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Turning defeat into victory
The reinterpretation of the Russo/Swedish War of 1808/09 in 19th century Finland
(with special attention to Johan Ludvig Runeberg's „Tales of Ensign Stål“)

Shortly before his 60th birthday, Max Engman, the leading Swedish speaking historian of Finland and specialist on 19th Century Finland, so to speak on the autonomous Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire, published a number of earlier essays in a collection intended for the Swedish book market. The book got the title „Lejonet och dubbelörnen: Finlands imperiella decennier“, and the following poem was inserted as its motto:¹

Fredrikshamn

Trehundra generaler med mestadels svenska namn
och hundra admiraler som i tsarernas tjänst drog till strid
fick sin skolning I vita hus av trä I det lilla Fredrikshamn
sedan freden i denna stad gjort slut på Finlands svenska tid.

I Sibirien och Alaska fick de sitt verksamhetsfält
och kring halva jorden på kejsarens bud fick de rida och segla och slåss
Men I Sveriges adertonhundratals som var mycket provinciellt
gick varenda löjtnant och trodde att de trånade hem till oss.

Indeed, Engman's essays show that Finland and Russia lived in a symbiosis of mutual gains in the 19th century. Finland provided quite a number of useful service personnel – ranging from reliable chimney sweeps and dairy maids in St.Petersburg till brave and level headed generals and administrators which helped to conquer and pacify the Caucasian provinces. In turn the Finns got their metropolitan and imperial experiences, and the human capital of their state to be was well equipped with urban skills and administrative as well as military experience.²

Engman's book, alongside with the third volume of Schildt's history of Finland – Matti Klinge's „Kejsartiden“³ – constitutes the peak of revisionism in late 20th century Finnish historiography, refuting the notion of the „Russian parenthesis in Finnish history“⁴, developed in the early years of independence. The cornerstones for this turn of the tide were, however, Osmo Jussila's and Keijo Korhonen's doctoral dissertations of 1964 and 1969⁵, which disproved the long cherished view that the

¹ Max Engman: *Lejonet och dubbelörnen: Finlands imperiella decennier*. Stockholm 2000, 4. – The poem is from the collection Alf Henrikson: *Sakta mak*, Stockholm 1968, and has been reprinted in Alf Henrikson: *Samlade dikter*². Stockholm 1997, 285. A translation could read as follows: "Three hundred generals with mostly Swedish names / And one hundred admirals, who fought in the service of the tsars, / Had got their schooling in the white wooden house in little Fredrikshamn / After the peace treaty in that city put an end to Finland's Swedish times. / Siberia and Alaska were the areas they worked in, / And around half of the world upon Emperor's order they would sail and fight, / But in Sweden of the 1800s, which was very parochial / Every lieutenant kept thinking the longed for home till us."

² For details see Max Engman: *Finland och S:t Petersburg: migration och influens 1703-1917*. Helsingfors 1983 (= Bidrag till kännedom av Finlands natur och folk, H. 130).

³ Matti Klinge: *Kejsartiden*. Esbo 1996 (= Finlands historia, 3).

⁴ The expression has been coined by Bernhard Estlander: ("Den ryska parenteserna i Finlands historia." In: *Nordisk Tidskrift (Stockholm)* (1926) 53-75.

⁵ Keijo Korhonen: *Suomen asiain komitea: Suomen korkeimman hallinnon järjestyty ja toteuttaminen 1811-1826*. Helsinki 1963 (= Historiallisia tutkimuksia; 65) (with an extensive summary in German, 442-460); Osmo

Russian tsars had confirmed a separate constitution as the basis of Finland's autonomy, thus leveling down Russia's stern Finnish policies after 1899 to a political process instead of condemning it as a violation of international or constitutional law. I myself added my contribution to this by extending their line of argument until the break-up, showing that the Finnish side itself had gradually and deliberately abandoned the platform of unwritten consensus which had been crucial for the autonomy.⁶

About a hundred years earlier, however, there had been a similar conviction in Finland about the favorable conditions the country had gained by its conjunction to the Russian Empire. When Helsinki University set out to celebrate its bicentennial in 1840 – which meant that the Imperial Alexander University viewed itself to be in continuity to Academia Christiania founded 1640 by the Queen of Sweden in Turku – professors, students and administrators were full of praise for the new order of things that had taken roots in 1809.⁷

It might not be unwarranted to shortly recapitulate the course of events.⁸ For centuries, Sweden had enlarged the eastern half of the realm, originally inhabited by Finns and Carelians, ever since it founded the stronghold of Vyborg on Novgorod territory in 1293. The tide turned during the Great Northern war with the conquest of Sweden's Baltic Provinces and Vyborg by Russia in 1710 after its victory at Poltava. Peter the Great secured the Vyborg area in the Peace Treaty of Nystad in 1721, but he reassured the inhabitants that they would enjoy freedom of religion, and instructed his administrators to observe the laws and customs of the region. As a practical consequence the Russian part of Finland, so called Old Finland, was subordinated to the same central administrative bodies in St. Petersburg which also guarded the explicitly guaranteed special rights of Estonia and Livonia. When Finland as a whole was occupied by Russia during the war of 1741-1743, even a dietine of Finland was summoned, and the parts finally added to Old Finland were bestowed with a special organisational statute. As the attempts of Catherine the Great to integrate the all territories of the Empire into a system of viceroalties were refuted by Paul I, Russia had a number of different newly acquired territories in the west, of which almost all enjoyed a degree of autonomy.

Thus it was quite in line with Russia's borderland policies⁹ that she already assured the inhabitants of Finland of their traditional rights by a proclamation of General Buxhoevden when her army crossed the border in 1808. War against Sweden had been incited by the short-lived cooperation of Napoleon and tsar Alexander I in order to force Sweden to adhere to the continental blocus. What had started as a typical war of coercion, turned into a swift occupation of the south of Finland, where the population willingly pledged allegiance to its new ruler. The Swedish high command, headed by the weak king Gustavus IV Adolf, misjudged the chances of resistance or counterattacks and rather attempted just to save the army, as an unfavorable peace treaty seemed inevitable. Viapori / Sveaborg sea fortress outside Helsinki / Helsingfors agreed to surrender, if no relief would have arrived at a certain date, and the detachments operating in central and northern Finland fought bravely, but isolatedly, and were forced to retreat in the end. A first thorough history of the war by Gustav Montgomery in Runeberg's times aroused interest in the events of 1808/09 and especially irritation on the undecided conduct of the

Jussila: *Suomen perustuslait venäläisten ja suomalaisten tulkintojen mukaan 1808-1863*. Helsinki 1969 (= Historiallisia tutkimuksia; 77) (with an extensive summary in English, 263-279).

⁶ Robert Schweitzer: *Autonomie und Autokratie: die Stellung des Gfsm. Finnland im Russischen Reich ... 1863-1899*, Gießen 1978 (= Marburger Abhandlungen zur Geschichte und Kultur Osteuropas, 19)

⁷ Matti Klinge: *Eine nordische Universität: die Universität Helsinki 1640-1990*. Helsinki 1992, 307-312, 327-339.

⁸ For general facts from the history of Finland a refer once and for all to Eino Jutikkala / Kauko Pirinen: *A History of Finland*. 5th., rev. ed., Helsinki 1996.

⁹ Boris Mironov has pointed out that assuring newly conquered territories of their rights in a way continued the policy started by Catherine the Great by her Gramota of 1785 to the Russian nobility: by letting the conviction take root that men as members of estates had ualinebale rights was in her eyes a prerequisite, from which it might be possible to proceed to the introduction of civil rights in general. Thus it was logical to confirm all rights that had already taken root in the conscience of the people in a defined area, regardless of whether the same level had been achieved in Russia. (Boris Mironov: "Social policies of Catherine II and their results" In: Eckhard Hübner et al. (ed.): *Russland zur Zeit Katharinas II. : Absolutismus, Aufklärung, Pragmatismus. Wiss. Konferenz Eutin 199*. Köln u.a. 1998 (= Beiträge zur Geschichte Osteuropas; 26), 115-135.

operations.¹⁰ But while the military result of the war was not yet decided, Alexander I made political moves to fix its results as fast as possible.

He summoned the Finnish representatives of the four estates who normally were delegated to the Diet at Stockholm to Porvoo / Borgå and guaranteed to uphold their traditional rights and privileges as well as the legal order in the country – in general terms, without special mention of individual laws. Recent scholarship agrees that the ceremony was neither a separate peace treaty in an ongoing war between the Tsar and Finland, nor an oath on a constitution. It was modeled after the acts by which monarchs in early modern times joined a new, well-defined separate entity to the lands of their crown, increasing their titles and the coat of arms with additional words and symbols. This reciprocal acceptance of land and ruler had been the meaning of the celebration of Porvoo, as Jussila has convincingly shown.¹¹

But the Diet of Porvoo was by no means a solemn act without further bearing. Quite to the contrary, Alexander I lived up to his promises by creating a centralized self-administration for Finland which preserved the advantages of Swedish rule by law and traditional *habeas corpus* rights.

In the light of these fairly favorable results it was not too difficult even for contemporaries to find positive traits in the development. At the beginning of the hostilities, of course, there was no similar prospect for optimism. The inhabitants of southern Finland felt deserted because of the swift retreat of the Swedish Army. On the other hand this retreat had spared them from bloodshed in their towns and villages and the hardships of occupation after fierce fighting, which would lead to ransacking and violence. The burghers of Vaasa / Vasa experienced this, even after they had sworn the oath of allegiance, because the Russians were aggravated by a stillborn disembarkation venture near the city. But as a rule, the Russian command strove to keep within the behavior rules of the so called cabinets' wars, and the authorities in Finland did their best to prevent outbreaks of popular resistance. Especially the bishop's council of Turku / Abo instructed on March 3, 1808 the clergy to not only read general Buxhoevdens proclamation in the churches but to exhort their listeners „att vara underdåniga all mänsklig ordning för Herrans skull ... samt medelst anständig varsamhet ... medverka till bibeheållande af inbördes lugn“.¹² The magistrate of Turku took all measures to regulate a peaceful quartering of Russian troops, taking into account details like the exchange rate of Russian roubles. They even were ready to celebrate Alexander's I birthday in December 1808, but the order was a hoax. On the other hand, even the commanders of the retreating army reminded the civil administrators to stay on their posts, keep up good order and help to alleviate the burdens on the population. Thus, solidarity with some attempts for uprisings was quelled, from Oulu there were reports that the burghers refused to supply their own troops, which were in miserable condition, but on the other hand celebrated balls with the Russian officers.

But whereas all this can be interpreted as display of fear and subduing to threat, very soon another argument came up. In the church of Hämeenlinna / Tavastehus the later bishop Zachris Cygnaeus gave his famous justification for swearing the oath: “Ett värnlöst land är liksom hafvet; hvilken vill räkna det till last, att dess vågor hvälfva till den strand, dit vinden drifver?” But he also added: “Våra förfäder

¹⁰ Gustav Montgomery: *Historia öfver kriget emellan Sverige och Ryssland åren 1808 och 1809*. Del 1-2. Örebro: Lindh, 1841; this judgement on the Swedish war effort was even put forth already when a first account of the events was published in St. Petersburg in 1828 (L.G.C.P. de Suchtelen: *Précis des événements Militaires de Campagnes de 1808 et 1809*, St. Petersbourg, 1827); see *ibid.* p. V. - For a detailed account of the war see Generalstabens krigshistoriska afdelning (ed.): *Sveriges krig åren 1808 och 1809*. Del 1-3, Stockholm, 1890-1902.

¹¹ Osmo Jussila: *Maakunnasta valtioksi*. Porvoo 1985, 35-58, esp. 34-41 and 54-58. An extensive summary can be found in Robert Schweitzer. " 'To form an ever more (im)perfect union: ' some suggestions for further research on Finland's position in the Russian Empire." In: Jorma Selovuori (ed.): *...vaikka voissa paistais? Venäjän rooli Suomessa: Osmo Jussilan juhla kirja*. Helsinki 1998, 493-519, here 493-500.

¹² Karl von Bonsdorff: *Opinioner och stämningar 1808-1814*. Helsingfors 1918 (= Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland; 141), 21-52, here 28.

hafva varit under ryskt välde och givit sin ed” and “Är de rätt att vanvärda beskyddaren, kristligt att undandraga välgöraren sin erkänsla?”¹³ And the rector of Abo University relied also on the promises of the Emperor to enlarge the institution, which was already given in June of 1808 and fulfilled immediately after the war.

Here we can observe the beginning of a dilemma for the national consciousness in Finland. For Russia in such an extent lived up to the expectations of the Finnish architects of peaceful subduction that the increasing justification of their course at the same time increased the charges of opportunism in respect to their actions. Finland had received great benefits, no doubt. The separate central administration has already been mentioned, which also meant relieving the Finns from tax contributions to some mother country and encouraging to formulate policies tailored to the special needs of the country. The most conspicuous gain was the reunification of Finland: in 1812 Russia joined "Old Finland", the earlier conquered areas of Swedish Finland, to the autonomous Grand Duchy. But if one would charge Finland of having sold herself to her new masters, the favorable price could only make this charge more serious.

It is quite revealing that there has not been any book length treatment of Finland's new situation written by an author from inside the country. It was Russia herself who was interested in enhancing its international reputation by pointing out the fair treatment of Finland. The task itself was left to Baltic Germans like Peter von Gerschau or Friedrich Derschau – with connections to Finland and capability to formulate this in German, Central and Eastern Europe's international language.¹⁴

The Finns would not have liked the tendency in these books anyway because they stressed the magnanimity of the Tsar greatly without attributing special importance to the Diet of Porvoo. When Alexander's I glory as liberator of Europe faded in the shadow of fear from revolution, e.g. in Poland, and the hopes of Finland to receive an explicit constitution passed jointly by the Tsar and the would-be Diet vanished, growing uneasiness was felt.

It increased with the ascension of Nicholas I in 1826, who immediately abolished statutes discriminating inhabitants of orthodox faith – thus changing the inherited legal order without consulting the diet. Assuming the worst case, it could not be denied that Finland had given herself to the mercy of a ruler who claimed unlimited power. For those who shared this view – partisans of the rising national romanticism connected with the university of Turku – the machinery of autonomous administration was a hollow structure with no life in it.¹⁵ It fell short by miles from what Hegelianism postulated as the moral state, the most advanced expression of human beings' social aspirations.

¹³ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴ Peter v. Gerschau: *Versuch über die Geschichte des Großfürstentums Finnland*. Odense 1821; Friedrich Karl von Derschau: *Finland und die Finländer*. Leipzig 1843 (The Russian original was published 1842, a Dutch ed. 1844). – Both authors were born in Courland, Gerschau being an illegitimate son of Duke Peter Biron, cf. Wilhelm Lenz (ed.): *Deutschbaltisches biographisches Lexikon*. Köln / Wien 1970, 165 and 240. The attitude of Baltic Germans towards Finland in general has been treated by Robert Schweitzer: "Deutschbalten und Finnland" In: Edgar Hösch (ed.): *Finnland-Studien: Referate auf dem I. Symposium deutscher und finnischer Historiker (München 1987)*. Wiesbaden 1990 (=Veröffentlichungen des Osteuropa-Instituts München: Reihe Geschichte; Bd. 59), 85-111.

¹⁵ On the following chain of arguments cf. Jussila, *Maakunnasta valtioksi*, 66-82. As the book has not been translated, one could consult in this point Osmo Jussila / Seppo Hentilä / Jukka Nevakivi: *Vom Großfürstentum zur Europäischen Union: politische Geschichte Finnlands seit 1809*. Berlin 1999, 51-53 (English translation under title *From Grand Duchy to modern state: a political history of Finland since 1809*. London 1999). Cf. also – more detailed – Robert Schweitzer: "...läßt uns Finnen sein! Finnland zwischen staatlicher Identitätsbildung und nationalen Erwachen". - In: Robert Bohn / Bernhard Glienke (eds.): *Der neue Norden: Norweger und Finnen im frühen 19. Jahrhundert: Vorträge des 3. internationalen Kolloquiums des Zentrums für Nordische Studien, Kiel*. Frankfurt/M. 1990. (=Veröffentlichungen des Zentrums für Nordische Studien; 3) (= Beiträge zur Skandinavistik; Bd. 9), 13-36.

This thinking is associated with the figure of Adolf Ivar Arwidsson, who demanded an increase of national spirit instead of the repeated praises of and declaring of loyalty towards the Russian rule. The slogan “Swedes we can no longer be, Russians we do not want to become – so let us be Finns!” – even if its attribution to Arwidsson has been doubted – is a concise expression of this trend. It called for the formation of a nation, uniting Swedish speaking upper class and the Finnish populace. This was more than the rights of estates and a legal continuity – and this new kind of liberty still would have to be striven and fought for. Finland – according to Arwidsson – could not be content with the autonomy it had, because it would prevent the unification to this new liberty and at the same time did not mean any real guarantee of the old liberties.

It is characteristic that this opinion could only be voiced from exile in Sweden, where Arwidsson had been banished, and that also a contrary position was written with the pen of a Swede, Israel Hwasser. He refuted Arwidsson’s argument that Finland’s constitution was at the mercy of the Tsar by formulating a theory of a separate peace treaty concluded at Porvoo between Finland and the Tsar. Not any more were Finland’s benefits bestowed by the Tsar as the reward for her loyalty, but her loyalty was the compensation offered to the Tsar for his recognition of her constitutional system as an inherent quality.

The administrators of Finland were unimpressed. They still worked on the integration of Finland’s special rights into the legal system of Russia by composing a supplement to the Russian Law Book *Svod Zakonov*. This supplement would have been promulgated by the Tsar – as it really happened with the regional laws of the Baltic Provinces.¹⁶ But this meant that after they were undoubtedly recognized by this promulgation, they were by the same token subject to change by the autocratic Tsar – which also then happened in the Baltic Provinces. But to those thinking in a theoretical framework that started out from Finland's autonomy being a magnanimous grant of the Tsar, this codification only meant replacing one grant, expressed in general terms in Porvoo 1809, by another one, which had the advantage of explicitness.

Thus the spirit of drawing closer to Russia still continued in the spheres of officialdom in state and university, leading to the adulation of the 1840 celebrations, the establishment of a chair for Russian at Helsinki university etc.¹⁷ Yet among the students and professors an undercurrent developed, which in all its inconspicuousness gives a positive answer to the question whether Finland took part in the “Spring of Nations” before 1848. Recognizing the increase in status for the inherited legal system, if it was regarded as originating from outside the Russian autocratic legal system and being recognized as a whole by the Tsars’, law professors at the university included this in their teaching of would-be young officials, and voiced this opinion when being called to comment on the ongoing codification mentioned above.¹⁸

Within the forties, the attitudes of the students changed rapidly, their interest to learn Russian dropped low, their hidden sympathies for constitutional demands in Pre-revolutionary Europe increased.

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This was the situation in 1846, when Johan Ludvig Runeberg, the most famous Swedish speaking poet of 19th century Finland, enjoying even international renown, wrote a patriotic poem, which was to become the unofficial national anthem of the Grand Duchy and the official one of independent Finland. Its name was Vårt Land (Our country).¹⁹ Its first lines read

¹⁶ Osmo Jussila: "Finland in der Gesetzeskodifikation zur Zeit Nikolajs I." In: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, N.F. 20 (1972), 24-41.

¹⁷ Cf. note 7.

¹⁸ Jussila: *Suomen perustuslait*, 206-207; Jussila: *Maakunta valtioksi*, 83-87.

¹⁹ Original quotations of Runeberg are taken from Johan Ludvig Runeberg: *Samlade Skrifter*, Del 5: Fänrik Ståls sägner. Helsingfors 1974. Supplementary information, as far as it has been found in Runeberg: *Samlade*

Vårt land, vårt land, vårt fosterland,
 Ljud högt o dyra ord!
 Ej lyfts en höjd mot himlens rand,
 Ej sänks en dal, ej sköls en strand,
 Mer älskad än vår bygd I nord,
 Än våra fäders jord.²⁰

This is, of course, poetry. But a patriotic poem is at the same time political literature – and it will be now analyzed as such. Runeberg is politically correct: land is an undisputable quality of Finland not only as the landscape Runeberg describes, but also as a land joined as a well-defined separate entity to the lands of the Russian monarch, increasing his titles and the coat of arms of Russia with additional words and symbols. This reciprocal acceptance of land and ruler had been the meaning of the celebration of Porvoo, as Jussila has convincingly shown. “Fatherland” is equally warranted, not only as land of our forefathers, but even as a synonym for “nation” – Alexander I took pride at Porvoo to have elevated Finland “au rang des nations”.²¹

Otherwise Runeberg abstains from political contents in the poem, but its second stanza conveys a message of incommensurable bearing:

Vårt land är fattigt, skall så bli
 För dem, som guld begär,
 En främling far oss stolt förbi;
 men detta landet älskä vi,
 För oss med moar, fjäll och skär
 Ett guldland det dock är.²²

These verses form the bridge between the Swedish speaking poet's work and the national epic of Finland, Kalevala. Although 97% of Kalevala's text are original verses collected by Elias Lönnrot in Carelia, the epic's composition, the textual links, the structure and message are due to the compiler. The main string of action, the fight between the Finns and their enemies for the ownership of the wealth-producing Sampo ends with a pitched battle, in which the Sampo is destroyed. But Väinämöinen, the Finnish hero, plants some splinters into the soil thus laying the foundations for a moderate prosperity. This message, however, in its conjunction of loss and hope, is not age old epic material, but it was Lönnrot, who created it by linking an old prayer for a good harvest to the end of the fight story.²³

Skrifter, Del 14: Kommentar till Fänrik Ståls sägner, utg. av Johan Wrede / Helena Solstrand / Ulla Terling Hasán. Helsingfors 1983-1984 (= *Skrifter* utgivna av Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland; 515), will not be footnoted separately. For a commentary stressing the political context of this work by Runeberg see also Johan Wrede: *Jag sag ett folk: Runeberg, Fänrik Stål och nationen*. Borgå 1988.

²⁰ Runeberg: *Samlade Skrifter* 5, 1. English translation: "Our land, our land, our fatherland, / Sound loud, O name of worth! / No mount that meets the heaven's band / No hidden vale, no wave-washed strand, / Is loved as our native North, Our forefathers' earth." – All English translations of Runeberg's poems in this article are taken from: Johan Ludvig Runeberg: *The songs of ensign Stål*, transl. by Clement Burbank Shaw. New York, 1925, here 3.

²¹ Aira Kemiläinen: "'Nation'-sana ja Porvoon valtiopäivien merkitys." In: *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* 62 (1964), 289-304.

²² Our land is poor; true, we reply, / For him who covets gold; / The stranger proud may pass us by, / But we our land yet glorify; / For in each crag and fell and wold / A gold-land we behold." (Runeberg: *The songs of ensign Stål*, 5)

²³ Hans Fromm / Lore Fromm (eds. and transl.): *Kalevala: das finnische Epos des Elias Lönnrot*. 2 Vol. München 1967, I, 280-281 (chant 43, verses 369-434), and comment in II, 271-277, esp. 277. – This edition

This message – of Lönnrot as a poet in his time – is clear: Finland is a worth-while undertaking, it will not become rich, but also never fail. The defeat of Väinämöinen in the fight is being turned into victory in the aftermath. In the light of a national epic with such a prophecy, the appeal “Let us be Finns” appears to be perfectly in line with the course of destiny. Runeberg’s second stanza thus makes the essence from the Finnish national epic commonplace also for the Swedish speaking upper classes.

Runeberg's poem continues by praising the nature of the country, and the hardships endured by the brave and sturdy inhabitants. It even reminds of the constant fighting on its soil spilled with blood –but making the land itself the central theme, Runeberg renders the battles fought as naturally defensive and justified, but without naming the enemy in this age-old fighting, Russia. There is neither admiration for the victorious Tsar, nor blame for the loser, the Swedish king, but the hero is the people itself – the people of Finland. As it has preserved the possibility to work for the good of its country, the sacrifices were not in vain. Indirectly there is even a rebuffal of contemporary scandinavianism with its hopes that Finland still would look back to Sweden: Runeberg associates wealthier surroundings, where Finns might seek a career, with the colours of the Swedish flag – "Och fördes vi att bo I glans / bland guldmoln i det blå"²⁴ – and assures his readers that they would always long back for Finland. As in reality Russia was this country of career opportunities, the poet at the same time denies the possibility that Finns would ever become Russians.

This delicate balances is kept up in the last stanza:

Din blomning, sluten än i knopp,
Skall mogna ur sitt tvång;
Se, ur vår kärlek skall gå opp
Ditt ljus, din glans, din fröjd, din hopp,
Och högre klinga skall en gång
Vår fosterländska sång.²⁵

For sure Finland has not yet reached her destiny, as Arwidsson would have said, and by using the word *tvång* (*oppression*), even if clad into the picture of a flower’s bud, Runeberg shows understanding for the striving of the youth of his time for more freedom. Yet the poem ends with a call for "organic work", not for an uprising.

One does not have to go so far as Matti Klinge, who assumes that Runeberg deliberately attempted to make a conservative patriotic song popular in Finland so as to prevent songs like the Marseillaise take root in students’ circles.²⁶ Yet it was for sure a wise decision of the university authorities to place this song, furnished with a new, so to speak official melody, composed by chief university musician Pacius, in the center of the program for the Flora festival of 1848. This student feast, which had been prohibited several times because of feared unrest, was now allowed under the precautions of a tightly fixed

alongside with a new German translation and a commentary abreast of modern scholarship, comprising the whole second volume, can be regarded as definitive. For a short introduction in English see Heikki Kirkinen / Hannes Sihvo: *The Kalevala: an epic fo Finland and all mankind*, Forssa 1985.

²⁴ "If we could dwell in splendor bright / Mid gold-clouds in the blue, ..." (Runeberg: *The songs of ensign Stål*, 6)

²⁵ " Thy blossom, in the bud laid low, / Yet ripened shall upspring. / See! From our love once mor shall grow / Thy light, thy joy, thy hope, thy glow! / And clearer yet one day shall ring / The songs our land shall sing!" (Ibid., 7)

²⁶ Wrede: *Jag såg ett folk*, 9-18. Cf. Matti Klinge: *Runebergs två fosterland*. Borgå 1983, with the essay under the same title, 71-87. (Also available in English, in: Frank Egholm Andersen / John Weinstock (eds.): *The Nordic mind*. London 1987, 117-130.)

program, negotiated with the student leaders. Another banning of the feast might have led to uncontrolled escalations between the reactions of the students and the government in St. Peterburg. Indeed, at the feast the song was sung over and over again, thus moulding the patriotic feeling into a lasting expression, but at the same time the words were acceptable to both sides. This demonstration of patriotic feelings has at the same time been one of the finest hours of the so called "bureaucratic patriotism".

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When writing *Vårt land*, Runeberg had simultaneously worked with a number of poems which were meant to commemorate the war of 1808/09 in a loose chain of episodes. He was intrigued by the subject from reading Gustaf Montgomery's history of the war mentioned above. It had revealed the cowardice, defeatism and strategic mistakes of many commanders, and pointed out the futile bravery of the rank and file soldiers and the Finland-rooted generals and colonels like Döbeln or Sandels (both having been commemorated on the label of Finnish beer brands, by the way).

Typically enough, this picture had also been drawn by Arwidsson in his own supplement to his Swedish translation of Friedrich Rühs' *Finnland und seine Bewohner* (1809), published in 1827, but banished by the censors in Finland.²⁷ This step by the authorities was understandable in so far as the whole system of Finnish autonomy rested on the indulgent attitude of the population and the swift military collapse in 1808/09.

Runeberg's series of poems, rehabilitating the heroes and blaming the cowards, was almost ready when the overwhelming success of his national song occurred. So the author decided to put it at the beginning of the cycle to be published under the title *Fänrik Ståls sägner* (*The tales of ensign Stål*). At the same time he withdrew the poem about the loss of Sveaborg, the most pointed charge against the commander of the mighty sea fortress outside Helsinki, who had signed the conditional agreement of surrender mentioned above. But for sure, two poems remained included: One is *Konungen*, ridiculing the Swedish king, who theatrically dressed in Charles' XII dress, as well as his advisers who obeyed and gave account of this masquerade in an order of the day to the troops, the other is *Fältmarskalken* with the famous description General Klingspor – "Du har hjerta, han har mage, / Du vet dö, och han blott äta"²⁸. Otherwise only victorious battles were made subject of the work. Death and sacrifice for sure figured in the poems, too, but they were only connected with nameless individuals. So it was clear enough who was to blame, and that Finland could not have had any future in the framework of the Swedish realm.

These alterations not only somewhat milder down the charges against Sweden, but the addition of the anthem added programmatic weight to the whole series. While the episodic poems themselves were influenced by the – so to speak – scandalous disclosures of Montgomery, they were placed under the motto of endurance and organic work present in *Vårt land*. Thus the result was not bitterness, but a reconciliation with a lost war. What adds to the effect is of course that there is no pure panegyric, but that the episodes have some traits of comic – private Sven Dufvas misunderstanding, which leads him to storm a bridge instead of withdrawing, or lieutenant colonel von Fieandt who smoked his pipe during battle. On the other hand important qualities are mentioned like *Talte finska som en tolk* (*speaking Finnish like an interpreter*) in respect to Fieandt, signalling the closeness between the officers and their troops.

Most important, however, was the treatment of the Russian enemy in the poems. Of course already Runeberg's view on war as some kind of sport competition²⁹ helped to prevent hard feelings against the

²⁷ Wrede: *Jag sag ett folk*, 29.

²⁸ "You have heart, and he has stomach; / Death is yours, – food his sole pleasure!" (Runeberg: *The songs of ensign Stål*, 139)

²⁹ Cf. Wolfgang Butt: "Herrn Tugend Wiederhall: zur Rezeption von Runebergs 'Fähnrich Stål' in Deutschland." In: *Trajekt* 6 (1986), 183-211.

enemy of old and conqueror to be expressed. Runeberg avoids to name the Russians, and very often resorts to the word *ovän* instead of *fiende*. But he goes even farther and places a Russian alongside the Finnish heroes. It is general Kulneff – a noble, brave officer, master of the unpredictable ambush, favorite of the ladies and friend of the children – Runeberg draws the well-known picture of the good Russian. Moreover he calls the Russian and Finnish soldiers brothers in fighting: “Då grinade af välbehag / Mot björnen från Kosackens land / Hans bror from Saimens strand”³⁰ – they are so to speak brothers in fighting. Runeberg attempts to reconcile Finns and Russians because the brave among them both had suffered from the same enemy – cowardice. This was the real "enemy" who defeated the Finns, and against whom they could even with the Russians.³¹ The poem Kulneff therefore ends with the words:

Förhatlig är den fege blott,
 Åt honom ensam hån och skam,
 Men hel enhvar, som tappert gått
 Sin krigarbana fram!
 Ett gladt hurra, et högt hurra
 För hvarje man, som kämpat bra,
 Hvad helst han blef I lifvet än,
 Vår ovän elle vän!³²

Runeberg's poems in their mastery and popularity gave Finland a war of which she could be proud without aggravating the Russians – this was in line with Runeberg's double loyalty, coined by Matti Klinge into the expression “Runebergs två fosterland”. That meant nothing else than that Finland did not need to fight a war of independence any more in the revolutionary situation of 1848, in so far as the war fought in 1808/09 already had had the same effect – giving Finland its state-to-be. For a long time it had been accepted that Finland had been conspicuously absent from the revolutionary scene of 1848 – but it turns out that it was sublimely present. There was just no call to the barricades, because unnecessary sacrifice of blood could be avoided by displaying civil qualities. Matti Klinge would even go so far as to call the Flora Day of 1848 the real beginning of Finland's independence.³³

The success of the cycle called for a continuation. When it was finished in 1860, the conditions of censorship were much milder, the Great Reforms in Russia got an even stronger momentum in Finland which led to the regular summoning of the Diet starting 1863. Actually the new poems do not add much – the anti-Swedish trend is levelled down by tracing the bravery of the Finns in *Björneborgarnas Marsch* back to the times of Sweden as a great power. Yet this is only a slight modification. Also the noble and righteous Russian is present again – in the very last poem, which Runeberg composed after the manuscript had already been handed in to the censor. It is a true keystone of this building erected in words.

³⁰ "Then smiled, – with glad and grateful glance / Upon the bear from Cossack-land, – / His kin from Saimen's strand." Ibid., 128.

³¹ How deep Runeberg's view was rooted even in the minds of Russians can be illustrated by the fact that in the 1885, when Finland was suspected by Katkov's nationalist paper *Moskovskija Vedomosti* of "separatism" in connection with the Afghanistan crisis, Count F.L. Geiden (Heyden), the Russian Governor General of Finland, found no harm in the unveiling of a monument at the battlefield of Koljonvirta: commemorating bravery displayed in battles of the past could only lift the morale of any troops. (Keijo Korhonen: *Autonomous Finland in the political thought of 19th century Russia*. Turku 1967 (= Turun yliopiston julkaisuja: B 105), 85 and 89)

³² "The coward only wins disdain, / To him belongs but shame and scorn; / But hail each man on battle plain / Whom valor doth adorn! / A glad hurrah, a loud hurrah! / For each who battles brave, huzza! / Whatever path was his to wend, – / Our enemy or friend!" (Runeberg: *The songs of ensign Stål*, 129)

³³ Matti Klinge: "Milloin Suomi tuli itsenäisiksi?" In: *Kleio* (1987:3), 15-18.

In this poem, *Landshövdingen*, the Russian commander-in-chief demands from a Finnish civil official to issue an a decree ordering confiscation of the belongings of all families, whose head is still fighting in the regular Swedish army. Runeberg depicts the dramatic scene as follows:

"Har ni förstått min mening, ord för ord,
Så skrif!" Han slöt med trotsig välbehag.
Då stod Wibelius vid sitt domarbord,
Och der låg Sveriges lag.³⁴

The official refuses, pointing to the stipulation in Swedish law that collective punishment is forbidden:

"Här är vår vapenlösa trygghet än,
Vår lag, vår stora skatt i lust, I nöd;
Er herrskare har lofvat värda den,
Den vädjar till hans stöd.

I den, sen sekler ren, det stadgadt stått:
Att, bryter en, all skuld är endast hans,
Att mannen böter ej för hustruns brott,
Ej hustrun för sin mans.

[...]"³⁵

Surprisingly – or not surprisingly – the general yields to this argument. Runeberg thus recognizes the honest determination of the Russian administration to live up to the promises given by General Buxhoevden at the outset of the war and repeated by Alexander I in Porvoo.

This way Runeberg rehabilitates also the civil authorities by ascribing to them a kind of civil resistance during the war itself, which they – maybe – did not display. But historical truth is not the point here. The poem now by hindsight includes the civilians into the successful fighting front of 1808/09, completely in line with the doctrine mentioned above that a constitution for Finland had already been secured right during the war. The last taint spread on the behavior in 1808/09 was thus removed, the success story completed. In this interpretation the troops that continued resistance and the civil servants that held out on their post now were seen as having fought back to back. Between the lines Runeberg created the picture that the autonomy was not simply negotiated by utilitarian politicians or granted by the Tsar's grace, but was a prize won by the Finnish soldiers as well a officials and recognized as deserved – by means of their bravery and civil courage – by a fair victor.

It must be mentioned that Runeberg was understood in a much more constitutional sense than his text warranted. True, he could be more audacious now, during the reign of Alexander II, in composing the second part, than under Nicholas' I regime, but he took precautions not to jeopardize the process of reforms which just had started in 1856 in Finland. His text, to be sure, is again politically correct: If Alexander had guaranteed the basic rights in 1809, then the General Law of 1734, which prohibited collective punishment, was to be understood as included – even by the most narrow Russian interpretation. And the paragraph Wibelius had raised was from that general law, and not from the constitutional laws, the validity of which was so fiercely denounced later on by the Russian side.³⁶ Yet

³⁴ "If you have understood me, word for word, / Then write!" He ended in defiant way. / Then stood Vibelius at his judgement-board, / Where Sweden's law-book lay. [...](Runeberg: *The songs of ensign Stål*, 287)

³⁵ "Here lies our weaponless security, – / Our law – our treasure great in joys and needs. / Your ruler to revere it did agree; / For his support it pleads. / Herein for ages the decree has stood: / The criminal shall bear his guilt alone; / No man for crime of wife shall be pursued, / Nor she for his atone. [...]" (Ibid, 288)

³⁶ Robert Schweitzer: *Autonomie und Autokratie*. 269-285.

when these times came, Runeberg was called upon as the mobilizing force for constitutionalist resistance. “Read the tales of Ensign Stål, if you have forgotten your bible, and you will know, what your duty demands at this instant” – these were the very words used in an appeal by Victor Magnus von Born, a leading constitutionalist, in 1899.³⁷

Most interesting is that the entourage of the Swedish minister of defense, who succeeded in introducing general conscription in Sweden by hinting to an alleged Russian threat, inspired a new German translation which was spread by the Finnish publisher Söderström. Yet, C.G. Estlander himself, head of the Swedish Literary Society in Finland, which sponsored the book, had to remind the German translator, Wolrad Eigenbrodt, that Finland after 1809 was far from discontent with the Russian rule. And really, Runeberg’s text was – for the diligent reader – still resistant for an anti-Russian interpretation. This can be seen in a German translation which came out during the second constitutional crisis of 1910 and deliberately mistranslated important lines to meet the demands of the anti-Russian public opinion, which Runeberg's original text did not fulfill.³⁸

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The main point of my contribution is to present an example that might illustrate the ambiguity of doom and losses, which terminate developments and at the same time signalize the start of something new. The development sketched above has the special trait of rethinking doom from hindsight and thus in an unusual way creating a concept of future. Here, an instant of „doom“ is taken as a starting point for a feeling of national identity.

I would not contend that Runeberg’s poem was the only or even the decisive factor in achieving the positive development described above. Yet it must not be underrated that he added the second pillar to Finland’s national self-consciousness. The *Kalevala*, giving the Finns their national epic, had placed them – in the eyes of contemporary romanticism – in a way on the same level with the Greeks. The *Tales of Ensign Stål* gave them an epic about their war of independence, which made them in some way comparable to the Americans. And we all know that this combination of roots and modernism is at the core of the Finnish success story. This is not meant to belittle the achievements of the philosopher Johan Vilhelm Snellman, or the politicians Armfelt (Alexander, father and son) – to name just a few famous figures of the Finnish national movement. But Runeberg’s sheer mastery as a poet clad these thoughts into words that could create enthusiasm, be they even politically correct as they were – and without enthusiasm nothing really great has been ever achieved, as the American poet Walt Whitman rightly observed.

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³⁷ Quoted by Jutikkala: *A history of Finland*, 207.

³⁸ Robert Schweitzer: "Fähnrich Stahls Verfälschungen": politisch motivierte Unschäfen