articulate our KF of these emotions, a knowledge we already possess and which possesses us, but which we have not been able to articulate it in words. Frost provides us with fruitful, fresh poetical metaphors, one of the best instruments for articulating our KF of this and other emotions. His poem is a midwife, aiding us while we deliver and our baby is our tacit knowledge of the emotions connected to existential choices.

7. Understanding Moods

Let us probe the realm of feelings still further. Sorrow has a cousin called depression, and depression is a mood.[\[39\]](#) Moods have been famously expressed in a host of literary works. Let us look at August Stramm's expressionistic poem "Depression" ("Schwermut").

SCHWERMUT
Schreiten Streben
Leben sehnt
Schauern Stehen
Blicke suchen
Sterben wächst
Das Kommen
Schreit!
Tief
Stummen
Wir.[\[40\]](#)

In my translation:

DEPRESSION

Striding striving.
Life yearns.
Shuddering standing.
Looks seek.
Dying grows.
The Coming
Screams!
Deep down
Dumbified
We.

Actually, this poem is barely translatable because the poet uses the peculiarities of the German language for all it is worth, while creating a language of his own at the same time. Perhaps moods like depression can only be expressed in new language ("dumbified"), far removed from everyday chitchat. By breaking up the syntax, Stramm hints at the broken down, chaotic inner world of the sad person. Note also the *Verfremdungseffekt*, which is caused by the nominalization of verbs. In our case, we suddenly understand that the world of the sad one is frozen like the verbs, which are frozen into substantives. The suggestive rhythm of the poem is also of utmost importance. One can almost hear the fast heartbeat of the unhappy one and the rhythmic march of his dark thoughts through his brain. "The world of the happy is quite another than the world of the unhappy," Wittgenstein says. [\[41\]](#) Stramm's poem is a message from the unhappy world to the world of the blissful.

But poetic words about messages and unhappy worlds cannot help us to understand the cognitive import of Stramm's poem. That help can be found in the theories of Palmer. Thanks to our and Stramm's ability to see the world through the eyes of a depressed person, Stramm could write the poem and we were able to understand it; compare Palmer's analysis of *Hamlet*. Remember, also, Palmer's contention that such literary devices as rhythm can help a writer to show states of mind. This is exactly what Stramm does with the gloomy rhythm of his poem. Actually, we can safely say that the poem gives us "know-what" about depression. It shows rather than tells us about this mood, which is one of the reasons why it aids us in articulating tacit knowledge of it (the mood). The main means the poet uses is our old friend the *Verfremdung*. As we have seen, there are ways in which this effect can help us articulate our KF of emotions. This fact ought to strengthen our belief that KF and "know-what" have a thing or two in common.

Literary works can help articulate our KF and "know-what" of emotions. We use its devices for attaining these goals; among the devices are such stylistic devices as estrangement. I think that the other examples I have used are also examples of articulations of "know-what" about emotions. We get a better grip on what the feeling of warmth and coziness is by reading

Walsler, and the Icelandic writer helps us to understand what deafening silence is. At the same time these literary works articulate our knowledge by familiarity of the emotions and moods in question. Stramm's poem does that too, because it helps us articulate knowledge of a mood most of us have felt without being able to say much about. Further, they (at least Stramm's poem) aid us in Taylorian articulations. Stramm's *Schwermut* might, for instance, help me to articulate my current depression in such a way that I start to see it as having moments of *angst*; after all, the poem is brimming with anxiety ("*Das Kommen schreit!*"). In light of this, I understand my depression differently at the same time, / as it somehow changes; my depressive feelings get a distinct flavor of anxiety. Maybe the depression, after all, was caused by repressed *angst*. The poem has been my midwife, helping me to deliver these monstrous Siamese twins, depression and *angst*.

8. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we discovered that the kind of insight we get thanks to the disclosive power of literature is akin to KF, "knowing what," and the results of articulations. Disclosing means showing rather than saying, just like when Einar Már Guðmundsson shows what deafening silence is. Disclosing means grasping something intuitively and holistically, just like when Stramm provides us with a total vision of depression, a vision that helps us to intuitively understand depression, in stark contrast to the scientific, analytic understanding of it. Disclosing is also somewhat like seeing something in something else, like when we see faces in clouds. Frost's poem helps us see a meaningful unit – a narrative of a journey – in the chaotic series of events in our lives. The poem is a narrative about some painful choices of direction. Further, disclosing is like seeing something as something else, as, for instance, when a poetic metaphor shows a beloved woman as the sun.

I will use the remainder of this paper to consider a couple of possible objections to my analysis, as well as to sum up my argument. The former of these two objections is as follows: The author does not understand that we do not need a literary work for such an articulation. We can use apt metaphors and concrete examples in everyday life or imaginative theoretical discourses. Furthermore, meaningful gestures (one of the means of articulation) certainly have no role to play in literature, except perhaps in plays.

Well, I quite agree, but I want to add that I have never said that literary works monopolize the articulation. As I said earlier, the devices can be tools of such an articulation, but this does not mean that they have to be a part of a literary work in order to perform that task. This means that, for instance, a philosophical or religious text containing a lot of poetical metaphors can be an instrument of articulation. But texts of imaginative literature tend to be even better tools for that endeavour, the reason being that imaginative literature gives us a productive distance to our feelings. The same does not hold true for religious and philosophical texts, unless they are read as literary works. If we do not read them as literary works but as texts with straight forward truth-claims, then we

either believe or disbelieve the claims or analyze them otherwise and thus immerse us in them, or we seek causal explanations for them and thereby move faraway from the text. (Compare what I said earlier about persons using poetical metaphors in everyday settings.) In neither case do we get any productive distance from content of text. The productive distance can only be gotten by reading the text *qua* a work of literary imagination.

The latter possible criticism is the following: The author does not see that interpretations of literary works are more or less subjective. Therefore his interpretations might be inspiring for him, but the texts could be interpreted in quite a different manner. My answer is that I just want to bracket this problem and take my chances that my interpretations are somehow acceptable – adequate and/or fruitful, not absurd, even true. The same applies to my analysis in general; I know I am treading on slippery ground when I maintain that literature can give insights into tacit knowledge. It is hard to see how such a theory can be proven with absolute certainty; what philosophical theory can?

But bear in mind that we cannot be 100% sure that physics is not a sham. Nevertheless, we have good reasons to think that this not the case. I simply hope that I have put forth reasonable arguments in favor of literature having the power of articulating tacit knowledge, arguments that might provide an inspiration for other scholars.

We have seen in this paper that our knowledge of emotions tends to be tacit. But this knowledge is not entirely ineffable, and literature can play a major role in articulating it. Imaginative literature does not have to provide us with new information. What it does best is to give us insight into (tacit) knowledge we already possess. Thus, the poet is a midwife, helping us to deliver, soothing us in our birth pangs.

Endnotes

[1] I discuss the concept of disclosure later in this paper.

[2] As far as I know, this poem has never been translated.

[3] Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge. Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 49-50.

[4] Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), p. 4.

[5] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by E. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), §78.

[6] Johannessen, "Philosophy, Art and Intransitive Understanding," Johannessen, Larsen, Åmås, eds., *Wittgenstein in Norway* (Oslo: Solum, 1994), pp. 217-250.

[7] Johannessen, "Language, Art and Aesthetic Practice," in Johannessen and Nordenstam, Tore, eds., *Wittgenstein-Aesthetics and Transcendental Philosophy* (Vienna-Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1981), pp. 108-126.

[8] However, I cannot understand why this kind of knowledge

must be autotelic. Is our knowledge of faces not something practical? But perhaps our knowledge of faces is not K. F. Actually, Johannessen is mainly interested in our KF of artworks. Perhaps, that kind of KF is autotelic.

[9] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 183.

[10] I use 'language' in a pretty wide sense of the word, as meaning "the totality of symbolic systems and their meaningful application." Thus, meaningful gestures are parts of language.

[11] I follow Andrew Ortony in regarding similes as being non-literal. A literal comparison would be "John is like his sister, they have both red hair and green eyes." Ortony, "The Role of Similarity in Similes and metaphor," Ortony (Ed.), *Metaphor and Thought*, (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 342-356.

[12] Palmer, *Literature and Moral Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) p. 190. The inspiration from Wittgenstein's idea of showing versus saying ought to be obvious. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922), for instance § 2.172-2.174, § 4.014, § 4.12.

[13] Palmer. *Literature and Moral Understanding*, pp. 205-207.

[14] Taylor. "Theories of Meaning," *Human Agency and Language. Philosophical Papers. Vol. I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) pp. 257-258.

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 270-271.

[16] Black, "Metaphor," *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), pp. 41-42.

[17] I introduced the notion of "indicators of literariness" in Snaevarr, "The Mead of the Giant. On Literature and Discourse Ethics," *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, No. 13 (2001), pp. 101-117.

[18] Shklovsky, for instance, "Art as Technique," L.T. Lemon and M.J. Reis (eds.), *Russian Formalist Criticism. Four Essays* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 5-24.

[19] *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene V, for instance in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (London: Henry Pordes, 1990), p. 939.

[20] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, pp. 227-229.

[21] Solomon, *The Passions* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976).

[22] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Grafton Books, 1977), p. 31.

[23] Soskice, *Metaphor in Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987). pp. 47-48.

[24] This description is to be found in the 55th chapter of the saga. For instance, Hermann Pálsson (trans., ed.), *Egil's Saga* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 128.

[25] Obviously, there is nothing against reading the saga as a fictional work, a work of literary imagination, even though it might originally have been something different.

[26] Robert Walser, *Schneien (Snowing), Kleine Dichtungen, Prosastücken, Kleine Prosa. Das Gesamtwerk*. Bind II (Geneva & Hamburg: Kossodo, 1971), pp. 254-255.

[27] Kövecses seems actually to think that all emotions are so structured. The master metaphor for emotions is "Emotion is a force," he says. Kövecses, *Metaphor and Emotion. Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 17 and elsewhere.

[28] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 85.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 178.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[31] Lakoff and Johnson do not use the seeing-as metaphor, but it is on the tip of their tongue.

[32] For instance, Lakoff, "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor," A. Ortony, ed., *Metaphor and Thought*. 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 208-209.

[33] Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 71.

[34] Einar Már Guðmundsson, *The Epilogue of the Raindrops*, trans. by B. Scudder (London: Scud Thames Books, 1994), p. 32.

[35] This does not mean that we have to agree with them about metaphors having some deep, non-linguistic conceptual roots. Metaphors can be entirely linguistic (in my broad sense of the word), i.e., without any non-linguistic, conceptual foundations, and at the same time tools for shedding lights on fuzzy phenomena like emotions. Further, we can be of the opinion that Lakoff and Johnson have a point about poetical metaphors being, in many cases, elaborations upon conventional metaphors, without believing in the two gentlemen's conceptual dogmas.

[36] From *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene 1. For instance, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (London: Henry Pordes, 1990), p. 835.

[37] From "Sonnet number XVIII." For instance, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, p. 1201.

[38] Frost, "The Road Not Taken," *The Robert Frost Web Page*, www.robertfrost.org/indexgood.html.

[39] Solomon classifies depression correctly as a mood. According to him, a mood is a generalized emotion. We are depressed if we feel sad without reason for a long period. The emotion we call sadness, so to speak, gets generalised. Solomon (1976), p. 132.

[40] Stramm, *Schwermut (Depression)*, L. Forster, ed., *The Penguin Book of German Verse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin

Books, 1957), p. 392.

[41] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, § 6.43.

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