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**Patrik Fridlund**

## ***Ambivalent Wisdom as the Fruit of Reading.***

Abstract: It can be said that literary texts do not have any obligation to reality, and that literature destabilises our relations to the everyday use of words and to established perspectives. Literature stands in relation to something that cannot be explained or conceptualised, and in this respect it is close to religion. I argue that many of these characteristics of literature are also features of philosophical writing. I concurrently argue that literature is nonetheless connected to reality, and that it aims to say something about our world. I contend that philosophy can benefit from a deeper understanding of the close parallels and similarities between philosophical writing and literature.

Si può dire che i testi letterari non hanno un obbligo di realtà, che la letteratura e che destabilizza il nostro rapporto con l'uso quotidiano delle parole e con le prospettive abituali. La letteratura si trova in relazione con qualcosa che non si può spiegare o concettualizzare, e in questo senso è vicina alla religione. Fridlund sostiene che molte di queste caratteristiche della letteratura sono anche caratteristiche della scrittura filosofica. E sostiene anche che la letteratura è comunque collegata alla realtà, e che si propone di dire qualcosa sul nostro mondo. Egli ritiene che la filosofia possa beneficiare di una più profonda comprensione degli stretti parallelismi e delle somiglianze tra la scrittura filosofica e quella letteraria

**Keywords:** *Literature, Religion, Philosophical Writing, Ricoeur, E. Løvlie - D. Von der Fehr*

**Parole chiave:** *Letteratura, religione, scrittura filosofica, Ricoeur, E. Løvlie - D. Von der Fehr*

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### **Introduction**

In 2013, two Norwegian scholars in comparative literature, Elisabeth Løvlie and Druse von der Fehr, published a book entitled *Tro på litteratur (Believe in Literature)*. It is an eminently stimulating, interesting and creative work on literature. The tone is already set in the Introduction, in which they claim that literary texts are texts that cannot be summarised, paraphrased or even investigated<sup>1</sup>. The style, form and expression of literary texts are intimately connected to their topics and themes. Whilst most texts can be summarised or paraphrased, literary texts intimately intertwine form and matter. In contrast to other kinds of text, any summary or paraphrase of a literary text would therefore become an obvious and fatal betrayal of meaning. Moreover, if the literary text is disconnected from the real world due to its fictitious character, then it remains impossible to make inquiries into events, persons and other phenomena mentioned in the text. Literature consequently concerns that which cannot be investigated. In literature, there is a *mise en scène* of a process that neither aims to clarify nor has an overarching goal (at least if such a goal is conceived of as essentially graspable and explainable). Løvlie and von der Fehr conclude that, on the contrary, literature 'is' the locus of undecidability, unpredictability and the absence of meaning<sup>2</sup>.

The unusual term 'absence of meaning' may seem both audacious and overly strident. Yet it is not difficult to find good illustrative examples, particularly if 'absence of meaning' translates into an absence of identifiable and intended meaning. A classic example is Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*:

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<sup>1</sup> E. Løvlie – D. Von der Fehr, *Introduksjon. Tro på litteratur*, in Id., *Tro på litteratur. Religiøse vendinger fra Dante til Derrida, Fosse og Knausgård*, Vidarforlaget, Oslo 2013, pp. 7-17.

<sup>2</sup> Ivi, p. 10.

Alice sighed wearily. «I think you might do something better with the time,» she said, «than waste it in asking riddles that have no answers.»

«If you knew Time as well as I do,» said the Hatter, `you wouldn't talk about wasting *it*. It's *him*.'

«I don't know what you mean,» said Alice.

«Of course you don't!» the Hatter said, tossing his head contemptuously. «I dare say you never even spoke to Time!»

«Perhaps not,» Alice cautiously replied: «but I know I have to beat time when I learn music.»

«Ah! that accounts for it,» said the Hatter. «He won't stand beating. Now, if you only kept on good terms with him, he'd do almost anything you liked with the clock. For instance, suppose it were nine o'clock in the morning, just time to begin lessons: you'd only have to whisper a hint to Time, and round goes the clock in a twinkling! Half-past one, time for dinner!»

(...)

A bright idea came into Alice's head. «Is that the reason so many tea-things are put out here?» she asked.

«Yes, that's it,» said the Hatter with a sigh: «it's always tea-time, and we've no time to wash the things between whiles.»

«Then you keep moving round, I suppose?» said Alice.

«Exactly so,» said the Hatter: «as the things get used up.»

«But what happens when you come to the beginning again?» Alice ventured to ask.

«Suppose we change the subject,» the March Hare interrupted, yawning. «I'm getting tired of this. I vote the young lady tells us a story»<sup>3</sup>.

Løvlie argues that when we are 'exposed to literature', we are faced with an experience in which the world is not always what it appears to be, and where words and concepts do not necessarily have the meaning that is usually attributed to them. Ultimately, no-one can claim ownership of perspective<sup>4</sup>. For instance, the quoted passage from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* appears to be filled with meaningless and ridiculous dialogues. While we may find these dialogues funny, tragic, sad or entertaining, it is difficult to pretend that there is a clear meaning, or that the text communicates an unambiguous message. Lewis Carroll's 'wonderland' is both similar and different to the 'land' that Alice comes from. Words and notions do not carry the same meaning or the same weight. Clarifications are odd. In short, Alice's perspective is called into question, and the reader's perspective is perhaps simultaneously interrogated<sup>5</sup>.

This literary piece illustrates what Løvlie considers to be one of the hallmarks of literature. She argues that literary ambiguity undermines strong definitions of concepts, and thereby introduces an emptiness of both sense and reference. Løvlie suggests that literature has a special character *as literature*, and identifies features of literature that she considers to be particularly 'literary'. However, her aim is not to distinguish between literary and non-literary objects, but rather the opposite. Løvlie asserts that literature presents us with a language that has multifarious features<sup>6</sup>. She describes it as delineating the limit of what can be known<sup>7</sup>. Literature thus creates a space in which one can connect with what cannot be conceptually grasped or explained<sup>8</sup>. Due to literature's lack of definitive meaning and unambiguous reference, the reader stands in relation to what

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<sup>3</sup> L. Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, in Id., *The Complete Illustrated Works of Lewis Carroll*, Chancellor, London, 1982, pp. 69-70.

<sup>4</sup> E. Løvlie, *Religiøse vendinger i kontinental teori og i Knausgårds En tid for alt*, in Id., *Tro på litteratur*, cit., p. 35. Elisabeth Løvlie and Druse von der Fehr are responsible for their respective chapters in the book. In this paper I refer mainly to Løvlie's theoretical chapters.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. P. Fridlund, *Mobile Performances. Linguistic Undecidability as Possibility and Problem in the Theology of Religions*, Peeters, Leuven, 2011, pp. 43-47.

<sup>6</sup> E. Løvlie, *Religiøse vendinger i kontinental teori*, cit., pp. 34-36.

<sup>7</sup> Id., *Litteraturen og kjærligheten til en kommande hemmelighet*, in Ivi, pp. 80-81.

<sup>8</sup> E. Løvlie and D. Von der Fehr, *Introduksjon*, in Ivi, p. 9.

knowledge cannot control<sup>9</sup>. Løvlie states that in this particular sense, literature has neither a content nor a message. In this particular sense, literature is empty, Løvlie says<sup>10</sup>.

Løvlie's insistence that literature is empty of meaning implies that it lacks a message. However, it may be argued that there exist numerous examples of literature that intends to communicate a clear message, thus indicating that literature is not 'empty' in this sense. One could refer to George Orwell's critique of contemporary society in *1984*, or to the political themes in the Swedish Carl Hamilton novels (the *Coq Rouge* novels, 1986-1995) by Jan Guillou. Another interesting example is that of Philippe Claudel's *La petite fille de monsieur Linh* (2005), which explores the themes of the fragility of a refugee, the administration's lack of respect, and the formation of a profound wordless friendship that transcends cultural divides. All these things are strong fundamental *political* traits in this novel. There is apparently, a message.

I maintain, however, that these literary texts are open to a wide range of further interpretations, which transcend the ostensible message of the text. Such interpretation always remains a possibility insofar as these texts can, for example, be read for entertainment purposes, as expressions of exoticism, or even as poetry<sup>11</sup>. Thus Løvlie views ambiguity, absence of meaning and undecidability as characteristic features of literature. In other words, Løvlie views literature as a structure that opposes the idea of a single fixed sense or meaning to a given text<sup>12</sup>.

### 1.1) *The Case*

In their introduction to *Tro på litteratur*, Løvlie and von der Fehr establish that literature is the foremost enemy of conceptualisation. It remains both restless and uncertain concerning content, and regarding definitions<sup>13</sup>. It undermines fixed conceptual definitions<sup>14</sup>. In this sense, literary texts stand in stark contrast to other kinds of texts and perspectives. Simultaneously, in history, there has always been a different linguistic ideal, which resists uncertainty. The ideal of the search for a univocal, unambiguous, universal and transparent language, with a high level of precision aimed at minimising or avoiding misunderstandings, or even to make them impossible<sup>15</sup>. This attitude seems to conform to philosophy as a discipline, particularly prevalent in contemporary philosophy, especially in certain currents of contemporary philosophy, such as the 'analytic tradition.'

The term *analytic philosophy* roughly designates a group of philosophical methods that stress detailed argumentation, attention to semantics, use of classical logic and non-classical logics and clarity of meaning above all other criteria<sup>16</sup>.

Notions such as 'detailed argumentation' and 'clarity of meaning' have a prominent place here. So, at least some variants of philosophy would therefore be good candidates for the role of literature's primary opponent. In this paper, I will not undertake a comparative study. I rather suggest raising two questions that arise when we consider these definitions and this description of philosophy. Firstly, can even philosophy achieve clarity of meaning, or is this a fruitless enterprise? Secondly, is such a search for clarity 'desirable'?

<sup>9</sup> E. Løvlie, *Litteraturen og kjærligheten til en kommande hemmelighet*, in Ivi, p. 96.

<sup>10</sup> Ivi, pp. 80-81.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. P. Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action. Essais d'herméneutique II*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1986, pp. 175-176.

<sup>12</sup> E. Løvlie, *Litteraturen og kjærligheten til en kommande hemmelighet*, cit., p. 86.

<sup>13</sup> E. Løvlie and D. Von der Fehr, *Introduksjon*, cit., p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> E. Løvlie, *Religiøse vendinger i kontinental teori*, cit., p. 34.

<sup>15</sup> Id., *Litteraturens usynlige spor. Om det uleslige og poetiske språk*, in Ivi, p. 131.

<sup>16</sup> Wikipedia, accessed 21/11/2014; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy>, original italics. See also, for instance, the following claim in an introduction to the philosophy of religion: «...the business of philosophy is to clarify and analyse» (P. Cole, *Philosophy of Religion*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2004, p. 1).

### 1.2) Possible Clarity

The first question is whether ‘clarity’ is at all possible. One does not need to be a trained historian in order to have doubts. Anyone who has ever ventured to give a full account of something has been confronted with an endless stream of small but important details, which all need to be accounted for. A comprehensive account entails a process of progressive precision and clarification. Although this might seem obvious, it is sometimes necessary to make such points explicit. In his discussions of scientific perspectivism, Ronald Giere maintains that descriptions are ‘necessarily’ incomplete. Maps serve as a good illustration of this claim. Maps are partial representations of geographical features. They are of *limited accuracy*. «No real map could possibly indicate literally all features of a territory»<sup>17</sup>. Giere refers to a very short text from 1954, in which Jorge Luis Borges tells the following story:

En aquel Imperio, el Arte de la Cartografía logró tal Perfección que el Mapa de una sola Provincia ocupaba toda una Ciudad, y el Mapa del Imperio, toda una Provincia. Con el tiempo, estos Mapas Desmesurados no satisficieron y los Colegios de Cartógrafos levantaron un Mapa del Imperio, que tenía el Tamaño del Imperio y coincidía puntualmente con él. Menos Adictas al Estudio de la Cartografía, las Generaciones Sigüientes entendieron que ese dilatado Mapa era Inútil y no sin Impiedad lo entregaron a las Inclemencias del Sol y los Inviernos. En los Desiertos del Oeste perduran despedazadas Ruinas del Mapa, habitadas por Animales y por Mendigos; en todo el País no hay otra reliquia de las Disciplinas Geográficas<sup>18</sup>.

For a map to provide an exact representation, it would not only have to be of the same size as the represented territory and coincide with it point for point, but would also have to occupy the same place. This is absurd. If the difference between the map and what is mapped is thus erased, then there is no longer any point in having a map. The purpose of a map is to provide orientation, not to identically replicate the territory that it represents. And a map that does identically replicate the represented territory is useless. Maps must therefore selectively represent some features according to some principles. They cannot represent all features of a territory. In other words, maps are always relative to some set of interests<sup>19</sup>. The same is true of various kinds of verbal description.

One could, of course, claim that there is a difference between ‘clarity’ and a complete description. A clear thought or utterance is not necessarily all-encompassing or exhaustive. What would then be needed is rather clarity about language, words, notions, meanings, tools, instruments, aims etc. I agree with this point. It is true that clarity is not necessarily or only a matter of complete description. However, focusing on the means rather than on the end provides no simple solution. One may also doubt the possibility of a transparent philosophical discourse<sup>20</sup>. For instance, the meaning of words is the product of a metaphorical process. The same is true of philosophical concepts, which are consequently dependent on this metaphorical process. Moreover, philosophical concepts always have a history, they are determined as traces of traces, which implies a mobility of meaning. Philosophical concepts cannot be completely clear, transparent and stable pillars of the discourse<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> R. N. Giere, *Scientific Perspectivism*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2006, p. 73.

<sup>18</sup> J. L. Borges, *Del rigor en la ciencia*, in Id., *Historia universal de la infamia*, Alianza, Madrid 1971 [1954]. Engl. transl.: J. L. Borges, *Of Exactitude in Science*, in Id., *A Universal History of Infamy*, Penguin Books, New York, 1975 [1973].

<sup>19</sup> R. N. Giere, *Scientific Perspectivism*, cit., p. 73.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. J. Amalric, *Ricoeur, Derrida. L'enjeu de la métaphore*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 2006, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Ivi, pp. 18, 24, 54. See also: P. Fridlund, *Mobile Performances*, cit., pp. 52-58.

Of course, many times words and expressions have a stable meaning. So also philosophical concepts. However, this stability comes from a solid context. Sometimes there is an abundance of background information, one is well acquainted with the situation and there exists a general agreement regarding how things work, etc. In these situations, we can reasonably assume a relatively stable meaning<sup>22</sup>. But meaning is not absolutely stable, irrespective of context, as there cannot be any solid, pure and unambiguous foundation<sup>23</sup>.

This view entails that we distance ourselves from what may be termed the ‘metaphysics of meaning.’ One component of this metaphysics is the often unthematized and veiled idea of a transcendental signified that would guarantee the stable meaning of the sign. Moreover, in order to secure the stable meaning of a linguistic entity, a subject with access to the pure and transcendental signified is required. There must hence be a transcendental speaker. Stable meaning requires an ultimate language user; an ultimate rule provider who guarantees the absolute fixity of meaning. This transcendent function has traditionally been identified with ‘God.’ In contemporary thinking, either *logic itself* has taken over this function, or it is simply assumed<sup>24</sup>. The assumption in question is not only that transcendental meaning is guaranteed by a transcendent subject, but also that this meaning is accessible to human beings. Ordinary language users must have access to this transcendental meaning, and must understand that it is transcendental, even though they cannot but lack the capacity for such understanding. This is highly questionable<sup>25</sup>. If ‘clarity of meaning’ requires linguistic clarity, then there are good grounds for doubting its possibility. The clarity of meaning is always limited, fragile, mobile, contextual and contingent, as it is always dependent on another destabilising metaphor<sup>26</sup>.

Ricoeur suggests that the metaphor is not merely a superseded moment in the development of philosophical conceptualisation. It has intrinsic value, even in a philosophical discourse. According to Almaric, Ricoeur means that refraining from claims to absolute knowledge implies the ongoing use of metaphors<sup>27</sup>. In this sense, metaphors and linguistic mobility are necessary.

Mobility allows for semantic polysemy and for the development of new linguistic uses<sup>28</sup>. Otherwise, reading would be sheer deduction, which shows what is already known and enables absolute knowledge<sup>29</sup>. Ricoeur refrains from claims to absolute knowledge<sup>30</sup>, and believes that only this can allow for movement, time, change and transformation.

One could of course say that although clarity is not total or absolute, meaning may be relatively clear, and that is clear enough. Perhaps there are only ‘rough descriptions’<sup>31</sup>. But a rough description may nonetheless be a working one, and we may still aim to make it as

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<sup>22</sup> P. Fridlund, *Mobile Performances*, cit., p. 66.

<sup>23</sup> J. Derrida, *Limited Inc*, Galilée, Paris, 1990, pp. 266-67; see also P. Fridlund, *Mobile Performances*, cit., pp. 52-58; 107-09.

<sup>24</sup> P. Fridlund, *Mobile Performances*, cit., pp. 77-78.

<sup>25</sup> D. E. Cooper, *Metaphor and Derrida's Philosophy of Language*, in Eaglestone and Glendinning (eds.), *Derrida's Legacies. Literature and Philosophy*, Routledge, London, 2008, p. 47. Philosophical exercises that do not take into account the contradiction between the decisive factor of being able to see the transcendent meaning on the one hand, and being unable to do so on the other hand, are of little interest to me here. An example of such an investigation is J. R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, Penguin, London, 1996. For a discussion of the issue, see P. Fridlund, *Råa fakta, en oslipad idé*, in Jonsson (eds.), *Vetenskaps-societeten i Lund. Årsbok 2008*, Lund, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> J. Almaric, *Ricoeur, Derrida*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>27</sup> Ivi, p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> Cfr. P. Ricoeur, *La métaphore vive*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1975, pp. 145-50; 162-63; see also J. Derrida, *Limited Inc*, cit., pp. 26-36; 95-100; 252-54; P. Fridlund, *Mobile Performances*, cit., pp. 71-73.

<sup>29</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action*, cit., pp. 175-176.

<sup>30</sup> Id., *The Creativity of Language*, cit., p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> P. Fridlund, *Mobile Performances*, cit., p. 48.

sharp as possible. Striving for clarity is perhaps sufficient. Despite being difficult to obtain, it could still be the ultimate goal. This must be true to some extent, for we would not want an utterly chaotic discourse; a permanent stream of meaningless utterances or dysfunctioning communication.

### 1.3) *Desirable Clarity*

There are risks involved in aiming for clarity, and clarity may come at a price. Løvlie maintains that a preference for clear language over the obscure or vague always involves a loss<sup>32</sup>. In other words, if all communication were crystal clear, communicators would be like robots. If all communication were pure, the very idea of interpretation would be lost. This would have immediate and far-reaching consequences. Holy Scriptures would not need to be interpreted, as their meaning would already be clear, self-evident and fully understood. The same applies to literary classics. Daily life would also be different. It would be impossible to understand a trivial utterance in a shop as an expression of complicity, sisterhood, solidarity or flirtation<sup>33</sup>.

As Jacques Derrida writes: «Car le jour où il y aura une lecture de la carte d'Oxford, la seule et la vraie, ce sera la fin de l'histoire. Ou le devenir-prose de notre amour»<sup>34</sup>. That is to say, the day when it is possible to read for instance a postcard in only one way, when there will be only one true reading, this will also be the end of history. That will be, as Derrida says, the becoming-prose of our love (*le devenir-prose de notre amour*). It is not necessary to remain within the context of flirtatious conversations, romantic writings, sacred mysteries or the reading of ancient scriptures to see the implications of these issues. There is another side to this business too. Løvlie refers to a 17th century debate about whether respecting the apostle Paul requires the translator to retain some unclarity in the text when translating the New Testament. To simplify or clarify the message would be to contravene the objectives of Spirit. Consequently, the wisdom (*sagesse*) of the text would be lost<sup>35</sup>.

One could claim that foregoing this wisdom and reducing the role of the metaphor is a process of idealization. There would be a struggle to replace metaphors with philosophical concepts with direct claim to the truth (which would, however, only be valid in ideal situations under ideal conditions, after acts of idealization). The underlying idea behind this process is that there exists a direct path to proper meaning (*sens propre*), i.e. to ideal or idealized meaning. The clear philosophical concept would thus supposedly surpass and supplant the ambiguous metaphor. The death of the metaphor would coincide with the fulfilment of a philosophical process that may be interpreted as the hope for absolute knowledge<sup>36</sup>. While this may seem desirable, it would come at a high price. Wisdom, movement, history, the agent and subjectivity itself would be lost<sup>37</sup>.

Løvlie and von der Fehr maintain that in literature, there exists a process that *neither* strives for clarity *nor* has any goal. Consequently, they claim that literature is the place *par excellence* for undecidability, unpredictability, and the absence of tangible meaning<sup>38</sup>. This is perhaps precisely what the *sagesse* of literature consists in; the window that literature opens to wisdom.

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<sup>32</sup> E. Løvlie, *Litteraturens usynlige spor*, cit., p. 142.

<sup>33</sup> Cfr. P. Fridlund, *Mobile Performances*, cit., pp. 48-50; 71-72; 83-87; P. Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action*, cit., pp. 124-25; 138-40; 170-71.

<sup>34</sup> J. Derrida, *La carte postale. De Socrate à Freud et au-delà*, Flammarion, Paris, 1980, p. 127.

<sup>35</sup> E. Løvlie, *Litteraturens usynlige spor*, cit., p. 129.

<sup>36</sup> J. Amalric, *Ricoeur, Derrida*, cit., pp. 48-49.

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. P. Fridlund, *Mobile Performances*, cit., pp. 134-137; 145-147.

<sup>38</sup> E. Løvlie and D. Von der Fehr, *Introduksjon*, in Id., cit., p. 10.

## 2) Literature and Other Texts

Løvlie presupposes that literature is something 'special'. Poetry is different from ordinary language<sup>39</sup>. In certain respects, Ricoeur has a similar line of thought. He maintains that in the metaphorical process, references to the ordinary world are cut off<sup>40</sup>. The particularity of literature manifests itself in the absence of final meaning and unambiguous reference<sup>41</sup>. However, this very absence gives us access to that which cannot be articulated or conceptually grasped<sup>42</sup>. In literature, words lend themselves to something 'else', to something beyond ordinary language<sup>43</sup>.

Although literature typically is empty in this particular sense, there is something in it that captures our interest and touches us. Løvlie maintains that in literature, there is something important, and makes something with us, and to us. Although we may not know what this is, it is nonetheless present. Drawing on Derrida, Løvlie claims that both literature and religion are marked or conditioned by a radical secret. This can never be communicated fully or entirely shared. It remains inaccessible to the reader (and to the writer). In this sense, the Secret cannot be communicated or conceptualised. That is what it means to be secret in this particular context. Yet there remains a trace, a 'trace' of this secret<sup>44</sup>.

### 2.1) Traces

The trace thus appears as a trace of something that is not present, as it is 'not' this something. Neither is it completely absent, as it points to this something. A trace therefore points beyond itself, to something that is 'other', to something 'else'. This something remains undecidable or indeterminate. It emerges, but it is neither present nor totally absent. In a specific respect, the trace introduces otherness<sup>45</sup>, for it confronts us with something 'secret' that cannot be transmitted in its totality. And precisely because it is a secret, it cannot be said or expressed, although it is said through the trace<sup>46</sup>.

There are, however, certain distinctions to be made. Not all traces have the same quality. Or perhaps better: not every text is literature in the strong sense of being the trace of a secret. That said, it should also be pointed out that all texts have something in common. Derrida suggests that any text may 'become' a literary text, i.e. a text that is relatively readable, but that does not refer to a particular reality<sup>47</sup>. I will argue that what Løvlie says about literature therefore also has a bearing on *other* texts in other genres, including texts in philosophy, the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences.

### 2.2) Reading

One could say that once a text is written down, published or recorded, it is complete unto itself, but that its becoming nonetheless demands further acts of reading and interpretation. In these acts, a meeting takes place between the world of the text and the world of the reader<sup>48</sup>. Ricoeur claims that this interplay between text and reading (or text

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<sup>39</sup> E. Løvlie, *Litteraturen og kjærligheten til en kommande hemmelighet*, cit., p. 79.

<sup>40</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action*, cit., p. 246.

<sup>41</sup> E. Løvlie, *Leserens troserfaring*, cit., p. 181.

<sup>42</sup> E. Løvlie and D. Von der Fehr, *Introduksjon*, cit., p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> E. Løvlie, *Litteraturen og kjærligheten til en kommande hemmelighet*, cit., p. 79; E. Løvlie, *Leserens troserfaring*, cit., p. 181.

<sup>44</sup> E. Løvlie, *Litteraturen og kjærligheten til en kommande hemmelighet*, cit., pp. 80-81.

<sup>45</sup> Ivi, pp. 85-86.

<sup>46</sup> Ivi, pp. 80-81.

<sup>47</sup> J. Derrida, *La littérature au secret. Une filiation impossible*, in Id., *Donner la mort*, Galilée, Paris, 1999, pp. 173-75, quoted in E. Løvlie, *Litteraturen og kjærligheten til en kommande hemmelighet*, cit., pp. 86-87.

<sup>48</sup> J. Amalric, *Ricoeur, Derrida*, cit., pp. 79-80.



and reader) reflects the fact that words in natural language have a potential meaning, which has to be decided by context<sup>49</sup>. Consequently, there is always another possible reading and another possible interpretation. If that were not the case, the act of reading would be an act of sheer deduction, which would only reveal something that is already known<sup>50</sup>. This is not a marginal, innocent or unimportant issue in Ricoeur's philosophy. On the contrary, central to Ricoeur's corpus is a dialectic between the self on the one hand, and signs, symbols, texts and human praxis on the other. One implication is that, for Ricoeur, language is not simply the abstract concern of logic or semiotics<sup>51</sup>. This in turn has significant implications for the central place that Ricoeur attributes to human subjectivity and historicity: The text requires the reader precisely because the text is not a fixed and ossified formula.

A text hence does not simply describe what 'is' or what 'has been', but also opens itself to new fields when it is read. I consider it essential to see that this concerns also philosophical and scientific texts. New horizons are opened to the reader; if what one reads in the text is true, then this or that can be done, indeed must be done. The act of reading leads the reader to perceive that this or that can be rethought, or must be rethought. Let me quote a philosophical text written by A. J. Ayer:

What we have been in search of, in enquiring into the function of philosophy, is a definition of philosophy, which should accord to some extent with the practice of those who are commonly called philosophers, and at the same time be consistent with the common assumption that philosophy is a special branch of knowledge<sup>52</sup>.

and another philosophical text, this time by Jan Löfberg:

The analysis, to be possible at all, presupposes that the initial object, a certain interpretation of the sayings of Jesus, be established to a considerable extent, namely as much as is required to constitute the interpretation as a certain, specific interpretation in an interesting sense. (...) The analysis makes no historical-exegetical claims but operates blind to history, and according to the analytical and preferential preconditions of the method<sup>53</sup>.

These quotations can be apprehended as traces of something that is no longer there; of something inaccessible, a secret. And also at the same time pointing 'out' and further. In neither case, it seems that the interesting point would be exactly what Ayer or Löfberg have been doing, at precise times and specific places. Rather, their texts are interesting because they provide possibilities and look 'forward' to what is yet to come, while remaining determined as 'traces' of a reflection, an observation and a decision that no longer exist. Löfberg's analyses and methodological choices were made by a concrete person (Jan Löfberg). Those who are «commonly called philosophers,» as Ayer says, are so called by some specific person(s) at some determinate point in history. Yet when this is reported in their texts, the focus is not on these specifics. Ayer's description and reasoning lead to a certain way of talking about philosophy, a particular manner of treating philosophers; the text does not seem to content itself with simply reporting what has been. In Löfberg, the text seems to structure the reading of the coming pages, which in turn are not meant to be an account of things 'as they are' at the very moment the words are written down, nor an

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<sup>49</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action*, cit., pp. 51-54.

<sup>50</sup> Ivi, pp. 175-176.

<sup>51</sup> P. Ricoeur, *The Creativity of Language*, in Kearney (eds.), *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers. The Phenomenological Heritage*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984, p. 32.

<sup>52</sup> A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, Dover Publications, New York, 1952, p. 51.

<sup>53</sup> J. Löfberg, *Spiritual or Human Value? An Evaluation-Systematical Reconstruction and Analysis of the Preaching of Jesus in the Synoptical Gospels*, LiberGleerup, Lund, 1982, p. 16.

account of how things were at a particular moment of history. I suppose that Ayer and Löfberg could claim that they are dealing with general (i.e. atemporal and non-spatial) relations. While this is undeniable, it is not the only significant aspect of their texts. I suggest that as little as a reading does focus entirely on the reporting aspect, i.e. on what has been, it cannot content itself only with pure abstractions. One must find *some* implications and draw *some* conclusions. While Ayer and Löfberg's texts contain traces of a secret; of something we cannot know as readers, their texts hence also point elsewhere. They open new horizons to the reader.

This kind of meaningfulness, which is so dear to *les beaux arts*; to the humanities, theology and philosophy, is also unavoidably a vital feature of texts written in other disciplines, for example in computer science:

Prices on a local power market obviously depend highly on the balance between local production and consumption. This is clearly illustrated by Figure 5 and 6. The figures show local market prices on a market with 30 actors, in the first case nine of them have production capacity, in the second three of them have it. Everything else is equal. In the figures we can see that the local equilibrium prices are significantly lower in the case when the relative number of producers is higher<sup>54</sup>.

While this passage undoubtedly contains observations, it also points beyond itself and incites us to 'do' something, perhaps to 're-organise' or re-strengthen the local power market. It concerns certain findings, but they are 'interesting' not merely as findings, not because they were found at a certain time by certain people. Rather, the findings point outwards, forwards, to something more and other, to something beyond. It is not the past tense that matters, not what 'has been', not where the experience was made, or by whom, or when, but the process of pointing forward: what 'comes out of this'... In other words, what matters most is what the text is pointing to or envisaging. The most important aspect is found in what Ricoeur calls 'before the text', i.e. 'the thing of the text'. Ricoeur claims that the text develops a 'world', in the sense that the interpretative interaction between the text and the reader concerns a suggested world, in which the reader can project her own possibilities<sup>55</sup>. The world of a literary text is thus a projected world, which distances itself from everyday reality and turns possibility into a reality<sup>56</sup>. My point is that in certain respects and to greater and lesser degrees, this is a feature of 'all' texts, including philosophical and scientific writings.

Of course, it would be decidedly odd if there was no relation between what is said and where the observation was made, the time at which it was made, etc. Yet if the observation were limited to these particulars, the value of the text would be close to nil. What I wish to stress is that all texts point forward and outward. Even when they are anchored to history, to empirical observations, to what has been and what is, the primary purpose of the act of reading must be to what the particular text points. Questions must be asked: What is disclosed and opened? Which actions are made possible or excluded? What is called for and what is prohibited?

### 2.3) *Literary Freedom*

Løvlie argues that precisely because literature does not have any obligations to reality, it can express itself freely, without necessarily referring to any concrete state of affairs<sup>57</sup>. Literature is not obliged to refer to something 'out there'<sup>58</sup> and its relation to time and

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<sup>54</sup> P. Carlsson, *Algorithms for Electronic Power Markets*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Uppsala, 2004, p. 215.

<sup>55</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action*, cit., pp. 57-59.

<sup>56</sup> Ivi, pp. 142-143.

<sup>57</sup> E. Løvlie, *Religiøse vendinger i kontinental teori*, cit., pp. 33-34.

<sup>58</sup> Id., *Litteraturen og kjærligheten til en kommende hemmelighet*, cit., p. 88.

space is therefore inessential.<sup>59</sup> In literature, an author may move between different times and places, and temporal and spatial relations are not necessarily 'real'. In several of his crime stories, Henning Mankell writes afterwords in which he thematises this topic. He insists that he writes about things that could have happened, but that have not necessarily taken place in the way he describes them<sup>60</sup>.

In a sense, it is of course extremely important that *commissaire* Maigret walks the way he does in the first paragraphs of *Maigret et le clochard*. It is similarly important to the Sister Fidelma Mysteries that the events take place in the seventh-century<sup>61</sup>. And the TV series *Downton Abbey*<sup>62</sup> is about a precise historical period. Løvlie would certainly not disagree with any of this. She simply insists that in literature, the very message (if any) is not related to this 'reality'; to the time and the place. The 4.50 from Paddington could just as well have been another train, leaving from another station, as long as the subsequent events can unfold and a crime story can be constructed<sup>63</sup>. Similarly, many of the interesting and fascinating events in Peter Tremayne's novels about Sister Fidelma and many features of the plot of *Downton Abbey* could have been depicted as taking place in another era. Precisely this kind of transposition frequently occurs in theatre, opera and film.

While I agree with Løvlie, the only thing I want to say is that this is similar regarding texts in general, and not only of strictly literary texts. I must emphasise that I do not aim to dismiss or reduce the roles played by the body, the concrete human, real experiences, actual human subjects, or our historicity. On the contrary, I argue that research must begin with the here and now, not with generalities, but with real texts, concrete cases and so forth<sup>64</sup>. I aim to point out that if literature moves beyond time and space, then this is also true of other texts. A double movement is thus required. Non-literary texts go beyond the 'here and now' and *also* have atemporal and non-spatial features that are 'important', and to some extent absolutely *decisive*. On the other hand, literature is also anchored to reality, which too is important and decisive. That is at least my argument in the next section.

#### 2.4) Fiction—Non-Fiction

Løvlie claims that a novel typically begins with a description of something. It can be of a person, a landscape, a building, a city or a feeling. For Løvlie, it is significant that although there is a description, it does not refer to anything in particular<sup>65</sup>. Løvlie's claim that a literary text has a content that does not refer to a particular reality connects to established views of fiction<sup>66</sup>. Fiction is often described in terms of its use of certain literary devices, and a fictional text would thus typically include invented elements, which describe something that has never happened, invoke names that do not refer to anybody, etc. By

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<sup>59</sup> Id., *Leserens troserfaring*, p. 180.

<sup>60</sup> H. Mankell, *Den orolige mannen*, Pocketförlaget, Stockholm, 2009, efterord; H. Mankell, *Hundarna i Riga*, MånPocket, Stockholm, 1992, pp. 338-339. H. Mankell, *Danslärarens återkomst*, Ordfront, Stockholm 2000, efterord.

<sup>61</sup> Sister Fidelma is the principal character in a series of historical mystery novels and short stories by Peter Tremayne (pseudonyme for Peter Berresford Ellis). The first one, *Absolution by Murder*, was published in 1994.

<sup>62</sup> *Downton Abbey* is a British period drama television series first aired on ITV in the United Kingdom and Ireland on 26 September 2010.

<sup>63</sup> S. A. Christie, *4.50 from Paddington*, Published for the Crime Club by Collins, London, 1957.

<sup>64</sup> Cfr. P. Fridlund, *Mobile Performances*, cit., pp. 147-150, 153-157. For a broad theoretical background, see also H. Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement. A Historical Introduction*, Nijhoff, The Hague, 1965, pp. 659-68; 672-76.

<sup>65</sup> E. Løvlie, *Leserens troserfaring*, cit., p. 185.

<sup>66</sup> Id., *Litteraturen og kjærligheten til en kommande hemmelighet*, cit., pp. 86-87.

contrast, non-fiction typically endeavours to render facts accurately, and refers to real people, real places, real events, etc.<sup>67</sup>

This is a highly doubtful claim, and it is incredibly easy to provide counter-examples. The Swedish author P. O. Enquist has written several novels on historical persons or events, such as *Lewis resa* or *Legionärerna: en roman om baltutlämningen*<sup>68</sup>. The Belgian author Amélie Nothomb refers to her proper *feelings* in autobiographical novels like *Stupeur et tremblements* and *Ni d'Ève ni d'Adam*<sup>69</sup>. However, such references are ambiguous. How and to what extent do they refer? Can they even be said to refer at all? More concrete references are made with regard to geography. For example, in Georges Simenon's *Maigret et le clochard*, commissaire Maigret walks along the Seine with a colleague<sup>70</sup>. In *Min kamp 6* by Karl-Ove Knausgård, the author drives along the coast in South-West Sweden<sup>71</sup>. Or let us consider the following passages from Emile Zola's *Au bonheur des dames*:

Denise était venue à pied de la gare Saint-Lazare, où un train de Cherbourg l'avait débarquée avec ses deux frères, après une nuit passée sur la dure banquette d'un wagon de troisième classe. Elle tenait par la main Pépé, et Jean la suivait, tous les trois brisés du voyage, effarés et perdus au milieu du vaste Paris, le nez levé sur les maisons, demandant à chaque carrefour la rue de la Michodière, dans laquelle leur oncle Baudu demeurait. Mais, comme elle débouchait enfin sur la place Gaillon, la jeune fille s'arrêta net de surprise.

(...) C'était, à l'encoignure de la rue de la Michodière et de la rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, un magasin de nouveautés dont les étalages éclataient en notes vives, dans la douce et pâle journée d'octobre. Huit heures sonnaient à Saint-Roch, il n'y avait sur les trottoirs que le Paris matinal, les employés filant à leurs bureaux et les ménagères courant les boutiques. Devant la porte, deux commis, montés sur une échelle double, finissaient de pendre des lainages, tandis que, dans une vitrine de la rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, un autre commis, agenouillé et le dos tourné, plissait délicatement une pièce de soie bleue. Le magasin, vide encore de clientes, et où le personnel arrivait à peine, bourdonnait à l'intérieur comme une ruche qui s'éveille.

(...) Dans le pan coupé donnant sur la place Gaillon, la haute porte, toute en glace, montait jusqu'à l'entresol, au milieu d'une complication d'ornements, chargés de dorures. Deux figures allégoriques, deux femmes riantes, la gorge nue et renversée, déroulaient l'enseigne : *Au Bonheur des Dames*. Puis, les vitrines s'enfonçaient, longeaient la rue de la Michodière et la rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, où elles occupaient, outre la maison d'angle, quatre autres maisons, deux à gauche, deux à droite, achetées et aménagées récemment<sup>72</sup>.

These passages exemplify a relation between the literary text and reality. Ricoeur draws on this relation when he claims that each discourse is connected to the world; if it did not say something about the world, then what would it be talking about?<sup>73</sup> Fiction therefore does not lack reference, even though reference can be more or less explicit<sup>74</sup>. This is perhaps trivial. Løvlie certainly has something else in mind when she claims that literature does not refer to reality. It would be very surprising if someone claimed that there are no 'real names', no 'real references' and no 'reality' in fiction. But it may plausibly be claimed (as I think Løvlie wants to say when she claims that literature does not refer to reality) that such 'real references' do not truly function as references to a real world. I mentioned the above examples because I think that their references to 'reality' add something and make a

<sup>67</sup> S. Friend, *Fiction as Genre*, in "Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society", 2012, CXII, 2, p. 189.

<sup>68</sup> P. O. Enquist, *Lewis resa: roman*, Norstedt, Stockholm, 2001; P. O. Enquist, *Legionärerna. En roman om baltutlämningen*, Norstedts, Stockholm, 1968.

<sup>69</sup> A. Nothomb, *Stupeur et tremblements: roman*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1999; A. Nothomb, *Ni d'Ève ni d'Adam: roman*, Albin Michel, Paris, 2007.

<sup>70</sup> G. Simenon, *Maigret et le clochard*, Presses de la Cité, Paris, 1963, pp. 8-9.

<sup>71</sup> K. O. Knausgård, *Min kamp 6: roman*, Oktober, Frankfurt, 2012, pp. 7-8.

<sup>72</sup> E. Zola, *Au bonheur des dames*, Gallimard, Paris, 1980, pp. 29-30.

<sup>73</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action*, cit., pp. 156-58.

<sup>74</sup> Ivi, pp. 20-21.

difference to the texts (this difference depends on the references that are made). Nonetheless, I believe this is not the point Ricoeur wants to make either. More importantly, he thinks that the metaphorical language that is so characteristic of literature aims to touch on a reality beyond language, and strives to achieve an expansive grasp of the truth. Moreover, fiction has the ability to ‘transform’ reality. The text aims to create a new horizon<sup>75</sup>.

### 2.5) *Literature and Truth*

The Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgård reflects on the writing process in the sixth and final volume of his autofictional novel *Min kamp (My Struggle)*. He describes his memory of his relationship with a 13-year-old girl when he worked as a teacher in his twenties. When this memory arose in the writing process, the only authentic thing that the author could do was to follow the thought and let what was merely a thought and a desire be actualised and acted out in the ‘reality’ of the novel. In the novel, it was necessary that he had sex with the girl, so strong was his desire at the time of the ‘historical event’. For Knausgård, this process is essential to writing a novel. All tendencies, wishes and desires are crystallised into a single point and a single picture, in which everything that was hidden is revealed. The novelist may thus express the truth, while nonetheless writing about events that never took place. In this particular case, the physical desire was so strong and so intense that it had to be made into an explicit act in the novel in order to remain faithful to a reality in which the desire was never realised<sup>76</sup>.

These reflections on what it means to write a novel mirror Ricoeur’s more abstract deliberations about text, reference and meaning. Ricoeur points out that language changes character every time that it shifts its attention to the message itself<sup>77</sup>. He maintains that reading involves a movement towards a way of being in the world that is opened by the text<sup>78</sup>. The reader’s interest is not directed towards the potential reference of the text, nor to potential concrete events, names and places, but rather to the meaning that remains<sup>79</sup>. To understand a text is hence to follow this movement from what it says to what it speaks about<sup>80</sup>. This movement, however, does not consist in a turn away from reality. Fiction rather points at reality in another direction and through indirect means<sup>81</sup>.

In these kinds of situation, to tell or give an account of something (for instance, to write a report) is typically about giving *examples*; there is an aspect of *exemplarity*<sup>82</sup>. A laboratory report may describe what has happened in a very concrete and particular situation, but its value lies in its *exemplarity*. What is observed in a concrete and particular situation can be expected to be observed at other times and in other contexts, providing that the same or similar relevant conditions obtain. This exemplarity is also identifiable in other contexts. Even the most exceptional account of a unique event in a fictive world may *exemplify* something that could have happened or that may take place. And such fictitious accounts can also exemplify reactions to an event or ways in which events can be recounted<sup>83</sup>. Aristotle seems to have something like this in mind when he says that comedy

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<sup>75</sup> Ivi, pp. 26-28. See also Mankell, who affirms in an afterword that he writes in order to make the world more understandable (Mankell, *Den orolige mannen*, efterord).

<sup>76</sup> K. O. Knausgård, *Min kamp* 6, cit., pp. 936-38.

<sup>77</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Du texte à l’action*, cit., pp. 26-28.

<sup>78</sup> J. Amalric, *Ricoeur, Derrida*, cit., p. 78.

<sup>79</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Du texte à l’action*, cit., p. 117.

<sup>80</sup> Ivi, p. 233.

<sup>81</sup> Ivi, p. 246.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. J. Derrida, *Passions*, Galilée, Paris, 1993, p. 91.

<sup>83</sup> S. R. Queneau, *Exercices de style*, Gallimard, Paris, 1947, in which a short event is told in 99 different ways.

pictures or imitates human characters, while tragedy imitates actions<sup>84</sup>. These forms of drama hence do not give us the ‘complete’ picture of an event<sup>85</sup>, but nonetheless provide examples.

Knausgård uses a memory as an example of what could have happened, should have happened or was bound to happen, if the agent’s wish or desire had been satisfied. In the same vein, Henning Mankell claims in the afterword to the novel *Danslärarens återkomst* that such fictive elements are intertwined with a number of unambiguous truths<sup>86</sup>. This corresponds to Aristotle’s view that mimicking or imitating gives us *insights*, even if we do not know precisely what is being imitated, and even if the imitation considerably deviates from what it imitates<sup>87</sup>. In his afterwords to the novels *Den orolige mannen* and *Hundarna i Riga*, Mankell claims that the most important aspect of the fictitious text is that it unveils reality<sup>88</sup>. The aim of writing is to make the world more understandable<sup>89</sup>. One can hence conclude with Ricoeur that fiction does not lack reference, although the reference sometimes only exists ‘indirectly’<sup>90</sup>. In a similar fashion, Ricoeur argues that metaphors aim to reach a reality beyond language, and to say the truth about that reality. Fiction could therefore be said to have the force to ‘transform’ reality, as fictional texts aim to create a new horizon of reality<sup>91</sup>. Hence, literature also refers to the world. But it is also true that philosophy uses fiction.

### 3) Philosophy and Fantasy

In post-war philosophy of religion, not least in the Anglophone analytic tradition, a debate arose around the issue of verification. I previously described how this particular philosophical tradition emphasises ‘clarity’ and ‘argumentative rigour’, and ‘stress[es] detailed argumentation, attention to semantics, use of classical logic and non-classical logics and clarity of meaning above all other criteria’. It thus appears to stand in opposition to literature, if the latter is taken to be devoted to unclarity, lack of reference, fictitiousness, etc. (in short, if it devotes itself to being untrue, in Løvlie’s sense). Yet, it is precisely in this philosophical tradition that *The parable of the invisible gardener* by John Wisdom plays a central role.

Once upon a time two explorers came upon a clearing in the jungle. In the clearing there were growing many flowers and many weeds. One explorers says, «Some gardener must tend this plot.» The other disagrees, «There is no gardener.» So they pitch their tents and set a watch. No gardener is ever seen. «But perhaps there is an invisible gardener.» So they set up a barbed-wire fence. The electrify it. They patrol with bloodhounds. (For they remember how H. G. Wells’s ‘Invisible Man’ could be both smelt and touched though he could not be seen.) But no shrieks ever suggest that some intruder has received a shock. No movements of the wire ever betray an invisible climber. The bloodhounds never give cry. Yet still the Believer is not convinced. «But there is a gardener, invisible, intangible, insensible to electric shocks, a gardener who has no scent and gives no sound, a gardener who comes secretly to look after the garden which he loves.» At last the Sceptic despairs, «But what remains of your original assertion». «Just

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<sup>84</sup> *The Poetics of Aristotle*, chapters V and VI; <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/9/7/1974/1974-h/1974-h.htm>; accessed 13 January 2015.

<sup>85</sup> *The Poetics of Aristotle*, chapter VI; <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/9/7/1974/1974-h/1974-h.htm>; accessed 13 January 2015.

<sup>86</sup> H. Mankell, *Danslärarens återkomst*, cit., efterord.

<sup>87</sup> *The Poetics of Aristotle*, chapter IV; <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/9/7/1974/1974-h/1974-h.htm>; accessed 13 January 2015.

<sup>88</sup> H. Mankell, *Den orolige mannen*, cit., efterord; H. Mankell, *Hundarna i Riga*, cit., pp. 338-39.

<sup>89</sup> See H. Mankell, *Den orolige mannen*, cit., efterord.

<sup>90</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action*, cit., pp. 20-21.

<sup>91</sup> Ivi, pp. 26-28.

how does what you call an invisible, intangible, elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even no gardener at all?»<sup>92</sup>

This use of literary fiction can be read in the light of Ricoeur's claim that the role of this type of image is to constitute a play of different possibilities in a state of non-commitment; to test new ideas, new values, new ways of being in the world<sup>93</sup>.

It strikes me that there are two lines of argument being brought together when reading Løvlie and Ricoeur. I agree with Løvlie when she affirms that literature does not refer to 'out-there', that what we have are rather traces of a secret. The fictional character of a literary text frees it from time and space and from the obligation to communicate anything in particular. However, I also agree with Ricoeur when he insists that literature is about the world, and, as I have pointed out, that literature finds its basis in non-fictional elements.

In this paper, I have moved from Løvlie's and von der Fehr's 'theory' of literature to philosophical questioning about the extent to which it is possible and desirable to strive for clarity of meaning. I then considered the literary traits present in supposedly 'non-literary' texts, and the place of 'reality' in literature. I have provided examples from both science and philosophy, but it is undeniable that philosophy is my main concern. It is obvious that literature is influenced by philosophy - it suffices to mention such writers as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. But philosophy has a similar relation to literature. Plato, Berkeley, Hume and others are well-known for their employment of literary devices. However, despite the fact that the programme of the 20<sup>th</sup> century analytic philosophy tradition is far from literature, it also employs literary devices, albeit often in an unthought and unthematised way. This is unsurprising, as references to reality must simultaneously move beyond reality. Philosophy could hence learn from literature, and do so in a conscious and deliberate way. This will be the topic of the final section of this paper.

## Consequences

I have argued that the essential features of literature identified by Løvlie also bear on other kinds of text. From her reflections on literature, Løvlie draws the conclusion that one key feature of literature is that it destabilises and liberates fixed opinions<sup>94</sup>. But I suggest that this can also be said of philosophy, and perhaps all academic work. In this section, I will focus on philosophy, and particularly on its status as a 'creative' work.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari point out that philosophy is the art of inventing, forming and producing concepts<sup>95</sup>. They consider this creative process to be particularly important, as concepts do not come down to us ready-formed or as already available<sup>96</sup>. The creative process also implies that every concept has a history. There was a time when the particular concept in question did not exist. Concepts are created in response to particular problems, or more precisely, in response to the need for new concepts to address such problems<sup>97</sup>. They are thus constituted as tools for dealing with specific issues. This entails that concepts can only be evaluated in relation to specific situations<sup>98</sup>.

I suggest that this gives both a destabilising and a stabilising character to philosophy, and that both of these aspects are related to how philosophy intervenes in concrete

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<sup>92</sup> As quoted by A. Flew in A. Flew, *Theology and Falsification. A Symposium*, in Mitchell (eds.), *The Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford University Press, London, 1971, p. 13.

<sup>93</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action*, cit., pp. 243-45.

<sup>94</sup> E. Løvlie, *Litteraturen og kjærligheten til en kommande hemmelighet*, cit., p. 93.

<sup>95</sup> G. Deleuze – F. Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1991, p. 8.

<sup>96</sup> Ivi, p. 11.

<sup>97</sup> Ivi, pp. 22-23.

<sup>98</sup> Ivi, p. 31.

problematics. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, the creation of concepts can contribute to stability by helping philosophers to deal with a specific problem: If we are unable to tackle an issue, new concepts may be needed and they may help. Stability can thus be created. On the other hand, creating concepts can also contribute to a certain kind of mobility: New concepts transform the scene, challenge established views and overthrow old answers. This aspect of the creative process is particularly well captured in the following passage by Ricoeur:

For me the philosophical task is not to close the circle, to centralize or totalize knowledge, but to keep open the irreducible plurality of discourse. It is essential to show how the different discourses may interrelate or intersect but one must resist the temptation to make them identical, the same<sup>99</sup>.

This perspective finds a clear foundation in Ricoeur's views on language and human subjectivity. Words have a potential meaning that is eventually decided by context<sup>100</sup>. As I have remarked, another interpretation is always possible, for to read would otherwise simply amount to deducing what is already said or to understanding something that is already known<sup>101</sup>. Ricoeur's emphasis on interpretation and transformation reflects his view that reading is a creative process that eludes absolutes<sup>102</sup>.

Since I began this paper by focusing on literature from a philosophical point of view, let me end it with a few words on the relationship between philosophy and literature. There are certainly many things to be said about this relation. I consider Løvlie's and von der Fehr's reading of literature to be highly stimulating. Literature or artistic writing (in the sense of the German *Belletristik*, from the French *belles lettres*), brings the reader to a land of undecidable secrets and traces. The elusive character of literature evokes belief and an experience of what cannot be known, explained or conceptualised. Løvlie and von der Fehr suggest that in this sense, literature has an affinity with religion. In this paper, I argue that philosophical texts also share significant and interesting features with literature. If this claim is taken seriously, I believe that philosophy may find a stimulating interlocutor in literature. Two horizons in which such dialogue may take place immediately come to mind. Firstly, the style, form, genre, context and even the typographic choices that serve to constitute a philosophical text should be valued as important factors. They should not only be valued for aesthetic reasons, but for properly 'philosophical' reasons, as it were. The material expression of thinking, conceptualisation or reflection should not be neglected, especially when we consider the means through which the text is shared with its readers. The text is an inseparable part of the 'message'. It is also vital to reflect not only on what is said, but on how it is said – the manner of expression is not innocent. Secondly, if philosophy engaged in a productive dialogue with literature, it could become more aware that there is a secret in philosophy itself. There is always something hidden and unconceptualised, yet still philosophically important. This undoubtedly presents significant difficulties. How can the secret be spoken about, and what purpose does it serve to speak or think about something that apparently cannot be said or thought? Historically, many have drawn the conclusion that it 'cannot' be spoken about. Not in philosophy, and not in a serious manner. As Emmanuel Lévinas says: «[L]'histoire de la philosophie occidentale n'a été que la réfutation [...] de la transcendance. Le logos *dit* a le dernier mot dominant tout sens...»<sup>103</sup>. The dominant idea has been that this speculation is a matter for one's spare time; harmless at home but inappropriate at work. But I believe that to be a

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<sup>99</sup> P. Ricoeur, *The Creativity of Language*, cit., p. 27.

<sup>100</sup> Id., *Du texte à l'action*, cit., pp. 51-54.

<sup>101</sup> Ivi, pp. 175-76.

<sup>102</sup> Cfr. Ricoeur, *The Creativity of Language*, cit., p. 27.

<sup>103</sup> E. Lévinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, LGF, Paris, 1990, p. 262.



mistake. It makes knowledge the norm and excludes from philosophy anything that transcends knowledge and conceptualisation<sup>104</sup>. The need for change is pressing. I hope that this paper may contribute in some way to that change.

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<sup>104</sup> Ivi, p. 154.