

LITERATURE AND HONOUR

AASTA MARIE BJORVAND BJØRKØY AND THORSTEIN NORHEIM (EDS.)

Literature and Honour

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Preface

The articles included in this volume emanate from the project *After Honour*, initiated by the research group *Literature and Affect*, Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies, at the University of Oslo. The following 15 articles are written by scholars from Norway, Denmark and Iceland.

In May 2015, the research group arranged a kick-off workshop, and during the autumn we organized two seminars, each followed by workshop: ‘Honour, war and violence in literature’ (25 September), and ‘The welfare state and the fall of honour groups’ (20 November). In Spring 2016, the Master’ course *NOR4460 Literature and honour* was a part of the teaching portfolio at the Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies. It was led by Thorstein Norheim, and several of the contributors to this volume, and research group members, contributed with lectures. The course generated several Master’s theses related to the honour concept. In August 2016, Cecilie Takle initiated her Ph.D.-project, ‘Honor Codes in Contemporary Scandinavian Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults’.

We would like to thank the Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies at the University of Oslo for the financial support, which helped us to initiate the research group and work out the research project. We are particularly grateful to Per Thomas Andersen for his major role in initiating this, and outlining the research project. We would also like to thank Stefka Georgieva Eriksen for her contribution during the start-up phase and the first seminars.

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Aasta Marie Bjorvand Bjørkøy and Thorstein Norheim

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1

The concept of honour and honour narratives

THORSTEIN NORHEIM AND AASTA MARIE BJORVAND BJØRKØY

ABSTRACT This article gives an introduction to the concept of honour, which is explored theoretically, with references to the most prominent researchers in the field, as well as historically, in order to reveal the concept's main transformations in Scandinavian culture. In addition, the article gives a short introduction to the rest of the articles in the book.

KEY WORDS after-honour | honour concepts | theories of honour | history of honour | new forms of honour

I

The primary objective of this book is to make substantial empirical and theoretical contributions to the understanding of one of the most important challenges in today's globalized world: the dynamics of intersections and exchanges between strong, foreign honour cultures and weakened honour cultures in the West. Today, this opposition is rather fundamental, and thus subject to both controversy and conflicts; perhaps most notably in religious issues between the East and the West, Islam and Christianity – as honour belongs to ancient cultural practices that admittedly are mingled with religion, but at the same time exist prior to it. The societal and political contexts are not the only reason why the topic of this book should be of interest. Considered from a historical point of view, this cultural divide has not always been there. Originally, there were strong honour cultures also in the West – as was certainly the case with medieval Norse honour culture. This also illustrates the topic's major importance. Not only does it provide a better knowledge of our own cultural roots – an insight which seems forgotten in most of today's public debate about national and cultural identity, but it also brings about a better cross-cultural understanding.

The concept of honour seems to appear most intrusive in the Scandinavian welfare states, that is, in parts of the world where a strong honour culture seems most inconsistent, and therefore reveals friction. The philosopher Martha Nussbaum highlights the idea that emotions are social constructs: ‘We learn how to feel, and we learn our emotional repertoire. We learn emotions in the same way that we learn our beliefs – from our society’ (Nussbaum 1990, 287). The same applies to the concept of honour. Honour codes and our sense of honour are also social constructs, forwarded primarily through stories from generation to generation. According to Per Thomas Andersen, places shape our emotional geographies. The feeling of individual freedom has a strong position in contemporary Scandinavia, while the collective sense of honour is weak. But what Andersen calls ‘emotional geographies’ are not static; ‘they change, but usually they change slowly. The collective sense of honour was also much more important than feelings of individual freedom in our part of the world during early Norse times’ (Andersen 2016, 25).

The Scandinavian culture will be our focal point, and literature, primarily Scandinavian, is the chief target for our research efforts. We regard fiction as a unique source in our effort to understand the Other as well as the Unknown – a basic insight and awareness that every human being and any democratic society needs. This understanding is grounded in the opinion that literature is intertwined with history, and capable of reflecting social norms, thus representing a unique access to the cultural dynamics we seek to explore. This is perhaps most obvious when it comes to narratives such as sagas and novels, the genres dealt with by most of the articles in this book. On the one hand, there is a compelling argument in literary theory that narrative is a privileged form or genre, because it can be regarded as a metaphor for identity, which the study of honour is basically all about. On the other hand, narratives seem well suited to safeguard the emotions and affections which underlie the very mechanisms of honour. As a matter of fact, many scholars are concerned with the function of emotions within narratives and stories – how stories engage our emotions, but also how emotions fundamentally organize stories.¹ Also, a strong connection was established in the Norse era between narrative (‘saga’) and honour (‘virðing’).² This – as well as our presumption that the topic of the book appears most prominent and urgent in our Scandinavian, equality-oriented welfare society – are the reasons why literature from this particular region is singled out as a unique focal point.

1. See Patrick Colm Hogan: *Affective Narratology. The Emotional Structure of Stories* (2011) and Per Thomas Andersen: *Story and Emotion. A Study in Affective Narratology* (2016).

2. Cf. Sørensen 1995, 14.

We are concerned with the concept of honour and its historical changes. Our aim is to explore the gradual weakening of honour culture in the Scandinavian countries, from a strong Norse honour culture to an egalitarian, equality-oriented welfare society which – as stated in an article by Per Thomas Andersen republished in this volume – appears to be an after-honour culture (Andersen 2016). We also seek to provide insight into what an after-honour condition means, in order to discuss the honour culture's importance and relevance today. There seems to be an understanding that Western culture, with its ancient roots, is an old honour culture. This is particularly apt when it comes to the ancient Scandinavian societies. In his book *Fortælling og ære. Studier i islændingesagaerne* (1995), Preben Meulengracht Sørensen notes that the Old Norse culture had a highly formalized honour culture, as depicted in the Icelandic sagas. The importance of honour should not be underestimated. Here, honour was the principle by which the society was organized. Not only did honour regulate the relationship between the individual citizen and the groups it belonged to (family and clan), but also to the society at large. Even if there was a legislature, there was no executive power – and no police force. This meant that every citizen had to safeguard and protect his or her own reputation, rights and property, by relying on the strengths of family and clan alliances. In fact, honour was also the ultimate norm for value of life – in the way that a posthumous reputation could be worth dying for.

During the course of history, Western honour culture has weakened – as noticed in many international honour studies. In his book *Honor* (1994), the American anthropologist Frank Henderson Stewart writes about the collapse of honour, which he claims occurred between the twelfth and the nineteenth centuries, in a period which, for him, is characterized by an individualization of Western cultural values. According to Stewart, individuality and subjectivity received increased attention, at the expense of community, and this changed the whole concept of honour. During this period, Stewart notices, honour gradually became an internal concept for moral virtues and qualities, related to an individual's sense of honour. Thus, he detects a shift from external behaviour to internal sense, 'from basing honor on a certain kind of behavior (always winning in battle, always keeping one's promise) or on the possession of certain external qualities (wealth, health, high rank) to basing it on the possession of certain mostly moral qualities (the ones that we refer to compendiously as the sense of honor' (Stewart 1994, 48).

The English literary scholar Alexander Welsh seems to agree with Stewart. The foundation for his book, *What is Honor? A Question of Moral Imperatives* (2008), is the transition between the 'aristocratic code' which characterizes the traditional honour culture and the individualization of the honour concept, that followed in

the wake of the 1700s, and the emergence of modernity and Enlightenment. To Welsh, honour is primarily a question of individual morality. Thus, honour is associated with a type of morality that affects our actions and our behaviour. In short, honour acts ‘as a moral imperative’ (Welsh 2008, 4).

The after-honour concept is derived from the American writer James Bowman’s exploring of Western (particularly American) post-honour culture. Even Bowman’s topic is the weakened honour culture in the West and its historical causes. With his book *Honor. A History* (2006) he tells ‘the larger story of the discrediting and ultimate loss of cultural honor in the West’ (Bowman 2006, 10). Thus, he points to the weakening of the 19th Century’s Victorian aristocratic honour culture, and considers, as crucial factors, both the prevalence of Christianity and – like Stewart and Welsh – the emergence of nationalism and democratization in the 1700s. To Bowman, though, military honour and war history play a crucial part, and he places particular emphasis on the demise of the honour code among Christian gentlemen, marked above all by chivalry, sportsmanship and fair play – along with the preference of duelling (2006, 33).³

However, the ultimate break with this military honour culture occurred with the two World Wars. These wars, Bowman argues, totally depleted any credible honour culture in the Western world, mainly because of the nature of modern warfare – above all World War I’s trench warfare and front line slaughter. In this war, the soldiers were knowingly, and without hope, sent straight to their deaths. Obviously, this was not consistent with honour. The symbol of the war was indeed the anonymous, nameless soldier. When honour came without names and identity, it was fundamentally lost. These changes were additionally supplied by World War II’s carpet bombing, and designation of civilians as legitimate war targets. The traditional honour concept lost its meaning and importance, and this tendency was, according to Bowman, enhanced by the emergence of the post-war feminization of Western society in general, the increased status of Western popular and celebrity culture, and the collapse of public/private distinctions. As a result, today’s Western culture is a post-honour culture (Bowman 2006).

3. Bowman’s preoccupation with military honour complies with his definition of honour as a result of the human need for revenge and retaliation. In his universal definition of honour, Bowman refers to a snowball fight between two children which ends with one being hit and starting to cry. The father of the victim then tries to explain that when you throw a snowball at someone, it is to be expected that the other will hit back: ‘You can’t expect, when you get somebody, that they won’t get you back.’ (Bowman 2006, 1). This example is the basis of Bowman’s perception of honour: ‘It struck me as a neat summing-up of one of the earliest lessons we all learn – [...] – which is also the basis of what used to be called “honor”’ (2006, 1).

In this book, we take Bowman's claim seriously by exploring the Scandinavian after-honour culture. Our research suggests that his claim needs modification, even if one aspect of contemporary Scandinavian literature, the anti-honour literature, i.e. texts that demonstrate openness about traditionally shameful or dishonourable phenomena, underscores Bowman's point by increasing their authors' fame and honour. Nevertheless, there are works that go in the opposite direction, by advocating a revitalization of the traditional honour culture and concept. Furthermore, there are textual expressions of new forms of honour, which indicate that the traditional honour concepts have been internalized and converted into moral and ethical concepts, such as respect and dignity. Also, there are literary texts which highlight conflicts caused by encounters between strong and weak honour cultures.

*

The articles in this book examine both diachronic and synchronic aspects, and the book is organized into three main parts: the first section deals with Norse literature and Old Norse culture as an honour culture. The main corpus here is Icelandic sagas and an Irish king's saga. The second section consists of articles about the gradual change of the honour culture through the course of history, and how the concept of honour has become individualized. The articles pay attention to these historical changes, as they are focusing on major works and canonical authorships, that may be regarded as particular and important milestones, selected for illustrating this historical process. The articles in the third section investigate honour in the late modern welfare state, problematizing the after-honour concept.

II

The articles in this book relate to the concept of honour in various ways, and in varying degrees. Initially, the book calls for a theoretical statement to pinpoint the concept, and to link the articles together, but also to give an introduction to the field of research. However, conceptualizing honour in the limited space of an introductory chapter seems an impossible undertaking. Therefore we limit ourselves to those theories and theorists that have influenced the articles in this volume the most.

The honour concept originates in antiquity, with Aristotle as one of the pioneers. As an academic field of research, however, honour is a modern phenomenon starting in the 20th century, when two disciplines in particular were prevalent. There is

a German tradition involving law scholars early in the century (among them Moritz Liepmann). Also, the German-American sociologist Hans Speier is considered a pioneer from around the middle of the century. In the 1960s, the concept gained greater attention within social anthropology, with prominent contributions by two scholars in particular: John George Peristiany and Julian Pitt-Rivers. *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (1966), edited by Peristiany, was followed by a number of books and articles, including their edition of *Honor and Grace in Anthropology* (2005). A survey of the research field indicates clearly that honour studies are cross-disciplinary – also involving political science, history, psychology and law.

The sociologist Peter Berger has argued that honour operates at three levels in human life: materially, ontologically and socially (Berger 1983). Honour is connected to a multitude of meanings. A fruitful approach might be to regard honour as a category, and its various manifestations as concepts – as William Lad Sessions does in his book, *Honor for Us* (2010).⁴ Theoretical investigations of honour mainly follow two directions: On one hand, honour is regarded as a sentiment or emotion. This is the main focus for Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers. A well-known definition is the following, in three phases from Pitt-Rivers: Honour is ‘a sentiment, a manifestation of this sentiment in conduct, and the evaluation of this conduct by others’ (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 503).

On the other hand, honour has been seen as a social dynamic, regulating the relations between an individual and society in an axiological system. Pitt-Rivers even emphasizes that honour is ‘[t]he value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride, but it is also the acknowledgment of that claim, that his excellence is recognized by society’ (Pitt-Rivers 1966, 21). Robert L. Oprisko follows this line in his book *Honor. A Phenomenology* (2012), by stressing that honour is a social fact (Oprisko 2012, 3, 4). He claims that honour structures society, including politics, and he defines honour as ‘a multiphenomenal category of concepts that, as a system, hierarchically structures society when an Other inscribes value onto an individual’ (Oprisko 2012, 3).

4. Cf. even Oprisko: ‘Honor is a fickle subject. A comprehensive understanding of honor requires it to be examined not as a conceptual singularity, but as a multiplicity, a category of concepts and conceptions that form honor in total. Honor can be many things: prizes won for accomplishments, acceptance into an elite social group, a disposition that includes how you treat others or are treated by them, a driving motivational force, and a personal quality that can never be taken away, among many others. We understand honor by conceptualizing it and giving it meaning, but it is also a means by which an individual is conceptualized and given meaning through valuation and evaluation by his or her self, peers, social groups, and others’ (Oprisko 2012, 39).

Adding to this theory of social dynamics, Frank Henderson Stewart has emphasized, in his so-called bipartite theory, that honour involves two aspects: inner and outer honour. He uses *internal honour* as a term for ‘a personal quality (honourableness)’ and *external honour* as a term for ‘reputation (for honourableness)’ (Stewart 1994, 18). Oprisko, whose excellent research contribution also lies in his definitions of the various honour terms and concepts, clarifies the difference. Internal honour is, in Oprisko’s words, ‘[h]onor processes that take place solely within the psyche of an individual person’, while ‘[h]onor processes that take form through discursive intercourse between individuals and groups’, qualify as external honour (Oprisko 2012, 159).

Following Stewart’s theory, honour is a concept which regulates the relation between individuals and the group which they belong to or identify with. *Honour group* and *honour code* thus become key concepts in a study of honour. According to Stewart, honour group refers to ‘a set of people who follow the same code of honor and who recognize each other as doing so’ (1994, 54). Honour groups could be large and extensive (like nations, clan and family), or small and limited. But in either case, they are defined and regulated by a distinctive honour code. As Stewart writes, honour code ‘is a set of standards that has been picked out as having particular importance, that measures an individual’s worth along some profoundly significant dimensions; and a member of the honor group who fails to met [sic] these standards is viewed not just as inferior but often also as despicable’ (1994, 55).

In most cases, it is relevant to consider honour as operating on different levels. Stewart’s distinction between horizontal and vertical honour seems crucial. Horizontal honour is – as summarized by Oprisko – ‘[t]he right to respect based upon one’s inclusion within a particular group with a particular standard of conduct that affords distinction both within the group and outside it’ (2012, 159). In opposition, vertical honour is ‘[t]he right to special respect enjoyed by those who are superior’, which is also known as ‘positive honour’ (2012, 160). In addition, Stewart puts forward a third key concept: reflexive honour. Reflexive honour deals with rules which are part of the code of honour, and Stewart explains it with the following example: ‘[I]f A impugns B’s honor, then B’s honor is ipso facto diminished or destroyed, unless B responds with an appropriate counterattack on A’ (Stewart 1994, 64).

Obviously, there are also different types of honour. In his book, *Honor for Us. A Philosophical Analysis, Interpretation and Defence*, the American philosopher William Lad Sessions recognizes six types of honour: conferred honour, recognition honour, positional honour, commitment honour, trust honour and personal honour – considering the latter as most important – in his exploration of honour as a normative, positive-valued concept which should attract us in the ways we live

our lives in the contemporary world. The first kind of honour is the ‘*regard* given by someone to someone on some *attributed basis*. It is fundamentally reputation or even fame’ (2010, 11). Recognition honour is ‘[p]ublic esteem of inherent qualities’, i.e. ‘excellences [...] that merit or deserve such esteem’ (2010, 14), while positional honour is ‘a matter of being, having or doing something that positions one ‘above’ others in a group’ (2010, 17). Commitment honour ‘emerges when we consider such matters as honouring a promise or an agreement, or perhaps a principle or ideal’ (2010, 20), and trust honour is ‘a certain trust in someone’ (2010, 22). However, in Sessions’ view, these five forms of honour are ‘peripheral’ compared to the central concept of his book: personal honour. This is defined as a Janus concept involving *both* internal and external aspects: ‘personal honor is a virtue of an individual in a certain kind of social setting’ (2010, 26), making honour a ‘bridge concept, linking individual character to communal regard’ (2010, 156).⁵ As Sessions elaborates: ‘A person of honor is impossible apart from an honor group and its member’s mutual regard, but equally so an honor group is impossible apart from persons of honor and their individually achieved characters’ (2010, 156–157).

Notions such as ‘shame’ and ‘dishonour’ are of course also relevant – and closely related to the honour concept, even though some theoreticians treat shame as honour’s counterpart. Some scholars establish a distinction between shame and dishonour. While the former term concerns the individual level, the latter concerns the group. To Oprisko, shame is ‘[t]he counterpart to prestige and the process by which an individual party gains social value for qualities, characteristics, and actions deemed as excellent, but valued as ‘bad’ by the group. Shame decreases an individual’s hierarchical position vis-à-vis others in the group’ (2012, 162). Dishonour is ‘[t]he public rejection of value in an object by an Other. Dishonoring is an active engagement to deny and reject the value system of a group’ (2012, 158). Similarly, there are distinctions between shame and guilt (see Sessions 2010, 174–177). Both shame and guilt can manifest themselves as emotions. But guilt is also a legal, ethical and legal term (cf. Farstad 2016, 28). In the book, *Skam. Eksistens, relasjon, profesjon* (2016), Marie Farstad emphasizes that we may be guilty without feeling guilty, and we may feel guilty without being guilty. Farstad also points out: ‘Å være skyldig uten å kjenne skyldfølelse skaper trøbbel for omgivelsene våre

5. Cf. also: ‘Personal honor is an achievable virtue of individuals with the requisite capacities in a certain social context: it means someone possesses an effective sense of honor, understands its commitments to the honor code of some appropriately sized honor group, and openly trusts the members of the group, as they trust him, to act accordingly’ (2010, 37).

og kan bidra til å skamme andre'. [Being guilty without feeling guilty creates trouble for our surroundings and can contribute to shaming others] (Farstad 2016, 28).

Today, concepts such as 'honour culture' and 'honour code' may seem unfamiliar and outdated. Alexander Welsh remarks that the weakening of the traditional honour culture in the wake of nascent modernity also included a decline of the very concept of honour: 'The h-word, as I might call it, tended to depart from private life in the West when the rise of nationalism generalized loyalty across an entire population, at the very time when urbanization, industrialization, and population growth induced far greater anonymity' (Welsh 2008, x). However, both he and many other scholars claim that honour could still be regarded as a key concept for explaining important dynamics in our modern society. According to Welsh, important elements in traditional honour culture have survived and been transported into post-honour culture under other names: 'If we limit ourselves to the ways in which the word is ordinarily used today [...] [h]onor is a measure of esteem and commendation, often a formal award for higher-than-usual achievement. To honor individuals is to single them out on the grounds of merit or because of the position they hold' (2008, 1). However, it is not this kind of social honour that Welsh is occupied with. Rather, he advocates a revitalization of the individual honour concept. Thus, his understanding of honour is approximately equal to current words, like '*respect* and *self-respect*, or personal *identity* and meaningful *integrity*' (2008, x). He argues for this modernization by claiming as follows: 'If you think of honor as respect, self-respect, and kinds of motivation dependent on respect, then it should be evident that it is not just some relic of the past' (2008, x). However, this morality resides with an honour group: 'Honor is indeed [...] a group thing' (2008, xii). Thus, honour is 'the respect that motivates or constrains members of a peer group' (2008, xv). Although there is an obvious problem involved in such a concept, since honour groups differ (2008, xvi–xvii), this relativity reveals – at the same time – one important historical change the concept has undergone lately. According to Welsh, honour is no longer restricted to male groups alone. In other words: The modern honour concept also influences female groups (2008, xv).

Also, both Stewart and the Ghanaian-American philosopher and cultural theorist, Kwame Anthony Appiah, underline this perception of honour as a moral concern. Their attention is not primarily directed at the traditional honour culture. On the contrary, they are engaged with new forms of honour, or more precisely, with new meanings of the concept as 'respect' and 'dignity'. In *Honor*, Stewart treats honour as an individual right to respect: 'I suggest we look at honor as a right, roughly speaking, the right to be treated as having a certain worth. I shall generally refer to it as a right to respect' (Stewart 1994, 21). More precisely, what matters is

a ‘claim-right, that is, “a right that something be done by another”’: ‘On the one side is the bearer, who has something about him that gives him a right to respect; and on the other is the world, which has a duty to treat the bearer with respect’ (1994, 21). By this approach, Stewart seeks to develop a concept of honour that can be used cross-culturally (1994, 31).

Appiah, on his part, postulates that ‘we live not after honor but with new forms of honor’ (Appiah 2010, 193). In his book, *The Honor Code. How Moral Revolutions Happen* (2010), Appiah is concerned with how changed honour codes guide moral revolutions throughout history – his examples include when the practice of duelling desisted, when Chinese footbinding came to an end, and when Atlantic slavery ceased. By seeing these moral revolutions as the result of connections between honour and social identity, Appiah turns his attention to our own lives in a modern world. He argues that honour is not an archaic or outdated concept. On the contrary, honour has ‘a crucial place [...] in our thinking about what it is to live a successful human life’, that is, to live a good and happy life (2010, xiii–xiv). Appiah’s explicit aim is to restore honour to philosophy and to ‘explain honor in order to help us recognize its continuing importance for every one of us’ (2010, xv and xvii). Appiah wants to find ‘the proper place for honor’ to ‘make the world better’ (2010, xvii).

Thus, in the last chapter of his book, Appiah introduces a theory of honour filled with the ‘capacity to bind the private and the public together’ in turning ‘private moral sentiment into public norms’ (2010, 178). The basic point in this theory – relating it to morality – is that honour systems are essential, because they help us to live our lives in accordance with a moral standard – individual dignity – which subsequently ‘will give respect to people and groups that deserve it’ (2010, 179). As Appiah stresses: ‘Honor takes integrity public’ (2010, 179). If we live our lives ‘caring to be worthy of respect’, this ‘living well’ will connect ‘with our place in a social world’ (2010, 179).

Most of the researchers are cross-culturally concerned. There seems to be an agreement in the research field today that honour culture and the honour concept should be detached from religion. Both Bowman (2006, 21–28, 45–51) and the Norwegian social anthropologist Unni Wikan (2008, 19–20) maintain that the honour culture exists independently of religion, even though honour has an important role to play in both Christianity and Islam. This recognition forms the basis of their account of how the concept of honour today differs according to culture. In the East, the traditional honour culture is still intact, while in the West it has less impact on society. Both theoreticians put forward some concepts that could help us understand the dynamics of today’s Eastern honour culture.

In the language AsanteTwi the expression ‘the face has fallen’ is used if someone has done something dishonourable. The Chinese speak of ‘losing face’, and in French, German, English and Norwegian, one can ‘lose face’, too (Appiah 2010, xviii). According to Bowman, ‘the tyranny of the face’ is about man’s ability to show and maintain traditional masculine traits, that give him strength and control. These traits are particularly important because of the logic of the ‘tyranny of the face’ being tied to man’s fear of ‘losing face’ and therefore considered shameful or weak. This phenomenon seems crucial for the understanding of the honour connected to sexuality, which, according to Wikan, constitutes the same form of honour as the Arabian concept of *namus*. *Namus* is the honour you either have or don’t have – it cannot be increased, only lost or preserved [‘den ting-like æren [...] som ikke kommer i grader, men er et spørsmål om enten–eller’], in opposition to *shirif*, a concept of honour which is graded, such as rank, reputation, or prestige (Wikan 2008, 11–12). Even though traditionally honour is related to the male character and his activities, Wikan points to the paradoxical status of women as ‘ærens akse’ [the axis of honour], especially in sexual matters: ‘Kvinnens ærbarhet, dyd og kyskhed er samfunnets grunnsten [...] Familier, slekter, klaner, stammer og nasjoner kan "tvinne" et æresbegrep som legger byrden, smerten på kvinnens skuldre’. [Women’s honesty, virtue and chastity are the foundations of society. [...] Families, generations, clans, tribes, and nations can ‘twist’ an honorary word that puts the burden, the pain on the shoulders of women] (2008, 9–10). In other words, both individual man’s honour and collective honour stand or fall with women’s sexual behaviour. If a woman, for self-inflicted reasons, or undeservedly ends up in conflict with the governing honour code and gains public awareness, both she and the collective, of which she is part, are dishonoured. As a result, the man closest to a dishonoured woman appears weak, and unable to control or protect her sexuality. Thus, he is a man without face. Only by performing extreme actions, will he be able to recover *namus*, his face, and both his and his family’s honour. Ultimately, these actions lead to honour killings, which, according to Wikan, are primarily a Western phenomenon and problem: ‘Æresdrap er i dag ‘vestlig’, europeisk, nordisk, norsk’. [Honour killings are today ‘Western’, European, Nordic, Norwegian] (2008, 20).

III

The Scandinavian societies have evolved from rather extreme honour cultures to late modern cultures in which equality is the governing norm, perhaps more so than in any other region.

This is the historical background for the articles in the first section of this book. In ‘Code of honour under debate in two Icelandic sagas’, Jon Gunnar Jørgensen examines the prevailing honour code in two Old Norse sagas; one saga about early Icelanders, the saga of Gisle Súrsson, *Gisla saga Súrssonar*, and one dealing with events from a late medieval society, the saga of Torgils and Havlide, *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*. The sagas were written about the same time, in the 13th century, but the action in the former takes place in the period before Christianity, in the years between 930–1000, while the latter focuses on events after Christianity was introduced. In both sagas, Jørgensen shows how honour functions as a driving force behind human actions, but also how the honour code changes with the transition from the old honour culture to the nascent Christian society. By comparing the two sagas’ words for honour with respect to prevalence and frequency, Jørgensen exposes a noticeable difference. *Gisla saga Súrssonar* is much more honour-based and connected to the old values than *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, which is more dominated by Christian values.

In his article ‘The price of integrity: Conceptions of honour in *Egil Skallagrímsson’s saga (Egil’s Saga Skallagrímssonar)*’, Simen Syvertsen gives a detailed examination of honour performances in another saga about early Icelanders, written in the 13th century. Although the old and masculine honour code is strongly expressed, the saga – as it is written in a period of transition – also contains Christian values, which produce a more ethically oriented and individualized honour concept.

The topic in Torfi H. Tulinius’ article ‘Honour, sagas and trauma’ is the connection between violence and literature in 13th century Iceland. By presupposing that the sagas reflect an Icelandic society, which is extremely violent, Tulinius seeks to describe the effects of this violence as trauma on the human psyche. The examination is based upon several sagas, among them the famous *Njáls saga*. Starting with some episodes which expose both traumatic killings and bloody revenge, Tulinius adapts a Freudian approach to literature, where his awareness of trauma and its effects on the psyche influences the way the stories are told.

Jan Erik Rekdal presents a reading of one Old Irish King saga, *Echtra Fergusa maic Léti* in the article ‘The value of the face’. In particular, Rekdal concentrates on an important honour motif in literature: how honour and shame are connected to the human face and bodily descriptions. Rekdal interprets the tale as an exposition of the meaning and implications of honour-price: the fact that the honour price of a person refers to a word for face underscores how central both face and façade are to honour and to shame; a king whose face is tarnished is no longer fit to rule his kingdom. Thus, Rekdal initiates what Johanne W.J. de Figueiredo and Nasim Karim follow up in the two articles that conclude this anthology – they concentrate on the consequences of a ‘loss of face’.

IV

Historically, as stated in several of the articles in the first section, there is a transition from a pagan Old Norse culture to a culture characterized by Christian values. As stated by Per Thomas Andersen, in the first article in the second section of this book, ‘After honor. From Egil Skallagrimsson to Karl Ove Knausgård’, this means that Christianity acquired the notion of honour, and that internal honour played as important a role as did external honour – at least in the two honour cultures which have since dominated the Christian world: the culture of Chivalry and the Victorian gentleman culture.

The revaluation in Christian cultures of internal honour leads to the individualization of Western cultural values, which most of the researchers hold as the main reason for the decline of Western honour culture. In Scandinavian literature, this tendency is hardly marked by resignation. On the contrary, the literary texts of some of the most prominent and original 19th century and pre-war authors like Henrik Ibsen and Kristofer Uppdal could in fact be regarded as expressions of different kinds of heroism, which – notably – are either dissected and undermined as in Ibsen’s case, or become exaggerated and invalidated as in the case of Uppdal. Whatever the outcome might be, these traits provide the backdrops for the next two articles in this book.

In her article, ‘Men’s and women’s honour’, Anne-Marie Mai examines how the concept of honour is central to the revolt that unfolds between Nora and Helmer in Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House* (1879). The drama reveals that a concept of honour is crucial to the showdown between the sexes that takes place in *A Doll’s House*. Thorvald and Nora conceive and interpret the concept of honour in radically different ways, and this discussion of the concept of honour can be traced throughout 20th century literature, where ‘honour’ is often central in the confrontation between women and men, regarding gender roles and identity. A striking example of this is the oeuvre of Suzanne Brøgger, in which ‘honour’ is reformulated in the clash between the typical middle-class nuclear family, sexual morality and so-called private life. Mai’s article uses the concepts of honour in *A Doll’s House* as its springboard. She includes the concept of honour in Thit Jensen’s novels about the modern, emancipated woman, *Gerd. Det tyvende Aarhundredes Kvinde* [*Gerd. Woman of the 20th century*] (1918), and *Aphrodite fra Fuur* [*Aphrodite from Fuur*] (1925). She also focuses on the concept of honour in Suzanne Brøgger’s collection of essays *Kærlighedens veje og vildveje* [*Love’s Paths and Pitfalls*] (1975), and compares it with Pablo Llambías’ rewriting of the work from a male point of view in *Kærlighedens veje og vildveje* [*Love’s Paths and Pitfalls*] (2009).

The individualization of the honour concept is also central in describing the historical background for the topic of Mads B. Claudi's article, 'His name is man! The chieftain hero as type and topos in Norway around 1900'. Claudi's starting point is the so-called 'chief cult' in Norwegian literary and public culture, a concept that relates to the English writer Thomas Carlyle, and is deeply characterized by both heroism and a sense of honour. With a historical and cultural approach to literature and poetry, Claudi demonstrates Carlyle's influence on individual authors, for example Kristofer Uppdal, but also how it inspired a collective of poets, including Tore Ørjasæter and Olav Nygard. Claudi ends his article by indicating that such an individual and person-oriented progressive movement as the 'chief cult' eventually came into discredit in the wake of World War II, and changed conceptions in modern research of how history develops.

Despite a predominantly Christian influence, Western honour culture has for centuries been extremely violent. Obvious examples are the two world wars, which are Per Thomas Andersen's concern in the middle part of his article. Here Andersen follows Bowman in stressing that modern warfare, more or less, puts an end to honour culture in the West. War, hate and violence are also the starting points for the last article in this section, Mikkel Bruun Zangenbergs 'The Genealogy of Belligerent Affects – from Cervantes to Al-Qaeda'. From a historical approach, Zangenberg explores how honour is intertwined with 'a specific affective logic that is at work across apparently widely different works and phenomena' – such as Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605), Sylvester Stallone's *Rambo* (1982), Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (1843), and Al Qaeda's manifestations and open letters (post 9-11). According to Zangenberg, who obtains theoretical support from Peter Sloterdijk and Axel Henneth, a common feature of these cultural and political expressions is the way in which failed intersubjective or political recognition results in various types of metaphoric and literal warfare, in the hope of gaining honour: honour is what the subject hopes for, once recognition is unavailable, denied or retracted. Furthermore, one of the article's benefits is that it addresses honour as an emotional concept, or more precisely, draws theoretical attention to Rita Felski, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Deleuze/Guattari. It advocates a distinction between emotions and affects, in order to view honour as related to the latter, the belligerent affects.

Zangenberg ends his article by discussing what to do with the so-called 'radical losers' – the concept is taken from Hans-Magnus Enzensberger – worldwide terrorists representing Al Qaeda or the Islamic State. Stressing that it is more important than ever to maintain the minor, utopian ideal of living after honour, Zangenberg points to the fact that the decline of honour culture in the West is noticeable – also in matters of war.

V

While honour in early societies was crucial to the way society worked, how it disciplined its citizens and how it regulated the relations between individuals and groups, it plays a less visible role in political governing and cultural education of the late modern Western society. James Bowman's account of an after-honour culture seems to be an accurate model for describing the Scandinavian welfare state of today, and for explaining its development over the last seven decades (Bowman 2006). By comparing the Scandinavian welfare state with other welfare regimes in the West – the liberal model (in the US and Great Britain) and the continental model (in Germany and Italy) – the Danish sociologist, Gøsta Esping-Andersen, shows that the Scandinavian welfare state has hallmarks that make it serve as the best example of an egalitarian, equality-focused society (Esping-Andersen 1990). Thus, the Scandinavian welfare state may be regarded as an after-honour society – with little room for traditional honour. This is the object of the last section of the book, as the articles provide insight into this prevailing Scandinavian after-honour culture. The examination of honour in this volume ends by pointing to four directions (in literature and criticism).

First, as Bowman points out, an expanding anti-honour culture arises – which accepts openness about traditionally shameful or dishonourable phenomena. In the final part of his article, Per Thomas Andersen stresses this tendency by noticing that formerly shameful or embarrassing phenomena do not necessarily lead to shame any more. On the contrary, in some cases they give you credit – maybe even honour. Individual traits, which would traditionally be regarded as devastating to personal honour, in fact turn out to be the sources of honour, as in the objects of overwhelming interest and fame. As a result, potentially shameful or dishonourable admissions might be regarded as a proof of honesty and authenticity, virtues that are highly appreciated by late modern man. Andersen expands this viewpoint by a closer examination of Karl Ove Knausgård's voluminous work *My Struggle* (2009–2011), and the way Knausgård openly writes about private matters such as family conflicts, serious illness, self-harm, infidelity, and premature ejaculation. Starting with Oprisko's distinction between shame and dishonour, Andersen points out how Knausgård exposes a lack of shame and fear, also he is more than willing to dishonour traditional honour groups, such as his own family and guild.

Second, there are cultural tendencies that seem to work in the opposite direction. Another hallmark of Scandinavian after-honour culture is that it actually gives rise to honour's revival. As Bowman points out, there are traces of a traditional honour culture today, in specific or unofficial cultures (for example in certain professional environments, sports contexts, street gangs, etc.). And there are also

signs which indicate that this honour's revival is manifesting itself in the arts. This is the main perspective in Thorstein Norheim's article, "'At dead of night': Abo Rasul's *Macht und Rebel* as dystopia and story of honour'. According to Norheim, the ubiquitous misanthropy in Rasul's (Matias Faldbakken) novel from 2002, originates from the kind of Marcusean repressive tolerance that the novel tries to oppose, and which the lack of traditional honour culture might be regarded as a symptom. The novel's main plot, the depiction of the two protagonists' radical resistance work, is clearly inspired by the need to invoke some honour images as a kind of revival of honour. Norheim sees this tendency as interrelated with the novel's genre as a literary dystopia. The article is concerned with the relationship between the after-honour culture, the welfare state, and the tradition of literary utopias/dystopias to which the novel belongs, which found its modern beginning with Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). Norheim shows that one of the main features of literary dystopias is that they also convey utopian perspectives. Typically, these are expressed as individual or collective hope, or desire for change, to oppose and improve the status quo. Rasul's novel is precisely concerned with such utopian resistance work, with the depiction of the two main protagonists' attempt to break with their dystopian existence, and revitalize a kind of traditional honour culture. The novel seems designed to illustrate Oprisko's theory of honour and rebellion, particularly the dynamic exchanges that take place when a strong individual – 'the rebel' – confronts and transgresses the governing value system and the existing honour code, claiming a new set of moral standards, and a new honour code (see 2012, 133–145). Rebel, the main character in Rasul's novel, may be viewed as personifying this rebellious attitude. By applying Oprisko's theory, the article demonstrates the relevance of honour's revival in readings of literary dystopias as political literature.

Honour's revival in a literary genre is the topic of the next article as well. This time the Fantasy genre is being examined. Neither shame nor honour can exist in a vacuum, as claimed by Cecilie Takle in 'Honor Codes in Fantasy Literature'. She portrays the coherence of ethics and the dichotomy honour/shame, and she shows how the fantastic is highly relevant in exploring ethics in literature. Her argument is supported by examples from the Norwegian trilogy *The Raven Rings* (2013–2015), by Siri Pettersen, and the *Shamer Chronicle* (2000–2003), by Lene Kaaberbøl. Takle also demonstrates why the Fantasy genre plays an important educational role for the individual, and also for democracy.

According to Bowman, the after-honour culture is deeply interrelated with the development of Western post-war societies. A third aspect of Scandinavian after-honour culture is the way in which it manifests itself in contemporary literature,

as so-called welfare literature, that is, texts which pay thematic attention to the conflicts which occur in encounters between individuals and welfare institutions, including questions about the individual's claim on support and services. Thus, it becomes clear that welfare literature, focusing on the family as well as on the aged, may be considered as expressions of the new forms for honour designated by Stewart, Welsh and Appiah. Here, concepts such as respect, dignity and shame affect an individual's status, alongside gender, class, age and health (see Appiah 2010, 62, 176, 185). But 'respect isn't always connected to hierarchy' (Appiah 2010, 185). What you provide decides your value.

Peter Simonsen provides a reading of Charlotte Strandgaard's collection of poetry, *No Man's Land* (2015), as a piece of Danish welfare state poetry, in his article 'To Age With Honour'. This collection of poetry articulates certain anxieties associated with maintaining one's honour as an elderly woman, in the contemporary welfare state, that embraces economic values of speed, efficiency, growth and (re)productivity. In the welfare state, the elderly are kept out of traditional functions. In a utilitarian sense, they feel useless, and it becomes difficult to 'age with honour', in maintaining their sense of dignity as an effect of maintaining their personal autonomy. A major life goal for the elderly, in western consumer societies, is to avoid ageing, in the sense of bodily, molecular and cellular decay, in order to stay young as long as possible. The longer we live, and are kept alive, the harder it may be to 'redeem yourself' in your own and others' eyes. Literary works of art increasingly force us to confront and to think about these paradoxes, and to attune our emotional registers towards life in senile modernity. Literary works provide ways for us to imagine and model new forms of subjectivity, both for ourselves and for those we care about.

Aasta Marie Bjorvand Bjørkøy explores similar issues in her article 'Ageing and dignity. Stories of Old Age from the Welfare State'. Gerontologists have claimed that there is no group of the population more heterogeneous than the elderly, when it comes to individual variations in health, function, interests and needs. Since new generations of the elderly have better health and economy, and a higher level of education than any previous generation, this becomes even clearer. Uniform treatment of the elderly (those over 65) is therefore neither worthy nor fair. Bjørkøy examines how the elderly are depicted, as well as treated, in the short story 'Ingenting hendt' [Nothing happened] (2000,) by Bjarte Breiteig, and the novel *Så høyt var du elsket* [You Were so Deeply Loved] (2011), by Nikolaj Frobenius. What forms of honour are addressed in these literary texts? And what existential issues may arise when we grow old, retired and sick in the Norwegian welfare state?

The last feature of the after-honour culture examined in this book is the cultural clash which occurs when Western welfare states, that is, weakened honour cultures, encounter strong honour cultures. This conflict has recently been intensified and actualized through the ongoing globalized flow of refugees. A major topic here is the dynamic which seems very important in strong honour cultures; the connection between ‘the tyranny of the face’ (Bowman 2006, 27ff) – otherwise a topic in Rekdal’s article – and honour connected to sexuality (Wikan 2008, 16). Both phenomena indicate that honour is a gendered concept, distinctly reserved for men, and thus an expression of a patriarchal social system.

In her article, ‘For honour’s sake. On honour and gender in Nasim Karim’s novel *Izzat*’, Johanne Walle Jomisko de Figueiredo discusses the problems that arise in the encounter between an intact honour culture (Pakistani) and a weakened honour culture (Norwegian). In the novel *Izzat* (1996), honour performances are largely connected to the question of gender, and Figueiredo examines in particular the conflict unfolding in the relationship between father and daughter. They represent opposing cultures; while the father belongs to an intact honour culture, which is distinctly male, the daughter, Noreen, is part of a weakened honour culture that resists the male honour culture with conflicting norms and values. Figueiredo explores the outcome of the conflict between two cultures, between father and daughter, with an emphasis on whether the term ‘honour’, described in the novel, provides space for the woman; and whether the concept of honour goes through any kind of development, or conversion, in the course of the novel.

Karim’s novel depicts how the East and the West differ in their understanding of honour. Due to its main theme – honour and forced marriage – the novel received a lot of media coverage in Norway. Eventually, this led to a parliamentary debate, which resulted in an amendment of the law (‘Ekteskapslovens § 16, tredje ledd’). Forced marriage became forbidden by law, and Muslim girls were given a statutory right to marry freely. This law stipulates punishment for any person who forces a girl into marriage against her will. Yet, it is doubtful whether this law has helped to reduce the number of honour killings. According to Wikan, the concept ‘æresrelatert vold’ [honour-related violence] occurred publicly for the first time in 2002, concerning an honour killing committed in Sweden (Wikan 2003).

Honour-related violence is the subject of the article ‘The significance of honour for sentencing in partner killing’, based upon Nasim Karim’s Master’s thesis in jurisprudence, *Partnerdrap – familietragedie eller æresdrap* (2015). In her article, Karim discusses sentencing in partner homicides. Unlike the other articles, Karim does not deal with fiction, but with actual criminal cases. In that way Karim’s contribution supplements Figueiredo’s, and concludes the anthology by reminding us

of the relevance of the issues treated in this anthology. The two murder cases she discusses take place in Norway, and both murders are committed by the spouse. Nevertheless, the first case is designated as an honour killing, while the other case is referred to as a family tragedy. The offender who shoots his wife must serve 18 years for murder, while the other gets eight years for having killed his wife with a thermos. Karim discusses why the two killings were not sentenced in the same way.

VI

The Norwegian welfare state has its historical roots in a strong, old Norse, honour culture. Undoubtedly, this is a useful reminder for the ongoing public debate about nationality and cultural exchange. Literature and literary criticism, at their best, contain insight and knowledge of great importance for a better understanding of human existence. With this book, we hope to show the social relevance of the humanities, and, more particularly, the relevance of literary studies. We turn to the arts to discuss the concept of honour, and, in accordance with Martha Nussbaum and her book *Cultivating Humanity. A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (1997), we wish to assert that ‘the arts play a vital role, cultivating powers of imagination that are essential to citizenship. [...] The arts cultivate capacities of judgment and sensitivity that can and should be expressed in the choices a citizen makes’ (Nussbaum [1997] 2003, 85–86). Based upon Heraklit, Nussbaum claims that we need more than knowledge to produce understanding, ‘we must also cultivate in ourselves a capacity for sympathetic imagination that will enable us to comprehend the motives and choices of people different from ourselves’ (Nussbaum [1997] 2003, 85). Differences in religion, gender, race, class and nationality complicate our ability to understand, since these factors not only affect our choices and actions, but also our minds, our insight and our thoughts. One may argue that all forms of art, in different ways, can help to shape our understanding of other people. But fiction is in a unique position, ‘with its ability to represent the specific circumstances and problems of people of many different sorts, [literature] makes an especially rich contribution’ (Nussbaum [1997] 2003, 86). As Aristotle points out in his *Poetics*, this applies especially because literature does not show us what *has* happened, but what *may* happen – knowledge and insight that are particularly valuable in political life. ‘The poet in effect becomes the voice of silenced people, sending their speech out of himself as a kind of light for the democracy’ (Nussbaum [1997] 2003, 96).

We share Nussbaum's view of literature. By concerning ourselves with literary fiction and its reflection of democratic ideals and values, we might be able to see that democracy is at stake, and could be undermined. Indeed, the literary texts give us a better cultural and intercultural understanding of human affects, as well as social processes, concerning human existence. This is certainly the case with literature concerning honour – and also the reason why we should deal with the topic of this book.

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Part 1:

History of the decline
of honour culture in
the West

2

Code of honour under debate in two Icelandic sagas¹

JON GUNNAR JØRGENSEN

ABSTRACT This article examines the prevailing honour code in two Old Norse sagas, namely one saga about early Icelanders, the saga of Gisle Sursson, *Gisla saga Súrssonar* and one dealing with events from a late medieval society, the saga of Torgils and Havlide, *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*. Jørgensen shows how honour functions as a driving force behind human actions, but also how the honour code changes with the transition from the old honour culture to the nascent Christian society.

KEY WORDS saga | honour | respect | values | Norse culture

INTRODUCTION

For the protagonists in the Sagas of Icelanders, honour acts as a motivation and a driving force. But although the heroes may follow the honour code in every detail, the outcome is usually tragic. The sagas are written well into the Christian period and the discrepancy between a brave and honourable action and its tragic results may imply a criticism of the clan society's code of honour. A good example here is the saga of Gisli Sursson (*Gisla saga Súrssonar*, here: *Gisli Sursson's saga*).

Saga hero Gisli Sursson does everything right as far as the code of honour is concerned. This ensures him an honourable death, but leads to the ruination of his family and his property, even though it was precisely his family he sought to defend. If one accepts the honour-based ethics of the clan society as a premise for interpreting the saga, Gisli appears as a tragic but exemplary hero. He does his duty, but still drives himself and his family to destruction.

The story ends with the widows of the protagonists turning their backs on the smoking ruins of their lives in Iceland and setting out on a pilgrimage – into the new era. The saga was written at a time when the Icelandic Commonwealth was in decline and the Church had long since become powerful and well organised. It

1. This article is translated by Richard Burgess.

is therefore reasonable to suppose that Gisli's heroic status was problematic in the author's own times and that the saga makes the clan society's honour code the subject of debate in the light of new ideals of Christian humility and forgiveness.

In the Contemporary saga of Thorgils and Haflidi (*Þorgils saga ok Haflíða*, here: *The Saga of Thorgils and Haflidi*), the action takes place in the Christian 12th century, but this story too is probably written in the 13th century, as *Gisli Sursson's saga* is. Here the main conflict is resolved on the basis of Christian values. This is achieved without honour being de-emphasised, but the concept of honour has a different content. Although Gisli steadfastly adheres to the old code of honour, the new era with its Christian values also leaves its mark on *Gisli Sursson's saga*. The difference in message between the two sagas is not as great as it might seem on the surface.

THE SAGAS OF ICELANDERS

As a genre the Sagas of Icelanders are defined by the fact that the main characters live in Iceland and are often descendants of the first Icelandic settlers. The action is set in the period between the first settlement and Christianisation around 1000 AD. The main events take place in the Commonwealth period, i.e. in the time after the Icelandic *Althing* was established in 930.

The Icelandic Commonwealth is described in the Grágás collection of laws and in the rich saga literature as an organised society with common laws for the whole country as well as regional *things* that were all subordinated to the *Althing* at Tingvellir. At the *thing*, laws were passed and judgements delivered. There were clear rules for how cases were to be conducted, for presenting testimony and for the composition of courts. It was thus an institution with many of the features of a constitutional state (nomocracy). However, we can clearly see in the sagas that 'might makes right'. If a chieftain has enough power, he can pressure the judges or can simply prevent the legal process from being carried out. It is also possible, with the help of skilful advisors, to trick an adversary into making errors so that the litigation comes to nothing. Dramatic litigation is a favourite theme in the Sagas of Icelanders.

A man who had suffered injury and served a summons at the *thing* had to have a certain leverage in order to ensure that the case got a fair hearing and that a judgement was delivered. Even if an offender was successfully convicted, the state had no executive authority that could punish the offender or collect fines. The plaintiff had to take care of this himself. For a serious offence an offender might be outlawed. This meant the loss of legal protection and that his adversaries could

take his life and perhaps his property (see Magnús Már Lárusson 1981: 603–608). But that presupposed that the plaintiff was in a position to carry this out.

THE CLAN SOCIETY

The old clan society was still alive and kicking throughout the Commonwealth. An individual had scant chance of defending himself against injustice without allies. Alliances were the individual's safety net. As part of a strong alliance you were sure of support in the event of conflict.

Everyone was born into an alliance, namely the family or clan. Family ties were therefore unbreakable. You owed your family full loyalty and could expect the same. But this alliance could be extended in several ways. Marriage was one means of building alliances between families. Marriage was thus a political tool for the family and too important to be left to the feelings and wishes of the individual. Alliance building could also be achieved through fostering children, a common occurrence in saga literature as well in historical reality. An individual could also extend his network by entering into foster brotherhood with a friend. Foster brotherhood meant that the parties assumed the same obligations to each other as if they were brothers. Another common form of alliance building was through friendship, sealed with an exchange of gifts.

The Sagas of Icelanders are realistic representations. Characters are complex, as they are in real life, and have their strong and weak sides. Even the most outstanding heroes can make mistakes and behave foolishly. In all families there can be contemptible individuals who behave treacherously and abuse alliances. If a person ends up in a serious conflict, the alliance is obliged to help him whatever the cause of the conflict. If the hero's brother is both weak and unreliable and gets into trouble due to his own stupidity, it is still the duty of the hero to risk both his life and his property to help him. People in the sagas adhere to this obligation to loyalty because the price of failing to do so is so high, namely a loss of honour.

Honour is the very backbone of the clan society and impacts on both the individual and the collective. Everyone benefits from the honour of the family he is born into. It is founded on the family's history, its power and property or on the fame of particular relatives. Each individual can then increase his honour through his own conduct and actions, or he can squander it by evading his obligations or by committing dishonourable acts. A person without honour is without dignity and lacks the most important capital with which to build alliances.

THE CHURCH

Christianity was adopted at the *Althing* in 1000 AD. This cultural turning point also marks that the waning of the historical period that is the setting of the Sagas of Icelanders, the clan society's code of honour being unable completely to sustain its legitimacy within a Christian framework. But although Christianity could be adopted by law through an *Althing* resolution, the cultural transition took time. It had started well before 1000, but much of the cultural legacy of the pre-Christian clan society remained in the 13th century when the sagas were written.

While the clan society demanded absolute loyalty to a collective, to an alliance, Christianity demanded absolute loyalty to God. The individual is also ascribed a soul which must be nurtured in accordance with the will of God and with an eye to an eternal life. New ideals such as humility, placidity and forgiveness represented alternatives to self-assertion, violence and revenge. When the Sagas of Icelanders were being written, the Church was well established in Iceland with a powerful administration, an abundant priesthood, churches and monasteries. Written culture in itself had ecclesiastical origins, and there is reason to believe that saga literature too grew under the auspices of the church (see especially Lönnroth, 1964).

TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

Most of the Sagas of Icelanders are written in the second half of the 13th century in a period that saw a transition from a clan society with an unstable balance of power between chieftains to a more up-to-date society with strong ecclesiastical power subordinated to a king.

The action in the Icelandic sagas also takes place in a transitional period, namely the conflict between paganism and Christianity. This conflict provides a backdrop for the action in *Gisli Sursson's saga*. Gisli and his friend Vestein are trading in Denmark. Christians could not trade with pagans who had not received the *prima signatio* (i.e. been marked with the sign of the cross), and in the longer version (S, see below p. 41) it is explicitly stated that Gisli and Vestein receive *prima signatio* (chap 13).² *Prima signatio* was no baptism, but a ritual that allowed for communication and trade with Christians. Both versions tell that after this Gisli refrains from making sacrifices to pagan gods (chap S15/M10). However, he is still unwavering in his fidelity to the old clan society's code of honour. His spirit

2. All citations and references to *Gisli Sursson's saga* are from *Íslenzk fornrit VI*. The translations are by the author in cooperation with Richard Burgess.

of self-sacrifice for family and honour knows no bounds, as we shall see. Gisli always takes responsibility when his alliance is threatened or harmed. Measured according to the old code of honour, he appears as an exemplary hero.

GISLI SURSSON'S SAGA

Gisli Sursson's saga is preserved in its entirety in two versions, a shorter (M) and a longer (S). The main difference is that the preliminary chapters are somewhat longer in S. Opinions differ as to which version is most original. The traditional view is that the short version is most original (Finnur Jónsson 1923: 453; Björn K. Þórólfsson 1943), but this view has been criticised, perhaps most rigorously by Jónas Kristjánsson and Guðni Kolbeinsson (1979). We will not discuss this further here. This analysis will be based on M, but in cases where there are significant differences between the two versions, I will also refer to the longer version. Unless otherwise specified, references will be to the shorter version (M). M is preserved in AM 556a 4to from the end of the 15th century (ÍF VI:XLIII), S in two younger paper manuscripts that both are based on a lost medieval manuscript.

Gisli grew up in Norway with his siblings Thorkel and Thordis. His brother Ari was raised by an uncle. His father was called Thorbjorn and gained the nickname Sourpuss (*súr*). Gisli commits an honour killing that leads to his family having to flee the country. They settle in Iceland, and here the three siblings find spouses. Gisli gets Aud, sister of Vestein Vesteinsson, Thorkel gets Asgerd and Thordis marries Thorgrim. The two brothers and their brother-in-laws seem at first a strong alliance, but a prophecy says that there soon be division between them. In an attempt to consolidate their unity, Gisli initiates a ceremony to make all four foster-brothers. However, this fails and the group is split up: Gisli and Vestein stay together while Thorkel and Thorgrim, who are also brothers-in-law, form their own alliance. One night Vestein is killed and Gisli undertakes to avenge his foster-brother. He understands that it is his brother Thorkel and his brother-in-law Thorgrim who are behind the killing and he takes revenge on Thorgrim. Gisli is outlawed for this killing. He lives in hiding for many years until fate catches up with him. These conflicts prove the ruin of Gisli's family, and in the saga's epilogue the widows of Gisli and Vestein turn their backs on Iceland and their old lives. They are baptised in Denmark and embark on a pilgrimage to Rome.

HONOUR KILLING

In her youth in Norway Thordis received the attention of Bard, a young freeholder. Thordis's father, Thorbjorn, did not approve of this liason and forbade Bard to visit Thordis. But Bard did not care about 'what an old man says' (kvað ómæt ómaga orð). Thorbjørn incited his sons to do something about this, the heaviest responsibility lying with Thorkel, who was the elder. The incitement is presented in more detail in the longer version (S). Here we can read that both brothers were good friends with Bard and that Gisli first tries to persuade his friend to stay away from Thordis. In M it is stated that Thorkel and Bard are friends. We are not told what Gisli thinks about Bard, only that he dislikes of what he says about his father. Neither are we told what Thordis feels for her suitor, but we can guess that she has nothing against him. One day when Bard and the two brothers are together, Gisli suddenly draws a sword and cuts Bard down (M chap 6).

By killing Bard, Gisli is defending family honour in the face of Bard's provocation as well as the right of the head of the family to decide whom the daughter should marry. What Gisli feels about Bard is just as irrelevant as what Thordis feels. According to convention, it was the elder of the two sons who was first in line to carry out the killing, but Gisli understood that his brother was unwilling to set aside his friendship with Bard for the sake of family honour. After the killing, Thorkel sits down with Bard's corpse. This reaction is a familiar motif in saga literature as a way of showing grief over a lost friend. The saga tells how Gisli tries to cheer up his brother by offering to exchange swords so that Thorkel gets the one that bites best.

Emotions are not described directly in the Sagas of Icelanders. It is only through words and deeds that we get to know what people are thinking or feeling. We can only guess at the motivation behind Gisli's offer of exchanging swords. However, it is no surprise that Thorkel declines the offer. What pleasure could he possibly gain from a sword coloured with his friend's blood? Was this simply mockery on Gisli's part, or was it really intended as a friendly gesture? We can imagine that Gisli lacks empathy and is thus able to follow the code of honour ruthlessly. This would also explain why he is unable to understand his brother's reaction after the killing. It is more likely, however, that Gisli has a great ability to control his empathy in order to act honourably. As we follow Gisli through the saga, we see that his actions are guided by a strict logic. He follows the code of honour far beyond the bounds of reasonableness. This is most likely also the case in this episode. By offering his brother the weapon that killed Bard, he is also offering Thorkel credit for the killing. As the elder son, Thorkel would be able to go home to his father and show him that family honour was satisfied.³

We are told nothing about how the killing affected Gisli's relationship to Thordis, but we are told that the relationship between the brothers was never the same again after this. That is an understatement. Here too there are important differences between the two versions. In M we are told that Thorkel refuses to live at home after the killing and goes to Bard's relation Skeggi, urging him to avenge Bard and marry Thordis. Here Thorkel is committing a serious act of treachery against his own family. From failing to take action to protect family honour because of friendship, he is now actively bringing revenge and shame on his own family. This is unheard of in a clan society, but ironically it shows considerable courage – and there is little that accrues more honour than courage. Thorkel is actively and openly defying the conventions of a clan society. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen believes Thorkel's betrayal of his family, as in M, is so unheard of that he doubts whether it belongs to the original version (Meulengracht Sørensen 2001: 40–41). While it is possible that this feature is secondary, it is nonetheless significant that it is undoubtedly present in the 15th century manuscript.

Thorkel's reaction is also rendered differently in S, where incidentally the suitor's name is Kolbein. Thorkel is distressed by the killing, but there is no mention of him sitting with the corpse or of exchanging swords. Thorkel is not happy at home, but in S he goes to his mother's family and not to Skeggi. However, there is a lacuna in the manuscript here, so we don't know the end of this episode.

THE KILLING OF VESTEIN AND GISLI'S REVENGE

In Iceland the brothers Gisli and Thorkel run the farm together. Thorkel doesn't contribute much, but Gisli makes no complaint. One day Thorkel is at home and overhears a conversation that triggers a new conflict. Once again it is forbidden love that is the issue. Thorkel hears the two women Aud and Asgerd discussing in the women's house. It emerges that Asgerd, Thorkel's wife, has an eye for Vestein, Gisli's foster-brother and brother-in-law. Now it is Thorkel's honour that is challenged. It also emerges that Aud had been infatuated with Thorgrim before she married Gisli.

Shortly afterwards, Thorkel demands a division of their inheritance. Gisli reluctantly accepts this, and they agree that Gisli will have the farm, while Thorkel will have the movable property and move to Thordis and his brother-in-law Thorgrim.

3. I owe this interpretation of the sword exchange as a transference of honour to student Aleksander Søreide, who suggested it during a discussion of the saga in a teaching session in Spring 2016.

One night when Vestein is visiting Gisli, there is a violent storm. While Gisli and his labourers are out bringing in the hay, someone enters the house and runs a spear through Vestein. As soon as Gisli understands what has happened, he declares he will avenge the killing in accordance with his oath.

Gisli, like Vestein's killer, strikes under cover of darkness. He exacts his revenge on Thorgrim and escapes unnoticed. After the killing, Thordis marries Thorgrim's brother, Bork. Soon Gisli lets his sister know that he did the killing, and after a while she informs Bork. Gisli is outlawed, and Bork starts an intense hunt for him.

Gisli's revenge is problematical. The saga gives no definite information about who carried out the killing of Vestein, only that it is the alliance of Thorkel and Thorgrim that was responsible. According to the code of honour, the important thing was not that revenge necessarily should strike the killer directly, but that it should strike his alliance at the same level, or higher, than the offence that was sustained. We see many examples of this, for example in *Njál's saga*. It places Gisli in a difficult dilemma. He can't kill his own brother, and his killing of Thorgrim impacts on his brother and, not least, his sister.

There are clear parallels between this conflict and the previous honour killing in Norway. The context is forbidden love, and again Thordis's fiancé and the brother's friend are on the receiving end. In Norway, Gisli defends the family's honour by killing an unwanted suitor, while his brother supports the suitor. In Iceland the roles are different. Thorkel is challenged by the fact that his wife has a forbidden sweetheart who is an ally of Gisli. This clearly demonstrates that it is not the nature of the provocation that decides Gisli's actions, but whom he has the strongest bonds of loyalty to and what his responsibilities are in an alliance.

The morning after the killing of Thorgrim, a large group of men lead by Thorkel arrive at Gisli's farm. Thorkel sees Gisli's wet shoes and understands that his brother has been out during the night. He pushes them under the bed so that his companions will not see them. Thorkel understands that Gisli is the culprit and actively but discretely prevents him being exposed.

Later Gisli reveals his guilt to Thordis through a skaldic verse. To Gisli's disappointment, Thordis informs Bork of this. When Gisli hears of this revelation he composes a new verse in which he compares his sister to Gudrun Gjukadottir from the Eddic poems. Not least in the *Lay of Atli (Atlakviða)* we hear of Gudrun's boundless loyalty to her own family. When her husband, King Atli, kills her brothers Gunnar and Hogni, Gudrun herself exacts revenge and kills her husband and their two sons. Gisli makes the point that his sister is not like Gudrun.

As a married woman, Thordis has a double loyalty – on the one side to her brother and her biological family, on the other to her husband and the family

she is married into. A woman retains the bonds to her biological family in spite of being included in a new one. This is indeed the prerequisite for the function of marriage as a tool for building alliances. As a wife, she is part of the husband's family, and as long as she is married she owes his family loyalty. If she can't meet these requirements, she must demand a divorce. To Gisli's disappointment, Thordis on this occasion confirms her loyalty to her husband's family.

THE KILLING OF THORKEL

Vestein had two young sons, and they were first in line to avenge his killing. Gisli may have taken responsibility upon himself because the boys were too young, but there are many examples in the sagas of revenge pending for many years until the avenger reaches adulthood. There is no short deadline for revenge. Gisli may have harboured jealous feelings towards the man Aud had previously been interested in and this may have influenced his decision to take responsibility for exacting revenge. It is also possible that Gisli makes Thorgrim the target of revenge in order to protect his brother from the later vengeance of Vestein's sons. If so, this strategy was as unsuccessful as his attempt at foster-brotherhood, because after Gisli had lived as an outlaw for several years, Thorkel falls victim to revenge nonetheless. Vestein's sons feel that their father has not been adequately avenged until Thorkel is killed. The boys dupe Thorkel as he and his retinue are setting up camp at the *thing*. They flatter him, praise his garments and ask to see his magnificent sword. Thorkel appears as a vain fool and is humiliatingly killed with his own sword.

The scene that follows is interesting. The boys seek refuge with their aunt Aud, where the outlawed Gisli is also hiding. Aud in her wisdom understands that Gisli cannot meet his brother's killers. She provides the boys with food and sends them off before speaking to Gisli. And Gisli once again reacts logically, as Aud had anticipated – his duty is to avenge his brother. Gisli's predicament is that he has been declared an outlaw because he avenged the killing of Vestein, the boys' father. They have now done the same and killed Thorkel, who for Gisli has been a constant source of disappointment. Gisli and the boys are now more or less in the same boat. Even so, Gisli is ready to dash off after the boys and kill them, but changes his mind when Aud says that they are gone. For Gisli, the logic of revenge kicks in immediately, but he quickly lets it pass. One would imagine that a cunning hero like Gisli would soon have been able to get his hands on the boys if he had wanted to. Perhaps there is a certain ambivalence that stops him, a sign that he is not entirely without empathy, not to mention common sense. The idea that Gisli should be driven to

wreaking revenge on the sons of his foster-brother borders on the absurd and clearly shows the saga throwing a critical light at the logic of revenge.

GISLI'S DOWNFALL

Bork, who is Thorgrim's brother and now also Thordis's husband, pays a man, Eyjolf Grey, to kill Gisli, but it turns out to be a difficult task. Gisli lives for many years as an outlaw, showing both strength and heroism in his struggle to survive, and loses everything he owns. His loyal Aud supports him to the end. When his enemies finally catch up with him, he defends himself alone against fifteen men. Two of them admittedly have their hands full restraining Aud and foster-daughter Gudrid while the fighting is in progress. Gisli kills five men before finally succumbing. Three more die of their wounds after the battle. Gisli's opponents gain no honour from their victory, but in the context of the clan society's norms, Gisli achieves what is most important: an honourable death.

AMBIVALENCE

The sagas provide many examples that women are also ruled by the code of honour. Thordis's actions should be understood in the light of the hopeless conflict of loyalty she finds herself in. When Eyjolf had finally managed to carry out his mission after encountering many setbacks and much shame, he comes to visit Bork and Thordis. Bork receives him well, but Thordis rather coldly. When serving him porridge, she loses a spoon on the floor and crawls under the table to fetch it. Then she grasps Eyjolf's sword and tries to stab him in the stomach. The sword's hilt catches on the table and the result is just a flesh wound in his thigh. Her husband offers Eyjolf *sjalfdæmi* for the injury.⁴ Thordis reacts by declaring herself divorced from Bork.

Thordis's reaction is unexpected. After all, she was the one who gave her brother away, thereby demonstrating her loyalty to her husband. Now she does the opposite, crossing her husband to avenge her brother. Furthermore, she takes the consequences of breaking her loyalty to her husband and declares herself divorced from him. It is difficult to see any logical reason for Thordis's change of loyalty. The explanation may lie in an underlying ambivalence. Thordis has probably had mixed feelings about her brother right from the time he killed her sweetheart in Norway.

4. *Sjalfdæmi* is well known from saga literature. The perpetrator of an assault allows the injured party to decide compensation for the injury while committing himself to accept the verdict.

At the same time, she is familiar with the code of honour that governed Gisli's actions. She didn't go straight home and give Gisli away to her husband, but waited a long while. When Gisli's killer comes visiting and she is encouraged by her husband to offer him hospitality, her conflict of loyalty becomes unbearable.

According to the old code of honour, Gisli doesn't put a foot wrong. If one accepts its premises, Gisli is an exemplary hero. He puts all personal feelings and considerations aside in the face of his duties to the alliance. He shoulders responsibility when his brother fails to and kills the unwanted suitor. He avenges his foster-brother even though it impacts on those close to him. He is willing to avenge his brother even though Thorkel didn't give him the support he expected. He doesn't seek conflict, he never provokes, but he takes the offensive without hesitation when duty calls. As an outlaw he manages to stay alive longer than any other, and by virtue of his strength and courage he ensures that his enemies gain dishonour even when he is overcome by superior force.

Thorkel is portrayed as Gisli's opposite. Where Gisli defends his family's honour, Thorkel fails. He is lazy where Gisli is hardworking. Gisli dies in battle against a superior force, while Thorkel is cut down by a couple of boys in the midst of his own men. In one scene after another, Gisli appears as the brave hero doing his duty, while Thorkel is spineless. But Thorkel too is ambivalent. His defence of Bard shows that he doesn't lack courage. By hiding Gisli's wet shoes, he shows that he has understood that Gisli is the culprit, but he doesn't give him away. And while Gisli is outlawed, Thorkel gives him support, albeit half-heartedly.

Gisli appears as a firm and consistent defender of the old clan society. But neither is he without ambivalence. After his encounter with Christianity in Denmark, he refrains from pagan sacrifice. He also has one foot in the new era while following the old code of honour.

Throughout his years as an outlaw, Gisli is haunted by dreams. Some nights the dark figure of a woman comes to him with terrible visions of blood and suffering. But other nights he sees a bright figure of a woman who promises him a good life after this one. His death is not in doubt with either of them. It seems natural to associate the bright figure with Christianity and the hope for a better life in the hereafter, and the dark figure as the opposite (see Mundal 1993: 29–30). The latter makes him anxious. There is no doubt that Gisli is drawn to the bright figure.

On one occasion ambivalence may play a role in hampering Gisli's willingness to act and thus preventing further tragic consequences. This is when he fails to pursue Vestein's sons after their killing of Thorkel.

The frequent ambivalence that permeates the saga reflects the conflict between the old and the new era, between the honour-based conventions of a clan society and the new ideals of the Christian state.

There is no doubt that Gisli's chief motivation is to defend his family's honour. When he hears that his sister had given him away, he says: 'mér hefir eigi hennar óvirðing betri þótt en sjalfs mín.' ('Her dishonour has not seemed better to me than my own.' Chap M19) Here Gisli explicitly states that his actions are motivated by his duty to protect his own and his family's honour.

PROBLEMATIC HONOUR

In a modern state based on a Christian or Humanist view of human life, killing cannot be condoned as a response in human relations. An honour killing like the one Gisli commits in Norway would be met with disgust and condemnation. The saga has arisen in a Christian society where a new culture with new ethical ideals is in the process of displacing the old honour code of the clan society. However, it hasn't been difficult for more recent saga readers to accept the clan society's honour culture as a yardstick for the hero's actions and thus grant him ethical acceptance. This may not have been so straightforward in the saga writer's own time. A close reading of the saga reveals a problematic hero, while honour killing would certainly have been considered problematic by the Christian 13th century. Earlier scholars have also pointed out this perspective: see, for example, Clark (2007: 514). The sagas of the Icelanders never moralise, they tell a story and let the reader process his or her impressions. If a man does everything right according to society's norms and it leads to catastrophe, it might be that there is something wrong with society's norms. In this way the saga of Gisli Surrsson makes the code of honour the subject of debate.

THE SAGA OF THORGILS AND HAFLIDI

It is not only in the Sagas of Icelanders that honour and revenge are driving forces in a spiral of violence. The Saga of Thorgils and Hafliði is regarded as belonging to the Contemporary sagas, since it is preserved in the great compilation of Contemporary sagas known as *Sturlunga saga*. The action takes place in the period 1117–21, i.e. well into Christian times, but nevertheless the honour code of the clan society seems to have a firm hold on the protagonists. The saga depicts a conflict that develops between two powerful and highly respected chieftains, Thorgils

Oddason and Hafliði Masson. Both are described as wise and likeable men, and both behave in an exemplary fashion as far as possible.

The conflict is initiated by Hafliði's nephew, Ma. He is an insufferable conniver whose behaviour is both unjust and violent. After having killed the kind farmer Thorstein and provoked the killing of Neiti, one of Hafliði's liegemen, he seeks refuge with his uncle. Hafliði makes no attempt to defend Ma's actions, calling him 'a disgrace to his family'. He thinks his nephew is undeserving of help and should be excluded from the clan. But as the man of honour he is, he pays the settlement for the killing of Thorstein and provides protection for Ma.

Neiti's family, for their part, have entrusted the case to Thorgils, since Ma had already sought refuge with Hafliði. The case now stands between these two chieftains. Through unfortunate circumstances and Ma's conniving, the conflict escalates. The two respected chieftains invest more and more honour in the case. Things reach a head when Thorgils brings an axe along to the *thing* and attacks Hafliði, chopping off one of his fingers. For this Hafliði gets Thorgils outlawed. But being a powerful man, Thorgils mobilises hundreds of men for the next *thing*. Thorgils also has a large following and the situation is as tense as at the outbreak of war. At this point the Church mediates. The bishop forbids the priesthood from fighting on Hafliði's side and encourages them to intervene instead.

Thorgils is prepared to offer Hafliði self-judgement in settling the dispute, as is fitting for generous chieftains and also in keeping with the clan society's honour code, but he sets the condition that the issues of outlawry, *goðorð* (chieftainship)⁵ and residence should be kept out of the settlement. At first Hafliði will not accept these conditions, but he acquiesces after mediation by the priests. He accepts to reconciliation, but demands a substantial fine: eight times the man-price Hafliði had paid for Thorstein. People think this is unreasonable, and one spectator comments 'Dýrr myndi Hafliði allr, ef svá skyldi hverr limr' (The whole of Hafliði would be expensive if every limb had cost as much. Chap 31).⁶

However, Thorgils gladly accepts the fine and declares himself well satisfied: 'Gefi menn vel hljóð máli Hafliða, því at hér hefir hvárr okkar þat, er vel má una'. ('People should listen well to Hafliði, for here we can both be satisfied with what

5. A chieftainship (*goðorð*) was an area ruled by a cheiftain (*goði*). The cheiftain had the right to attend the Althing with two followers. A cheiftain was not elected and the chieftainship could be transferred to others like other property.

6. All citations and references to the saga of Thorgils and Hafliði (*Dorgils saga ok Hafliða*) are from Guðni Jónsson's edition of *Sturlunga saga*, 1948. The translations are by the present author.

we have got. Chap 31). When Haflidi sees Thorgils' reaction he understands that Thorgils was truly willing to reach a settlement even at such a high price, and that explains the size of the fine. The large sum was not due to greed. In the epilogue we are told that the two chieftains after this always supported each other, and Thorgils gave Haflidi expensive gifts that bound them together as allies.

Gisli Surrsson remains loyal to honour code of the clan society and sacrifices his life and possessions for it. By the yardstick of the old code of honour he could be said to die with honour as a strong, courageous and steadfast saga hero.

It was the old code of honour that drove two decent men, Thorgils and Haflidi, to the edge of war and catastrophe. But here the conflict reaches a different resolution under the auspices of the Church. Reconciliation is achieved on the basis of a new code of honour founded on Christian values. On this basis Haflidi could renounce revenge without losing honour. With this resolution, both parties emerge strengthened from the conflict.

Gisli Surrsson's saga also has an epilogue in which we are told that the two widows leave home, receive baptism and set out on a pilgrimage. It is a clear message that the days of the old code of honour are over.

WORDS FOR HONOUR AND SHAME IN THE TWO SAGAS

Our analysis of the action in *Gisli Surrsson's saga* and *The Saga of Torgils and Haflidi* has shown that the sagas throw a critical light on the clan society's honour code, with the latter saga introducing a new code of honour based on Christian values. We will now see that this interpretation is also reflected in the narrators' choice of vocabulary.

Honour in the sagas of the Icelanders was the theme of Preben Meulengracht Sørensen's dissertation *Fortælling og ære* [Narrative and honour] (1995). Here he discusses the terminology of honour: 'De ord der i sagaernes verden hyppigst bruges for ære, er [The words most commonly used for honour in the sagas are] *sómi*, *sómð*, *virðing*, *metorð* og [and] *metnaðr*' (Meulengracht Sørensen 1995: 188). Perhaps even more important than gaining honour in the sagas is avoiding loss of honour. A common word for loss of honour is *skómm* (shame). The same words that denote honour are used in a negated form to denote disgrace or loss of honour: *ósómi*, *ósómð*, *óvirðing*, *svívirðing* or *vanvirðing*.

If we take the words for honour/shame emphasised by Meulengracht Sørensen and trace them in *Gisli Surrssons saga* (M), we get the result shown in table 1.

TABLE 1. Words for honour and shame in *Gisli Sursson's saga*

Words for honour	Words for shame	Number of occurrences
	<i>skömm</i> (shame)	4
	<i>óvirðing</i> (disgrace)	2
	<i>svívirðing</i> (shame)	3
	<i>engi virðingaför</i> (not honourable conduct)	1
<i>sóma</i> (honour)		1
<i>sómð</i> (honour)		3
<i>sómilegsta</i> (most honourable)		1
<i>sómðarauki</i> (increased honour)		1
<i>virðing</i> (reputation)		4
10 occurrences	10 occurrences	20 occurrences

The poems are excluded from these statistics. Of the 20 occurrences, 10 stand for ‘loss of honour’ (negative honour): *skömm*, *óvirðing*, *svívirðing*, *enga virðingaför*.

In addition, three occurrences of words for honour are negated in their context: Aud does not think Thorgrim and Thorkel deserving of *sómðarauki* (increased honour), and in Gisli’s last battle we are told of his opponents that ‘þeir sáu að þar lá við **sómð** þeirra og **virðing**⁷’ (they understood that their honour and reputation was at stake. Chap M36) – which they are unable to defend.

In only two of the examples do words for (dis)honour refer to Gisli Sursson, and these don’t represent an authorial description of Gisli. The first example is spoken by Gisli himself when he hears that his sister has given him away: ‘mér hefir eigi hennar óvirðing betri þótt en sjálfs mín’ (Her dishonour has not been better to me than my own. Chap M19) The other is spoken by Thorkel. In some ball games arranged by the family, Thorkel urges Gisli not to hold back against Thorgrim: ‘en eg ynni þér allvel að þú fengir sem mesta **virðing** af ef þú ert sterkari’ (and I would wish wholeheartedly that you will gain the most possible honour from this, if you are the strongest). Although honour is Gisli’s driving force, the narrator is remarkably cautious about explicitly crediting Gisli with honour for his actions.

7. Words in bold type here and in the the text that follows are highlighted by the present author.

The first two occurrences of the word *skømm* concern the consequences of evading battle. Ari, the brother of Gisli's grandfather, is challenged by the berserk Bjorn blakki to a battle over his farm and his wife. Ari would 'heldur berjast en hvorttveggja yrði að **skømm**, hann og kona hans' (rather fight than that they, both he and his wife, incurred shame. Chap M1) Thordis's suitor Kolbein finds himself in a similar situation and is challenged by Duelling Skeggi. When Kolbein backs out, Gisli tells what a wretch he is: 'Gisli biður hann mæla allra manna armastan, og "þótt þú verðir allur að **skømm** þá skal eg nú þó fara.'" Gisli scolded him as a wretch, and 'even if you incur the worst shame, I will nonetheless fight.' Chap M2)

Bork's alliance suffers to killings, first his brother Thorgrim and then Thorkel. In both cases we are told that Bork gains dishonour when the killings are not avenged (Chap 19, Chap 29).

Many of the examples concern loss of honour incurred by Gisli's opponents. They bring shame (*skømm*) on themselves when Aud throws a wallet in Eyjolf's face (Chap M32). And shame (*skømm*) and disgrace (*svívirðing*) when they are fooled and Gisli escapes (Chap M32). There is also in the last battle scene where Gisli prophesises that his opponents will reap dishonour for the killing (*svívirðing fyrir mannskaða*) (Chap M36), and in the next chapter (Chap M37) the narrator confirms that those that survived the battle only reaped dishonour (*fengu þó óvirðing*). To the extent that words for shame and honour are found in Gisli Surs-son's saga, they are always used in accordance with the old code of honour, and there is a clear emphasis on loss of honour rather than increased honour. You bring shame on yourself by not avenging, by not daring to fight, by significantly outnumbering an opponent or by being hit by a woman.

It is striking how the saga narrator avoids using honour words when referring to Gisli and his actions. Gisli's actions nevertheless appear honourable for the reader because his opponents lose honour through the many defeats they suffer in their manhunt for him. The narrator never fails to mention these losses of honour, but never characterises Gisli with honour words.

Fate finally catches up with Gisli. In the dialogue before and during the battle Gisli overtly reminds his opponents of the dishonour he wishes for them, and the narrator confirms this with his comments. It seems reasonable to accord Gisli *virðing* for the courage and strength of arms he displays. Naturally, Gisli's honour could be said to grow proportionally with the dishonour incurred by his opponents. But this is not stated in the text. Not even in the last battle are honour words used in reference to Gisli.

If we look for the same words in *The Saga of Thorgils and Haflidi*, we find 33 occurrences: *sómi*, *sómd*, *metnad*, *virðing*, *skómm*. (4 examples of the verb *virða*/the participle *virður* are not included). The saga is only 2/3 the length of *Gisli Surs-son's saga* (M), so the frequency of honour words is much higher. The narrator is not as reluctant to associate Thorgils and Haflidi with honour words as the narrator in *Gisli Surs-son's saga*.

Another difference is that words for loss of honour are seldom used. There are only four occurrences: *svívirðing*, *ósómi*, *skómm*, *frændaskómm*. The word *skómm* is used by the villain Ma when he goads his naïve companion by calling shame upon him if he doesn't fight the blameless Neiti whom Ma himself has attacked. When Ma seeks refuge with his uncle, Haflidi calls him *frændaskómm* (a disgrace to his family). The word is used in connection with recovering honour, in the sense of 'redress'. After Thorgils' protégé Olaf is humiliated by Ma, Thorgils urges him to avenge it: 'Þetta er þó mitt ráð, at þú leitir eftir **sómd** þinni' (This, however, is my advice that you seek your redress. Chap 5). The word **sómd** is used with the same meaning by Haflidi too after the killing of Neiti: '(Haflíði) sagði þetta enga **sómd** fyrir víg Hneitis ok kallar þau gert hafa vandalaust til sín ok kvaðst meiri **sómd** hafa þeim fyrir hugat'. (He said that this was no redress for the killing of Neiti, and that they had acted rashly and that he would have ensured a better redress for them. Chap M7)

When the men of the cloth mediate between the two protagonists, there are frequent references to a sense of honour. The priests remind both of them that their opponent is a highly respected man, and they appeal to the sense of honour of both men. When Haflidi is lying in ambush with his men to attack Thorgils, bishop Thorlak urges him to go home out of respect for the mass of John the Baptist: 'ef þú lætr fyrir farast þetta á þessari hátíðinni um friðinn, at guð muni þér ok sá kappi Jón baptisti **sómahlutarins** unna í málunum' (if you withdraw on this saint's day for the sake of peace, then God and his warrior John will grant you an honourable part [*sómahlutr*] in this case. Chap 22) Here honour is associated with refraining from an attack and honouring the saint's day instead.

The priest Gudmund Brandsson is presented as Thorgils's nephew and a good friend of Haflidi. He visits them both to mediate when the conflict is at the breaking point. He says he will support the one who shows most respect (*virðing*) for his words (Chap 19). First he talks to Haflidi to ask him to proceed cautiously to prevent people getting hurt: 'ok ger svá vel, at þú **far varliga, ok gæt virðingar þinnar ok sóma**' (and be wise and proceed cautiously and take care of your reputation [*virðing*] and your honour [*sómi*].) Here the priest expresses the notion that Haflidi can best protect his honour by showing restraint.

Then Gudmund goes to Thorgils and asks him what he will do. Thorgils answers that he will confront Haflidi's forces and defend himself. Gudmund says that people would think he had behaved as a great man (*allmikilmannliga*) if he confined himself to protecting his property: «En ef þu ferr með þann ofsa, sem í einskis manns dómi er, þá uggi ek, at þú mótir ofsanum ok ofrkappinu, áðr lýkr málum ykkrum Haflíða» (but if you proceed with a savagery (*ofsi*) that has no parallel, I am afraid you will meet savagery (*ofsinn*) and arrogance before the conflict between you and Haflidi is over.)

The turning point comes when the priest Ketil tells a story from his own life that Haflidi could learn from (Chap 29). As a young man, Ketil had found a good wife in Groa, bishop Gissur's daughter. But there were rumours that she had a relationship with another man, Gudmund Grimsson. Driven by jealousy, Ketil attacked Gudmund, but is worse off for the encounter. Gudmund sticks a knife in his eye and blinds him. Ketil serves Gudmund with a summons for this:

Ok þá er svá var komit, þá buðu þeir fé fyrir málit. Þá hugða ek at, hvat mér hafði at borizt eða hversu allt hafði tekizt þungliga, ok neitta ek fébótunum. Ok sá ek þá, at þat eitt var hjálpráðit til, at skjóta málinu á guðs miskunn, því at allt tókst þá áðr oðru þungligar til **mannvirðingar** um mitt ráð. Ok ek sagða **ofrkapp** vera ok **metnað** Møðrvellinga, hvé þung heift mér myndi vera. Fann ek þá þat, alls ek hugða þá at **mannvirðinginni**, at ekki myndi þær bótr fyrir koma, er myndi at **sómd** verða. Gerða ek þá fyrir guðs sakir at gefa honum upp allt málit. Vissa ek, at þá mynda ek þat fyrir taka, er mér væri haldkvæmst. Ok bauð ek honum til mín, ok var hann með mér lengi síðan. Ok þá snerist þegar orðrómrinn ok með **virðing** manna, ok lagðist mér síðan hvern hlutr meir til gæfu ok **virðingar** en áðr. Ok vænti ek ok af guði, at þér muni svá fara. (Chap 29)

[And when it had come so far, they offered me money (fé) for the case. I thought about what had happened to me and how difficult everything had become, and I didn't accept the fines. And then I understood that the only advice that could help was to leave the case to God's mercy, because so far I had only experienced adversity as far as my situation (ráð) and reputation (mannvirðing) were concerned. And I saw that it was because of the arrogance (ofrkapp) and ambition (metnað) of the Modruvellings that hate had such a hold on me. When I thought of my reputation (mannvirðing), I understood that not all the fines in the world could give me redress (sómd). So I dropped the case, for the sake of God. I knew that in return I would receive what was in my

best interests. And the gossip immediately turned and with it my reputation (virðing manna), and everything turned to more advantage for my happiness and honour (virðing) than before. And I anticipate from God that the same will happen for you.]

Instead of accepting the fines, Ketil chose to waive his claim and seek reconciliation with Gudmund. In this way he achieved a much better redress and his life improved. So it is reconciliation and Christian humility that grants Ketil honour. Revenge or fines could not grant him the honour and redress he sought. Thus the concept of honour has acquired a new content.

CONCLUSION – A NEW CODE OF HONOUR

Gisli and the two rivals Thorgils and Haflidi have a lot in common. They are all heroes in the sense that they initially enjoy a good reputation, they don't seek conflicts but are drawn into them due to their loyalty to the code of honour. *Gisli Surs-son's saga* ends tragically. The hero's steadfastness gains him honour according to the old code of honour but at the same time brings calamity on him and his family. Thorgils' and Haflidi's rivalry and loyalty to the old code of honour brings them too to the brink of disaster. But here the Church mediates and the wise Haflidi understands that there is another solution to the conflict: reconciliation. At the end of the saga we are left in no doubt that more honour is to be gained from Christian reconciliation than from revenge and fines. *The saga of Thorgils and Haflidi* ends happily. After reconciliation the two rivals emerge strengthened from the conflict and with more honour than they had before. But the honour gained under the auspices of Christianity has a different content and different conditions to the honour of the clan society.

An examination of the terminology of honour used in the two sagas clearly shows the function of honour as a motivator of actions. However, it is surprising to see how reticent the narrator is in using terms of honour when referring to Gisli. Instead Gisli's opponents are showered with terms of disgrace. The author of *The saga of Thorgils and Haflidi* is more generous with terms of honour. Honour is the chief motivator of action here too, but in the end the concept of honour is filled with new, Christian content. The same terms that according to the old code of honour were associated with revenge and violence are now filled with such Christian as peace, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Both the sagas we have examined were written in the 13th century and we can suppose that they targeted the same audience, or at least the same mentality. In a

sense they reflect and support each other, in that both throw a critical light on the old code of honour. Both express the notion that clan society's concept of honour belongs in the past and must be replaced by a new ethical standard, founded on the message of the Church. *Gisli Sursson's saga* shows the tragic results that may come from not realising this, while *The saga of Thorgils and Haflidi* provides an example to be followed.

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3

The Price of Integrity¹

Conceptions of honour in Egil's saga

SIMEN SYVERTSEN

ABSTRACT This article gives a detailed examination of honour performances in another saga about early Icelanders written in the 13th century. Although the old and masculine honour code is strongly expressed, the saga – as it is written in a period of transition – also contains Christian values, which produce a more ethically oriented and individualized honour concept.

KEY WORDS saga | Iceland | masculine honour | values | individuality

Then Thrand sat down to tie his shoe, and Thorstein raised his axe high in the air and struck him on the neck, so that his head fell on to his chest. Thorstein piled some rocks over his body to cover it up and went back home to Borg (*Egil's Saga* 2000, 172).²

Reading the sagas of the Icelanders can be a shocking experience for the modern reader. Confronted with their descriptions of killings it is easy to assume ‘at meneska var meir hjartelause’ [that people were more callous] in Norse times, as the Russian philologist Mikhail Ivanovich Steblin-Kamensky pointed out (1975, 90). It is not the killings themselves that lead to this conclusion, for these are familiar enough occurrences from today’s news coverage and entertainment. What is shocking is their portrayal as ‘noko heilt naturleg og normalt’ [something completely natural and normal], as being an obvious consequence of ‘ein moralsk skyldnad, ei plikt’ [a moral obligation, a duty] (1975, 90; 93).

As a precept for how to live your life, this duty can seem far from our everyday lives, but it is highly relevant to our understanding of Norse Scandinavia and certain parts of the world today. In honour-based societies this duty is the yardstick

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1. This article is translated by Richard Burgess.
 2. All references to *Egil's Saga* (hereafter ES) are from the translation of Bernhard Schrudder in *The Sagas of Icelanders: A Selection* (Viking Penguin, 2000), pp. 3–184.

for every human action and it decides whether an individual maintains or loses the respect of his or her fellows – respect being the word most commonly used these days to denote honour. The subject of this article is the Norse honour culture as portrayed in the sagas of the Icelanders. Conceptions of honour are illustrated and discussed in reference to one of the best-known and also controversial works of Norse literature, *Egil's saga*.

SAGA AND HONOUR – EARLIER RESEARCH

In his impressive work *Fortælling og ære: Studier i islændingesagaerne* [Narrative and honour: Studies in the Sagas of the Icelanders] Preben Meulengracht Sørensen gives an in-depth account and analysis of conceptions of honour in the Sagas of the Icelanders. With *Egil's saga* as his point of departure, he investigates the relationship between the Icelandic yeoman farmer and the Norwegian king, represented first and foremost by the main character Egil Skallagrimsson and King Eirik Bloodaxe (Sørensen 1993, 127–147). Sørensen sees the saga as 'islændingesaga om konger' [a Saga of Icelanders about kings] where 'en gammel samfundsnorm' [an old social norm] governed by more or less equal farmers comes into conflict with a new polity in which Norway is united under one king who demands absolute loyalty from all his subjects (1993, 129).

According to Sørensen, Egil Skallagrimsson's family represents the 'old' code of honour throughout the saga, a code in which a man can acknowledge the supremacy of another, but still reserves the right to decide for himself (1993, 128–129). The advent of monarchy in Nordic society meant an upheaval in traditional concepts of honour where loyalty to the king became more important than noble descent and honourable conduct. *Egil Skallagrimsson's saga* illustrates the difference between the traditional Norse concept of honour from the time before the monarchy and the new concept that finally prevailed. Sørensen emphasises especially the role of the king as 'et fikspunkt, de islandske begreber om status, frihed og ære udmåles fra eller sættes i modsætning til' ['a fixed point which Icelandic concepts of status, freedom and honour are measured by or put in opposition to'] (1993, 146).

In the Sagas of Icelanders the ideal relationship between people of different classes is portrayed as static: A man of noble family shows this by demonstrating his superior status in relation to the rest of society. In practice, however, this is not always the case. Marriages can turn out to be springboards for conflict in the sagas. When a man marries a woman of higher or lower status, this threatens society's social stability. The feud between the monarchy and Egil Skallagrimsson's

family initially springs from two instances of socially unacceptable marriages (Sørensen 1993, 132–135). However, the main reason for the feud is differing attitudes to honour, where the traditional attitude based on equilibrium and mutual acceptance between farmers is challenged by a new one where loyalty to the king is paramount.

TIPPING THE HONOUR SCALES – THE NORSE CONCEPT OF HONOUR

Modern notions and conceptions of honour are far removed from Norse ones. The English word and its German and Scandinavian equivalents, ‘Ehre’ and ‘ære’, in no way render the scope of the phenomenon in Norse society. In Old Norse there were several words denoting what we today would call ‘honour’. Among the most common were *sómi* and *sæmð* – ‘that which is fitting’ –, *virðing* – literally ‘evaluation’, figuratively ‘esteem’, ‘regard’, *metorð* and *metnaðr* which meant ‘appreciate/judge’, either in concrete terms about material things or figuratively about people (Sørensen 1993, 188–189).³

All in all, concepts of honour are closely associated with the word *helgi*, a word used in Icelandic law texts to denote personal integrity. It is rendered in modern English with words like ‘esteem’ and ‘respect’ but means, literally, ‘sacredness’ (Sørensen 1993, 180–181, 191–192). This underlines the individual’s ‘sacred’ right to maintain his honour. If a person’s integrity is violated, this must be redressed. The scales of honour must be reset to restore the status quo between members of society. Within the framework of Icelandic law, even purely verbal insults could be avenged with death within a given deadline (Sørensen 1993, 182). Honour was not an unambiguous term, but a multi-faceted system that created a framework for the lives of all free men.

THE PROBLEM OF SOURCES IN CONNECTION WITH THE SAGAS OF ICELANDERS

As a genre, the Sagas of Icelanders differ from other sagas from the High Middle Ages in Scandinavia in that they are about Iceland’s ‘land-takers’, i.e. the first settlers to take up permanent residence in Iceland (Tulinus 2014, 148–149). This implies a historical problem: Are the Sagas of Icelanders narratives about the time the action takes place (9th–10th centuries), or are they legacies of the time in which

3. Steblin-Kamensky also mentions the words *vegr*, *frami*, *vegsemð*, *heiðr*, *hovuðburðr* and *drengskapr* as words that can be rendered as ‘honour’, without translating the individual words (1975, 98).

they were written (13th–14th centuries)? Are the notions of ethics and morality featured in the sagas to be ascribed to a heathen or to a Roman-Catholic Christian society?

The situation for *Egil Skallagrimson's saga* as regards sources is similarly problematic. By all accounts Egil Skallgrímsson was a man who lived approximately 910–990 AD (Lie 2003, 483, 487). It is reasonable to suppose that the saga gives some correct information about who he was. Most probably he was a tall, strong man, a capable Viking and an outstanding poet. The academic consensus concerning the work is that it was written in Iceland around 1230 (Sørensen 1993, 117). The Icelandic scholar Torfi H. Tulfinius believes that the saga has features that indicate that Snorri Sturluson was the author, but a definite conclusion about the authorship remains impossible (2014, 213–216).

Sørensen points out that the tendency in saga research has moved from ‘en synsmåde, hvor sagaerne betragtedes som troværdige historiske beretninger om den førkristne “sagatid”, til standpunkter, hvor sagaerne karakteriseres som mere eller mindre fiktive skriftprodukter, der hovedsagelig spejler forfatterens samtid, om overhovedet nogen virkelighed’ [a view in which the sagas are seen as reliable historical narratives about the pre-Christian ‘saga age’, to positions where the sagas are characterised as more or less fictional written artefacts that primarily reflect the author’s own time, if they reflect reality at all] (1993, 325). Tulinius, for example, in his relatively recent study interprets *Egil's saga* as being closely associated with Christian notions of penitence, and stresses that the work may have been written as a sort of public confession to mollify the conflicts between Snorri Sturluson and other prominent Icelanders (2014, 266–270).

Historian Jon Vidar Sigurdsson links Iceland’s literary activity to the monasteries and the residences of chieftains, and refers here to several clerical saga writers (2008, 184–185). He underlines the ‘double connection’ these clerical saga writers had: ‘De arbejdet ikke bare for sine klostre eller biskoper, men også for de verdslige lederne’ [They did not just work for their monasteries and their bishops, but for their secular leaders too] (2008, 185). Saga writing was an activity several chieftain clans had dealings with, not least in order to promote themselves in relation to other clans and to establish or preserve social differences through the saga’s narrative about class division.

The obvious role that pre-Christian notions of honour have in *Egil Skallagrimson's saga* indicate that they also influenced Catholic Iceland at the time the sagas were written. As Steblin-Kamensky points out: ‘Hemnarplikta voks fram under sosiale vilkår som framleis fanst på Island i sogetida, og dei var heller ikkje ute av verda på den tid då sogene vart skrivne’ [The duty of vengeance grew out of social

circumstances that still pertained during the saga age, and they had not disappeared at the time the sagas were written either] (1975, 99). The portrayal of pre-Christian Iceland puts the saga writer's own time in perspective. Sørensen maintains that the Icelandic saga writer tries to give an unadulterated presentation of the past 'as past' in order to show the difference between the contemporary situation and what was seen as 'det ægte islandske' [the real Iceland] of the saga narratives (1993, 147). Thus for Roman Catholic Icelanders, the pagan past too may have appeared as a golden age that gradually saw its relatively egalitarian society replaced by a more hierarchical system.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS ARTICLE

Sørensen's analysis of *Egil's saga* points to broad perspectives in the narrative using examples from the action. However, there is no analysis of individual episodes as a basis for a comprehensive view of the saga. The contribution of this article will be to analyse honour as motif and theme in *Egil's saga* on the basis of individual episodes. The aim is to throw light, specifically, on how notions of honour are manifested in practice in particular incidents and, more generally, on what expectations there were of 'a man of honour' in Norse times.

Where relevant, I will interpret the saga in the light of modern theories of honour in order to illustrate its relevance to our own times. According to journalist and critic James Bowman, honour is an impulse that has been latent in human beings throughout the ages as a sort of universal sense of justice (2006, 1). As such, it has certain features that should be recognisable also in our own times. At the same time, honour is 'en social norm med meget forskellig betydning og vægt [...] i forskellige samfund' [a social norm with very different meaning and emphasis [...] in different societies] Sørensen 1993, 187). Today's theories of honour can provide useful tools for shedding light on notions of honour in *Egil's saga* for the modern reader, while the use of such theories requires that significant distinctions between Norse and modern understandings of honour are identified and discussed.

EGIL'S SAGA

THE FARMER'S SON AND THE EARL'S DAUGHTER

Egil's paternal grandfather Kveldulf was the close friend of a man called Berdla-Kari who had two sons, Eyvind and Olvir. Berdla-Kari is referred to as 'a very wealthy man'. His son Olvir, with the nickname 'Hump', falls in love with Solveig 'the fair', the daughter of Earl Atli. Olvir asks to marry her, but 'the earl, not con-

sidering him worthy enough, would not marry her to him'. This upsets Olvir who reacts to this rejection by composing love poems about Solveig (ES 2000, 8–9). Earl Atli's sons then go to Olvir's home to kill him (ES 2000, 11). Olvir manages to escape and finds service in Harald Fair-hair's court as a skald.

The attitude attributed to the earl that Olvir is not good enough can of course mean that Olvir lacked the necessary personal qualities in the earl's opinion. At the same time, it is also conceivable that it is Olvir's lineage that is lacking. Although Olvir Hump is son of a 'wealthy' man, that does not mean that he is of noble family. If they are to maintain their reputation, the earl and other male members of the family cannot accept his daughter marrying a farmer. 'Ægteskaber på tværs av sociale skel må afvises, fordi de vil føre til social uorden' [Marrying across social divisions is rejected because it would lead to social disorder] (Sørensen 1993, 134). Maintaining the balance of prestige between individuals and families is crucial. However, an offer of marriage from a man of inferior lineage is not in itself offensive, precisely because the earl withholds his consent. So why do the earl's sons try to kill Olvir Hump?

In the Sagas of Icelanders, women are in principle passive as regards honour, according to Sørensen: 'Kvindens status og ære er den samme som hendes fars og brødres og efter ægteskabet deler hun den med sin mand og sine sønner' [A woman's status and honour is the same as her father's and her brothers', and after marriage she shares it with her husband and her sons] (1993, 214).⁴ In traditional honour-based societies, a man's honour is dependent on the behaviour of the woman. As social anthropologist Unni Wikan points out, this is, paradoxically, often connected with the fact that women in such societies lack any 'independent honour', but are part of and repositories of their husband's honour through their sexuality. This 'sex honour' means that the husband must compensate for any dishonour that the woman's sexuality incurs him. The notion of the husband's honour being synonymous with the family's honour clearly shows a patriarchal attitude to honour and gender.

'Sex honour' in the examples that Wikan mentions is an either/or issue. If honour is lost in connection with the woman's sexuality, only killing the woman can restore the family's honour (2008, 16–17). In the Sagas of Icelanders, however, honour is avenged or protected by killing the man, just as the earl's sons go to kill Olvir rather than using violence towards Solveig. Unlike in modern cases of 'sex

4. Sigurdsson points out that other scholars claim that women could have honour (2008, 87). However, in practice this interpretation of women's honour has little significance, because the means used by women to protect their family's honour (whether they had a personal stake in it or not) was for the most part the same: to goad the family's male members to action.

honour', saga women are not directly responsible for men's actions, excluded as they are from the use of violence by their gender.

In Icelandic law, love poetry (*mansöngur*) about women was forbidden, since it was seen as an offence to the woman and her family (Sørensen 1993, 202). As with 'sex honour', it is not the facts or realities that are crucial, but how the case is conveyed in public (Wikan 2008, 17, cf. Sørensen 1993, 200). Olvir Hump's love songs about Solveig are an offence regardless of the truth content of the verses. The offence impacts not just on Solveig's reputation, but primarily on the honour of her male relations.

It is also the duty of the men to avenge the offence. The father and brothers are members of the same honour group, which Frank Henderson Stewart defines as 'a set of people who follow the same code of honor and who recognize each other as doing so' (1994, 54–55). The code of honour consists of the actions each member of the honour group must carry out in order to retain the respect of the others and membership of the group. Within the honour group to which the earl's family belongs, it is obviously part of the code of honour to maintain the family's status and reputation. The earl does this by refusing Olvir his daughter's hand in marriage. When Olvir goes a step further and writes poetry about Solveig, the code of honour requires a reaction from the earl and/or his sons, because poetry about Solveig also offends the honour of the male family members. As Sørensen points out in connection with offences that take the form of poetry, the offended party can only effectively put himself in respect by avenging himself on the composer or conveyor of the poetry (1993, 202).

Why does Olvir compose poetry about Solveig when the consequences are potentially so disastrous for him? The answer is that he himself has an offence to avenge. A rejected offer of marriage is an offence against the suitor and his family (Sørensen 1993, 177). The love poems about Solveig are thus Olvir Hump's revenge against Earl Atli and his family. This offence must be answered with a new act of revenge unless the earl and his sons are to lose honour. When the earl's sons come to take revenge, they have 'far too many men for Olvir to fend off' with them that Olvir has to flee rather than take up arms (ES 2000, 11). The attack by the earl's sons is an attempt to show their membership of the same honour group as their father through a demonstration of their superior power and prestige. Nevertheless, the revenge is not carried out: Olvir flees to Harald Fair-hair. Their friendship means that a continuing feud would involve the earl's family coming into conflict with the king, in which case the opponent would be of a rather different calibre to a farmer's son.

MAN OF NOBLE BIRTH AND WOMAN OF HUMBLE FAMILY

Bjorgolf is a ‘powerful and wealthy’ baron in Harald Fair-hair’s service, although old at the time he is introduced in the saga. A banquet is held at Bjorgolf’s residence, and among those attending is a farmer by the name of Hogni, who according to the saga is ‘wealthy, outstandingly handsome and wise,’ but ‘came from an ordinary family’ (ES 2000, 14). At the banquet, Bjorgolf sits with Hogni’s beautiful daughter Hildirid. Later that autumn, Bjorgolf comes to Hogni’s farm with thirty men to hold a *lausabrullaup* – ‘a hasty wedding’ – with her.⁵ Hogni cannot do anything about this and allows Bjorgolf to wed his daughter. This is emphasised by the fact that Bjorgolf pays ‘an ounce of gold’ for Hildirid (ES 2000, 14), which is less than the statutory amount to be paid by the bridegroom in a marriage contract (Lie 2003, 482).

This episode is first and foremost an example of how yeoman farmers covered several social classes. As Sørensen points out, an ordinary marriage between Hildirid and Bjorgolf would have been socially unacceptable because of the difference in status (1993, 135). For a man of noble family like Bjorgolf it would be simply dishonourable to enter a proper marriage with Hildirid. To underline their lower birth and illegitimate status, Bjorgolf’s sons by Hildirid are uncompromisingly called ‘Hildirid’s sons’ in the saga, i.e. with a matronymic rather than a patronymic surname, as was the custom (ES 2000, 14).

The ‘Hildirid sons’ Harek and Hraerek are denied paternal inheritance by Brynjolf, Bjorgolf’s son from an earlier, legitimate marriage. Later Brynjolf’s son Bard denies them the same, and neither does Thorolf Kvedulfsson allow them any inheritance when he takes over Bard’s farm after his death. This leads to Harek and Hraerek slandering Thorolf to the king. Their lies win the sympathy of the king, and in the end the king kills Thorolf.

Bjorgolf’s ‘hasty wedding’ is not kindly received: ‘his son Brynjolf disapproved of the whole business’ (ES 2000, 14). Brynjolf’s attitude underlines the saga age’s view on the distribution of prestige and status: One should not marry below one’s class, because that involved a loss of prestige and thereby diminished honour. Similarly, one should not try to move above one’s station if one belonged to a lower social class (Sørensen 1993, 132). Harek and Hrearek’s personal shortcomings demonstrate that their origins are too humble to qualify them for a task meant only for men of noble lineage.

5. A *lausabrullaup* – literally, a ‘loose wedding’ – was an informal wedding where the bride became not much more than the man’s mistress (Lie 2003, 482)

Thus the saga shows a view of status and distribution of prestige as something static. This static system is maintained by notions of honour. Harek and Hraerek take over Thorolf's farm and duties, but are not up to the task: They collected less tax collection than Thorolf because they had less 'vegr' (honour, nobility) than him (ES 2000, 28; see Sørensen 1993, 135 for the sentence in Old Norse). The social equilibrium cannot be upset, and a change in this equilibrium has fatal consequences. This is the case for Hildirid's sons, who are killed by Ketil Haeng in revenge for the killing of Thorolf (ES 2003, 37–38). In the case of the hasty wedding, it is the farmer Bjorgolf himself who disturbs the social equilibrium, but this disturbance would not have had such serious consequences had it not been for the king's intervention.

HARALD FAIR-HAIR AND THE NORWEGIAN NOBLES

The first of the county kings to fall victim to Harald Fair-hair is king Huntjof. Solvi the Chopper, Huntjof's son, gives a speech to persuade king Arnvid and his men that they either must 'follow the course taken by the people of Naumdal who voluntarily entered servitude and became Harald's slaves' or 'defend your property and freedom by staking all the men you can hope to muster [...] against such aggression and injustice' (ES 2000, 10). And he continues: 'My father felt it an honor [*vegr*] to die nobly [*sæmð*] as king of his own realm rather than become subservient to another king in his old age' (ES 2000, 10; see Sørensen 1993, 138 for the Old Norse terms). Choice and independence are the cornerstones of honour, according to this view: 'For en mand af ære er den personlige frihed vigtigere end livet' [For a man of honour, personal freedom is more important than life itself] (Sørensen 1993, 138).

The king's son Solvi the Chopper describes the choice between fighting or serving the king in terms of a dichotomy: honourable freedom versus dishonourable thraldom. However, another scenario is outlined by Harald Fairhair's skald, the afore-mentioned Olvir Hump, when he at a later juncture tries to persuade Kveldulf and Skallagrim to enter King Harald's service. If they do, they will receive 'great honor from the king,' and were told 'how well the king repaid his men with both wealth and status' (ES 2000, 12). Both Kveldulf and Skallagrim refuse to comply, but Thorolf Kvedulfsson responds differently: 'It strikes me as odd for such a wise and ambitious man as you, Father, not to be grateful to accept the honor that the king offered you' (ES 2000, 13). These different attitudes to what is honourable and dishonourable come from two different conceptions of honour.

In the saga the king represents what Stewart calls *vertical honour*: ‘the right to special respect enjoyed by those who are superior, whether by virtue of their abilities, their rank, their services to the community, their sex, their kin relationship, their office, or anything else’ (1994, 59). The king demands obedience from all the country’s inhabitants and that they should grant him a particular honour. Vertical honour is, as Stewart defines it, an honour that is granted from below by those that acknowledge the superiority of another or of several others. However, in *Egil’s saga*, vertical honour is portrayed as being given from above, by the king. Nevertheless, it is implicit in the saga that those who enter the service of the king acknowledge him as superior and thus worthy of greater honour. As Sørensen points out, the king’s behaviour is ‘hævet over de normer, der gælder for frie mænds liv, ejendom og ære’ [beyond the norms that apply for the lives, property and honour of free men], which stands in opposition to Norse society’s traditional notion of equality between free men, in principle regardless of the titles of kingship and nobility (1993, 140).

Horizontal honour implies that a person is given ‘the respect [...] that is due to an equal’ (Stewart 1994, 54). This view of honour is similar to the one that prevailed in the statutes of the Icelandic Commonwealth (corresponding to the Swedish, Danish and Eastern Norwegian statutes of the time), where all free men and women were equal ‘når det gjaldt retten til kompensasjon i form av hævn eller bøder for drab eller andre krænkelser’ [as regards the right to compensation in the form of revenge or fines for killings or other offences] (Sørensen 1993, 177). In practice the tendency was more in line with the West Norwegian statutes, where the size of fines varied according to the status of the offended and the offending parties (Sørensen 1993, 185). It is interesting to note that within honour groups it was the possession of freedom rather than of property that was decisive here. In theory, all free men of the same honour group had the same rights and duties to avenge offences.

In the saga we see that the glory and honour the king has to offer demands obedience: King Harald ‘gave them the options of entering his service or leaving the country, or a third choice of suffering hardship or paying with their lives’ (ES 2000, 11). The traditional honour that Kvedulf and Skallagrim adhere to depends on the ‘sideways’ acknowledgement of their peers and presumes the freedom of choice: ‘Bondens ære beror traditionelt på hans ret til frit at bestemme over sin person, sin ejendom og sin familie og dens relationer til omverdenen’ [A yeoman’s honour resided traditionally in his right to decide over himself, his property and his family and its relationship to the outside world] (Sørensen 1993, 144).

In his theory of honour, Alexander Welsh divides the moral spectrum into two categories: obedience and respect (2008, 5). The obedience category implies an acceptance of an authority's higher status and subordination to its demands. The respect category is based on consensus, and it is this category that Welsh identifies with honour (2008, 5). In the saga the king demands obedience from all members of society and thus removes them from the duties of honour. The honour that demands respect between members of society has no basis any more, because ultimately it is loyalty to the king that gives prestige and 'honour'. The king excludes himself from the yeomen's honour group and behaves as if he is no longer bound by the code of honour that initially prevails between all free men.

Vertical and horizontal honour are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but can be overlapping categories (Stewart 1994, 61). Thus there is room for vertical honour within the framework of the horizontal honour of traditional Norse society, mainly in the form of titles of nobility, earldom or kingship. For example, Kvedulf acknowledges King Audbjorn's right to demand services from him by virtue of his superior status (vertical honour), but as free men of equal personal integrity, Kvedulf can also refuse to serve the king when the latter's demands exceed Kvedulf's obligations (horizontal honour) (ES 2000, 10).

King Harald Fair-hair, on the other hand, accepts no overlap between vertical and horizontal honour. To use Welsh's categories, one must choose between obedience and respect. In the course of time, the general development in society, also in Iceland, was towards a sort of vertical conception of honour (see Sørensen 1993, 129, 146). Egil Skallagimsson, for example, a constant opponent of Eirik Bloodaxe's regime, finally offers to enter the service of king Hakon, Athelstan's fosterson (ES 2000, 131). By that time, however, the conflict between Egil and the royal lineage has escalated to a level where friendly relations between them are out of the question from the king's point of view.

ATHELSTAN AND EGIL

However, one king that Egil manages to establish friendship with is King Athelstan. Egil and his brother become Athelstan's liegemen and help him to conquer King Olaf, who poses a serious threat to Athelstan's rule. Thorolf dies in battle. Egil survives, but is clearly dissatisfied when he sits in King Athelstan's hall during the victory banquet:

Egil sat down and put his shield at his feet. He was wearing a helmet and laid his sword across his knees, and now and again he would draw it half-way out

of the scabbard, then thrust it back in. He sat upright, but with his head bowed low. [...]

When he was sitting in this particular scene, he wrinkled one eyebrow right down on to his cheek and raised the other up to the roots of his hair. Egil had dark eyes and was swarthy. He refused to drink even when served, but just raised and lowered his eyebrows in turn (ES 2000, 90).

What is the reason for Egil's strange behaviour? Obviously, the loss of a brother could be expected to have an impact also in Norse times, but Egil's behaviour is openly hostile to the king he has just been fighting for. With his helmet on his head and his sword halfway out of its sheath, he is clearly picking a fight with the king. King Athelstan's response is as follows:

King Athelstan was sitting in the high seat, with his sword laid across his knees too. And after they had been sitting there like that for a while, the king unsheathed his sword, took a fine, large ring from his arm and slipped it over the point of the sword, then stood up and walked across the floor and handed it over the fire to Egil (ES 2000, 90).

Egil accepts the gift and seems most satisfied. In addition, King Athelstan gives him two coffers of silver to take back to Iceland. It seems plausible that this 'performance' is about honour: Egil thinks that Athelstan owes him recompense for the loss of his brother. This is at least Athelstan's justification for one of the coffers of silver: it is meant as 'sonargjöld' – payment for a son – to Kvedulf. Egil will receive 'bróðurgjöld' – payment for a brother – from Athelstan, 'land or wealth, whichever you prefer' (ES 2000, 91).

At the same time, Athelstan's presentation of the ring implies a symbolic act. He rises from his throne and walks over to Egil. Although the king has higher status, according to Sørensen the two men are for a moment symbolically equal: there is freedom and equality between them on a personal level (Sørensen 1993, 128). The relationship between King Athelstan and Egil is described as friendly⁶ throughout the rest of the saga, with Egil being given the right to decide whether to remain with Athelstan as his liegeman or not (ESS 2000, 121). This shows a

6. According to Sverre Bagge, friendship in Norse times involved primarily 'en konkret handling, bl. a. i form av generøsitet' [a specific action, for example in the form of generosity] rather than being just a feeling. A Norse friendship was 'sannsynligvis både det vi ville kalle vennskap og det vi ville kalle allianse' [probably both what we would call friendship and what we would call an alliance] these days (1986, 153–154).

mixture of vertical and horizontal honour: The king's superior status to Egil is acknowledged, while at the same time Egil is granted freedom in a relationship where both parties' personal integrity is respected. This is clearly the saga's ideal. It is worth noticing that this takes place in the relatively distant setting of England, rather than in Scandinavia (Sørensen 1993, 129). When the saga was written in the 1230s, this was a utopian ideal in Iceland too.

EGIL'S 'STAKE OF SCORN'

Egil's conflict with King Eirik is at its worst when Eirik refuses to support Egil in his feud with the king's liegeman Berg-Onund. Egil responds by killing Berg-Onund and the king's son Ragnvald. Afterwards Egil places a horse's head on a pole and thus erects a *níðstöng* – a 'stake of scorn' – against Eirik and Queen Gunnhild and against their subjects until the king and queen are expelled from the country. He carves the *níð* [scorn] into the pole in runes (ES 2000, 106).

Níð is a ritualized form of verbal abuse which questions a man's honour by calling him an animal, a thrall, sexually deviant or something similar. The point is to claim that the man the *níð* is aimed at is not worth the respect of others, and thus is not 'a man of honour'. The truthfulness of the accusation is not crucial, it is the offence itself (Sørensen 1993, 199). Egil's *níð* does not offend Eirik directly through accusation, but rather indirectly through the placing of a horse's head on a pole to imply a comparison between the horse and the king. At the same time, Egil's *níð* is in the nature of a curse, as is emphasised by the carving of runes into the pole.⁷

Níð must be avenged, no matter what: 'Hvis ikke hævn kan gennemføres, så er konsekvensen tab av prestige og status for den krænkede' [If revenge cannot be accomplished, the consequence is loss of prestige and status for the offended party] (Sørensen 1993, 197). It is interesting to note that Egil's *níð* remains standing, unavenged by King Eirik. Hakon, Athelstan's foster son, takes power in Norway and expels him. Eirik becomes King Athelstan's *landvarnarmaðr* [protector of the land] and gets Northumberland as his domain (ES 2000, 109).

Thus it can be said that Egil's curse works and that Eirik loses his reputation by virtue of both the unavenged offence and his expulsion from the throne of Norway. However, while Eirik does not manage to have his revenge on Egil, his queen

7. The other occasion in which Egil carves runes in the saga is when he cures a sick girl. A boy has tried to carve a spell to make the girl fall in love with him, but has done it wrong, making her sick. Only when Egil burns the runes the boy has carved, and carves new ones, does the girl recover.

Gunnhild does what she can to facilitate it: ‘It is said that Gunnhild had a magic rite performed to curse Egil Skallagrimsson from ever finding peace in Iceland until she had seen him’ (ESS 2000, 109). The result is that Egil becomes restless, sails to England and is shipwrecked on the coast of the country King Eirik has been made ruler of.

HOVUÐLAUSN – THE HEAD RANSOM

Egil suddenly finds himself in the clutches of his arch-enemy. He considers escape, but calculates that it would not be possible, ‘considering it unmanly to be caught fleeing like that’ (ESS 2000, 110). Therefore he rides straight to the king’s castle and takes contact with his friend Arinbjorn, who has a close relationship with both Egil and Eirik. Arinbjorn accompanies Egil to the king and asks the king to spare his life. The following day Egil presents a poem in honour of the king, and Arinbjorn says he will fight to protect Egil if the king tries to kill him.

King Eirik is in many ways a cowed man, stripped of power, majesty and honour – at least in comparison with his former position as king of Norway. At the same time, he now has one of his worst enemies exactly where he wants him. Both Arinbjorn and Egil portray Egil’s arrival as intentional. Arinbjorn even claims that Egil is showing the king ‘great honour’ by travelling so far to make reconciliation’ (ES 2000, 111). However, as Tulinius points out, Egil’s offences against Eirik are so great ‘that he deserves execution many times over’ (2014, 149–150). And the king himself says to Egil that he ‘had no hope of my sparing your life’ (ES 2000, 111).

It might seem natural to imagine that it is Egil’s poem, a ‘drápa’ consisting of 20 verses, that saves him from the king’s vengeance. That is also implicit in the name usually given to the poem – *Hovudlausn*, or Head Ransom, meaning that Egil ransoms his head with a panegyric to the king. However, it is more correct to say that it is Arinbjorn’s defence of Egil that makes Eirik spare him (Tulinius 2014, 149–150; Lie 2003, 285). Arinbjorn is the king’s foster brother and has fostered one of the king’s own sons. This was a well-known method of creating alliances between different classes (Sørensen 1993, 134, 176).

Arinbjorn has served under the king for many years. His obligations to the king are, formally speaking, greater than to Egil. But saga characters ‘agerer [...] som individ, ikke som medlem av en gruppe’ [behave [...] as individuals, not as members of a group] (Sørensen 1993, 172). Thus Egil’s friendship with Arinbjorn can be more important to him than loyalty to the king; and it seems indeed that it is Egil’s friendship Arinbjorn values most. Sigurdsson calls this sort of friendship ‘fatal’, since it meant a friend might cost you your life (2008, 82).

It is clearly dishonourable for the king not to avenge himself on Egil, even though Egil literally begs the king for a settlement. Egil has killed several of the king's men and even his son Ragnvald. Even so, the king seems surprisingly passive, probably because Arinbjorn's support for Egil gives him the choice between two evils: to wreak vengeance on one of his worst enemies and at the same time kill one of his most loyal men, or, on the other hand, to tolerate the dishonour, even if Egil's poem is a form of compensation. The king chooses to let Egil go. This is clearly against the wishes of Queen Gunnhild.

QUEEN OF HONOUR

On several occasions Queen Gunnhild is portrayed as the one with the gift of the gab and with the clearest understanding of what the code of honour requires of her husband. She points out what dishonour it will bring if Eirik lets Egil go and argues that Arinbjorn has been richly rewarded for his service to the king and thus owes more loyalty to the latter than to Egil (ES 2000, 114).

Gunnhild's position is both similar and in contrast to other women in the saga. Hildirid and Solveig are from relatively humble and noble backgrounds respectively, but in both cases their marriage is determined solely by the men of the family. Gunnhild's marriage to King Eirik is referred to in similar terms: 'One spring Eirik Blood-axe made preparations for a journey to Permia [...]. and on the same journey he married Gunnhild, daughter of Ozur Snout, and brought her back home with him' (ES 2000, 59). As an unmarried woman she is an object like the other women in the saga. However, right from her first mention, Gunnhild appears in a special light, described as being not only 'outstandingly attractive,' but also 'wise, and well versed in the magic arts' (ES 2000, 59).

There are several occasions where Gunnhild seems more preoccupied with honour than the king. When at the beginning of his reign King Eirik allows Egil to remain in Norway after killing the king's liegeman Bard, Gunnhild reproaches him: 'Even though you happen to think Bard's killing was insignificant, I don't' (ES 2000, 77). Gunnhild shows herself to be an exemplary case of the strong saga woman who, while excluded from the arena of violence herself, goads her husband to action (Sigurdsson 2008, 87). In the conflict between Berg-Onund and Egil, the king intends to let the courts decide the outcome, whereupon Gunnhild openly scorns the king's lack of initiative: 'How peculiar of you, King, to let this big man Egil run circles around you. Would you even raise an objection if he claimed the throne out of your hands?' (ESS 2000, 98).

Gunnhild uses here traditional goading, often termed *fryja* or *hvotr* in Old Norse, which bears many similarities to *níð* since it often involves a man being accused of womanliness or of lack of initiative in defending his and the family's honour (Sørensen 1993, 238–239, 245). Goading is always directed towards the man and comes from someone close to him who is unable to carry out the necessary revenge themselves. Often it is the mother or the wife that goads, but it can also be the father. The purpose is to direct revenge against a third party; the aim of Queen Gunnhild's goading is to get Eirik to take revenge on Egil (Sørensen 20013, 239).

If revenge is not carried out, it means, according to Sørensen, that the offended and offending parties have swapped esteem and status (Sørensen 1993, 197). This is probably what is meant in Gunnhild's reproach: 'Would you even raise an objection if he claimed the throne out of your hands?' We can interpret the comment as meaning that failure to avenge will lead to Egil swapping status with Eirik.

Unlike the average woman, Gunnhild is not satisfied with just being a 'guardian of honour' (Sigurdsson 2008, 87). When her husband does not act, she goes a step further and gives the orders she thinks should have been given. She commands her two brothers to kill 'one of Skallagrim's sons, or preferably both' (ES 2000, 78). When the king wants to allow Egil to bring a legal case against Berg-Onund, it is Gunnhild who breaks up the court: 'Where are you now, Alf Askmann [Gunnhild's brother]? Take your men to where the court is sitting and prevent this injustice from coming to pass' (ES 2000, 98).

Here she goes beyond the traditional woman's role and assumes male characteristics. Honour could demand that of a woman if her husband was too lax about defending honour: The ideal woman of the Sagas of Icelanders can 'overskride grænsen til mandens kønsrolle' [transgress the border to the male role] when honour requires it (Sørensen 1993, 237–238). At the same time, this transgression marks the border between the sexes. When Eirik's honour and prestige are at stake in his last meeting with Egil, Gunnhild has no real power: Egil leaves the king's hall unharmed.

THE FEMALE SKALD

On Egil's journey to Varmland, he and his men spend the night with a farmer called Armod. Armod serves the travellers soured milk and pretends that is all he has, but the wife and daughter tell Egil, in a poem recited by the daughter, that he should soon 'expect to be served something better'. And sure enough, there is

soon plenty of food and drink, ‘ale was brought in, an exceptionally strong brew’ (ES 2000, 138). Egil’s men are plied with ale until it makes them unwell, and Egil ends up drinking the ale they are served, because it is bad manners not to drink what the host offers.

Finally, Egil can take no more. He walks across the floor to Armod and vomits in his face. Armod, himself the worse for wear, responds by vomiting on Egil. After this, Armod walks out, leaving Egil and his men to sit drinking throughout the night. At daybreak Egil goes over to where Armod is sleeping and draws his sword to kill him. But the wife and daughter beg him to spare his life. «Egil said he would spare him for their sake — ‘That is the fair thing to do, but if he were worth the bother I would kill him’» (ES 2000, 140).

As well as illustrating notions of honourable hospitality and the possible consequences of shortcomings in this area, the episode shows Egil’s acknowledgement of Armod’s wife and daughter. Could it be said that the women here behave with honour and are seen as repositories of honour? It is evident, at least, that Egil refrains from killing Armod because the women, unlike the host, have shown courtesy and hospitality, and that Armod would have lost his life if it had not been for them.

Could it be said that the wife and daughter perform a sort of exchange of gifts with Egil, where the women’s revealing of Armod’s lie is repaid by Egil by sparing the host’s life? As historian Sverre Bagge points out, the exchange of gifts presupposes a basic equality (1986, 154). When the exchange happens between unequal parties, the difference in status is made apparent by one of the gifts being greater than the other, for example material goods versus loyalty. The ‘gift’ the wife and daughter give to Egil (hospitality) is less than the one Egil gives them by sparing Armod’s life, thus underlining his superior status. Egil’s acknowledgement of the women’s conduct is perhaps an appreciation of their integrity, on a par with what was usually reserved for men of honour.

It is assumed that honour on the part of women, if it existed, was an upper class phenomenon (Sigurdsson 2008, 87). Armod seems to be a wealthy farmer, but not so powerful that Egil cannot find his way to his bedchamber unhindered. Armod’s lineage is not mentioned, probably a sign that he is not of noble birth (Sørensen 2003, 175). Thus the episode underlines a respect for and an acknowledgement of women that do not belong to the upper class. On the other hand, we see that whatever ‘honour sentiment’ there is, it takes a different form with these women than with Queen Gunnhild: Armod’s wife and daughter do not openly chide the lord of the house and neither do they goad him to respond to Egil’s insult. The reasons for this might be that such chiding can be interpreted as an offence against Armod, or

that Armod is not much of a match for Egil. If the daughter's poem about there soon being served better food and drink is to be interpreted as a reproach to her father, he certainly dismisses it by giving her a cuff (ES 2000, 140).

The demonstration of a form of 'honour' by Armod's wife and daughter is probably a result of the lack of it on the part of the master of the house. Armod shows himself to be simply an 'honourless' man. Egil emphasizes this by cutting off 'Armod's beard close to the chin' and gouging 'out one of his eyes with his finger, leaving it hanging on his cheek' (ES 2000, 140). The beard cutting is a concrete expression of the accusation often implicit in *níð*, namely that the man has feminine characteristics. Similarly it could be said that Armod's wife and daughter assume 'masculine' characteristics by behaving as close to the ideal of a male host as was possible for them. When Armod's daughter expresses greetings from her mother to Egil in the form of a poem, this can also have been a way of demonstrating honour to Egil.

In a continuation of the tradition from the Viking Age, poems in 13th century Iceland were used 'til at kaste glans over både digteren og digtets gjenstand' [to add lustre to both the poet and the object of the poem] (Sørensen 1993, 107). Skaldic verses were revered by Icelandic scholars just as classical Roman poetry was and 'repræsenterede også i sin menneskeopfattelse og etik noget, der i højmiddelalderen måtte opleves som oprindeligt islandsk, og som et naturligt led i sagaernes fremstilling af mennesker og deres bedrifter' [represented in their ethics and perspective on humanity something that in the High Middle Ages was seen as authentically Icelandic, and as a natural element in sagas' portrayal of people and their actions] (1993 105, 110).

Egil Skallagrímsson distinguishes himself by reciting a poem in the approved fashion at the age of three (ES 2000, 51–52). Armod's daughter is 'aged ten or eleven' when she presents her poem to Egil (ES 2000, 138). Although he is in a class of his own both by virtue of being a man and having presented a verse at a much younger age, there is a striking parallel. The fact that Armod's daughter can present a verse places her in an old tradition with a cultural value on a par with classical European poetry. Skalds often came from 'distinguished families' that were 'usually richly rewarded by kings' for their poems, which bears witness to the prestige skaldic poetry had in Norse times (Sigurdsson 2008, 179). The fact that a girl is presented as having such talents means that she is elevated to a sphere of prestige and skills normally reserved for men. This is all the more striking considering that Armod's daughter is otherwise so insignificant that the saga does not even mention her name.

THE EARL'S POET DAUGHTER

When Egil is banqueting in Earl Arnfinn's hall, he is placed, by drawing lots, next to the earl's 'attractive and nubile' daughter. While she is occupied with walking 'around, keeping herself amused', Egil sits on her seat and when she returns she composes an insulting verse about him: 'What do you want my seat for? / You have not often fed wolves with warm flesh [...]' Egil answers her with a verse that responds to the insults, and they have a merry time together the rest of the evening (ES 2000, 76).

Here the earl's daughter demonstrates her superior status to Egil, even reciting a verse with clear similarities to poetic *níð*. If she had been a man, Egil would probably have avenged the offence with his sword. He chooses to respond with a verse presumably because she is a woman. Thus their 'verse sparring' is seen as an expression of the young woman asking who Egil thinks he is, and Egil answering and thereby demonstrating that he is a capable fellow, no less gifted than her and a match for any man in terms of accomplishments.

With regard to the rare examples of young women being portrayed as independent individuals, Sørensen concludes: 'Den ugifte kvinde har [...] som litterært motiv fået en værdi i sig selv; men i almindelighed har hun mindre vægt i islændingesagaerne end den unge, ugifte mand' [As a literary motif [...] the unmarried woman achieves a value of her own; but usually she has less focus in the Sagas of Icelanders than young, unmarried men] (1993, 230). In *Egil's saga*, the daughters of Armod and Arnfinn achieve just such a literary value. As was the case with the 'equal' friendship between King Athelstan and Egil, the daughters of Armod and Earl Arnfinn are both situated in distant locations and a distant past. The women may represent a utopian ideal of a relationship between a man and a woman based on the art of the skald, where artistic skills are given most emphasis. Should one of the parties suffer an offence, violence is not an option because of the gender difference. However, should insults of the sort the earl's daughter utters be presented man to man, quite a different response is required of the offended party.

HONOUR AND THE CHRISTIAN – OBEDIENCE AND RESPECT, MORALS AND HONOUR

In our preliminary quote, Thorstein kills the thrall Thrand because he grazes another farmer's animals on Thorstein's land. Before the killing, honour is explicitly mentioned in the exchange between the two when Thrand says: 'You're more stupid than I thought, Thorstein, if you want to risk your honor by seeking a place

to sleep for the night under my axe' (ES 2000, 171). However, Thorstein manages to kill the thrall, and also emerges as victor from the feud with the thrall's owner.

The saga tells us that Thorstein 'stood firm if others imposed on him' (ES 2000, 180), a clear indication that he adhered to his society's notions of honour also after the killing of Thrand. There is clearly no contradiction between this and the reference to him in the saga's epilogue where we are told that he 'was baptized when Christianity came to Iceland' and 'was a devout and orderly man' (ES 2000, 184).

When Christianity was introduced, the material and political conditions in Icelandic society were not greatly different from what had prevailed in Norway before the advent of the monarchy and in Iceland during the settlement period. It was still up to every man to protect his property and his honour, regardless of whether Iceland adopted a new religion. Thorstein Egilsson thus had no material reasons not to 'hold his own if anyone went against him', and it seems reasonable to suppose that he followed the pre-Christian ideals of honour just as much after embracing Christianity as before.

Steblyn-Kamensky maintains that honour in the form that emerged in Norse society was due to the lack of a 'public penal system' of punishment that could safeguard the wellbeing of its citizens (1975, 106). From this perspective, conceptions of honour were the very prerequisite for a society if it was to maintain a certain degree of peace. In theory, when royal power was consolidated and a monopoly of violence established, the need for these notions of honour disappeared. The life and property of each citizen was now protected by the state, rather than by each individual (Steblyn-Kamensky 1975, 107).

Using Welsh's concepts, Iceland's transition to a vassal state under the Norwegian crown could be said to lead to a development from a more or less egalitarian honour-based society founded on mutual respect to a hierarchical society based on obedience to the authorities. The distinction between obedience and respect corresponds to the distinction that Sørensen points out between morals and honour, where he emphasises that morals are 'funderet i overordnede autoriteter, først og fremmest den kristne læres' [based on superior authorities, primarily Christian teachings], while honour traditionally 'har deres fundament i den offentlige mening' [has its foundation in public opinion] and as such is determined by a form of equality (1993, 308).

However, the distinction between morals and honour, or obedience and respect, obscures the fact that honour could be conceived as having pre-eminence. When honour is referred to as 'ein moralsk skyldnad' [a moral duty] by Steblyn-Kamensky (1975, 93), 'absolute imperatives' by Bowman (2006, 27) and 'a kind of moral imperative' by Welsh (2008, ix), it implies that honour is closely connected

with morality. It is also difficult to see why honour cannot just as easily be associated with something external, like moral conceptions, as something internal for the individual.⁸ When Sørensen comments that the hero in the classical saga is *unable* to show weakness for the sake of his reputation, this may point in the same direction (1993, 329). The notion that respect assumes equality between the involved parties is not necessarily inherent in the concept. Perhaps Stewart's concepts of vertical and horizontal honour are more applicable also when defining honour, as he does, as 'a right to respect', whether from your equals or your inferiors/superiors (1994, 21).

The saga's relatively deadpan remarks about Thorstein's honour and Christian conversion indicate that the introduction of Catholic Christianity did not mean a sudden break with notions of honour. However, in western culture Christianity contributed significantly to a weakening of the concept of honour, standing in constant tension to it. This was because honour in 'primitive' societies (like pre-Christian Scandinavia) was understood as 'bravery, indominability and the readiness to avenge insults or injuries for men', which was never compatible with Christianity, 'the religion of humility and turning the other cheek', according to Bowman (2006, 21).⁹ In the west, Christianity's constant pressure on honour culture forced it into a value system that made it quite distinct from honour in non-Christian societies. For example, the Catholic Church in Iceland actively opposed the conceptions of honour that prevailed in contemporary society. It called for humility, urging people to refrain from defending personal and family honour – according to Sigurdsson, 'a powerful attack on the traditional conception of honour' (2008, 85).

CONCLUSION

Norse concepts of honour as demonstrated in *Egil's saga* are part of an intricate system that both encompasses and is encompassed by gender, social prestige, status and descent. The saga exhibits two views of honour that intersect each other: The 'horizontal' view that was hung on to in Iceland and the 'vertical' view which prevailed when Iceland became a vassal state under the Norwegian crown.

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8. This may possibly be connected to the distinction between external and internal honour. This distinction is thoroughly explained, discussed and rejected by Stewart (1994, 12–21).
 9. Bowman's formulation of the universal teaching of honour is: 'You can't expect, when you get somebody, that they won't get you back' (1). This directly contradicts Jesus' commandment: 'If someone strikes you on the cheek, offer him the other one as well, and if someone takes your coat, don't keep back your shirt, either!' (Luke 6, 29).

Kveldulf and later Skallagrim are portrayed as ‘men of honour’ in the horizontal sense when they set the boundaries of their loyalty, demanding a freedom the king cannot accept. Egil shows the same attitude to honour, but moves inexorably towards accepting a form of vertical honour, primarily by offering his services to King Hakon.

The saga portrays women as objects, among them Solveig the fair and Hildirid. However, the saga’s depiction of women as objects is more a reflection of historical realities than discriminating generalisations. Female honour may be seen expressed in Gunnhild’s goading of King Eirik. But she steps beyond this and takes a most unusual role for a woman when she gives orders to the king’s men and plans to kill Egil and his brother. In addition to this traditional manifestation of female honour, the episodes involving Armod’s and Earl Arnfinn’s daughters show that poetry, or, more specifically, the art of the skald, is an arena where the saga allows for greater respect and acknowledgement of women’s skills.

When seen as objects, women are property on a par with other possessions. If a man assaults a woman, it is the woman’s closest relation that has the moral duty to avenge the offence. There are many similarities here with what in modern terminology is called ‘sex honour’, and with the honour killings that result from it. However, in the saga women are excluded from the violence, and vengeance is perpetrated not against the woman who, as the object of the offence, inflicts dishonour on the family, but against the man who, as the subject of the offence, inflicts a loss of family honour. Solveig’s brothers therefore direct their revenge on Olvir, not on Solveig, when he writes poems about her.

Marriage to Solveig would have meant increased prestige for Olvir. One of the fundamental problems of the notion of honour is that a man *must* avenge an offence. A man who remains passive in a competition over prestige between men loses honour and is thus not worthy of respect from his fellow human beings. However, a man’s place in this ‘competition of honour’ is still associated with certain social duties and tasks based on social status, which in turn is related to family relationships. It is apparently Olvir’s descent that stands in the way of his marriage to Solveig. Olvir fails with regard to the most important means of acquiring honour: namely taking honour from men who have a higher status and prestige. By contrast, Egil manages on several occasions to inflict a loss of honour on others, thus gaining honour at their expense, not least through his *níð* towards Eirik which is never properly avenged.¹⁰

10. Another example is the duel with Berg-Onund, where Egil kills one of the king’s men and appropriates his property.

Honour in the saga is interwoven with what Sørensen calls ‘personal integrity’ (1993, 180). As such, notions of honour were an expression of every individual’s right to maintain his integrity, his *helgi*. Every person with a statutory right to honour, which in the saga and in Icelandic society meant free men and women, also had the right to protect this honour with life and limb – and could, with the law on their side, kill another person for an insult.

Such attitudes stand in sharp contrast to Christianity’s ideals of humility. Catholic Christianity and Norse conceptions of honour are not portrayed as incompatible in *Egil’s saga*, although that does not necessarily mean that the saga writer saw Christian values and conceptions of honour as mutually compatible. It is part of the ‘objective’ style of the Sagas of Icelanders that the narrator abstains from comment on what is being told, letting the tale speak for itself. In reality, the traditional honour culture was actively opposed by the Catholic Church in Iceland. In the course of time, the influence of Catholicism contributed to a weakening of honour as a cultural phenomenon in society.

Honour is still crucial in *Egil’s saga* and is portrayed as a system that is present in every social connection, in every meeting between people. A host who denies his guests good food and drink, a man who sings of his love for a woman, a thrall herding sheep on the wrong ground – all of them challenge the person they encounter to choose between revenge or loss of honour. Thus in the Sagas of Icelanders a world is revealed where it was to be expected that honour was involved in all dealings with other human beings. Even when conflicts could be resolved peacefully, a man perceived publicly as having been offended against would often have to respond violently in order to maintain honour – sometimes regardless of whether he felt offended or not. On many occasions in *Egil’s saga* notions of honour lead to the individual asserting his right to integrity at the expense of the well-being of others. If a person is to prove his right to respect, his actions must be ruthless and unambiguous. The price of integrity is therefore often paid at the expense of another’s life.

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Honour, sagas and trauma *Reflections on literature and violence in 13th century Iceland*

TORFI H. TULINIUS

ABSTRACT It has long been recognized that the mechanisms of an honour-based society are expressed in the narrative form of the *Íslendingasögur*, or Sagas about early Icelanders as they are called. These sagas were written in the thirteenth century but the events described are supposed to have taken place in the ninth and tenth centuries. I will briefly discuss the findings of several scholars on this question and then widen the discussion to the contemporary sagas which were composed in the same period but relate contemporary events. Though the latter sagas are more bound by detail and reality in what they describe, they also reveal the same structures of revenge. They also reflect the concerns of a society which is going through an exceptionally violent period in its history. Some of the texts show a deep understanding of the effects of trauma on the human psyche. In the main part of my paper, I will suggest how this understanding finds expression in the more literary compositions of the Sagas of Icelanders, some of which may be understood as efforts to reconstruct a troubled identity in traumatic times.

KEY WORDS saga | honour | trauma | psychoanalysis | death instinct

There seems to be no doubt that our culture, i.e. early 21st century Northern European culture, formulates the sacredness of the individual in a very different way than that of the example of a traditional honour culture which is the subject of this paper, that of medieval Iceland (Wührer 1956–78). We who live in the societies of Western Europe that have gone through the Enlightenment, de-secularisation, the rise of human rights and the establishment of a welfare society are no longer in an honour-based culture. The sacredness of each individual is enshrined in his rights, which are the same for everybody, regardless of gender, race, social status, ability or disability, etc. (Taylor 1989). In an increasingly globalized world, however, we

can be confronted with people who still belong to an honour culture (Grzyb 2016). It is important to understand these differences in order to avoid cultural clashes, especially if our sense of the inviolability and freedom of each individual is challenged by differences in culture.

There are, however, at least some emotional aspects of human behaviour that transcend the different social and cultural constructs. This is nowhere better apparent than in great works of literature which find ways to express this, thereby going beyond the limitations of culture and society to create an understanding of one's own humanity and that of others, even though these others can be at quite a great distance from us both in time and space. The literary experience gives us the opportunity to understand each other's humanity across the borders of culture, class, gender, etc. (Black 2010).

This paper will proceed in three stages. First an episode from one of the so-called contemporary sagas will be summarized. It is a tale of traumatic killings and bloody revenge. There is a curious awareness of trauma and its effects on the psyche in the way this story is told in the saga which will be the object of a second section. Finally, it will be suggested that this awareness may have played a part in shaping another saga that many believe to be the greatest work of literature from the Nordic Middle Ages, *Njáls saga*.

For those who have no previous knowledge of the medieval Old Norse-Icelandic literature, a few elements must be kept in mind. The saga is a form of narrative that was mostly developed in Iceland in the 12th and 13th centuries, but at a time when the relationship between Iceland and Norway was very close, as the countries shared a common language, a common past, submitted to the authority of the same archbishop and soon to the same king. The sagas are prose narratives which often include poetry. There are many types of sagas, but here I will only mention two of them which are relevant to this paper: the contemporary sagas, narratives about events which happened more or less during the lifetimes of the authors of the narratives, and Sagas about early Icelanders or *Íslendingasögur*. Written in the same period as the contemporary sagas, the Sagas about early Icelanders describe characters and tell of events that are supposed to have happened in the lives of those who settled Iceland around the year 900 and those of their immediate descendants, the generations that live in Iceland until it was converted to Christianity in the year 1000 (Clunies Ross 2010).

These two types of sagas are in many ways similar. Their main characters are Icelanders. They combine prose and poetry, use narrative techniques to some extent derived from oral story-telling and present themselves as accounts of events that really happened. More importantly for our purposes today, they are both

clearly the expression of a society which is based on honour and its corollary, i.e. revenge. There is by now a long history of scholarship on the links between sagas and honour culture, starting with Theodore M. Andersson (1967) and leading to Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (1993), William Ian Miller (1990) and Jesse Byock (2001). Indeed, cycles of revenge and counter-revenge structure most of the sagas from each group. This is to be expected since this was also the way society functioned in Iceland in this period. Honour and revenge structured the social relations. And the sagas are not only interested in the honour of male property owners and fighting men, but also to a lesser extent in that of very young or old people, some of them destitute and friendless. Women also play a role in the honour game (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, 15–25).

However, of the two groups of sagas, the Sagas about early Icelanders are closer to what we would call today fiction than the contemporary sagas. Their authors are less bound by fact and detail than those writing about events they either witnessed themselves or know that members of their audience may have witnessed. Indeed, the Sagas about early Icelanders are more governed by artistic design which can shape – consciously or unconsciously – the plot, the characters and the underlying structures to a greater extent than the contemporary sagas. This does not mean, as we shall see presently, that the authors of the contemporary sagas are not interpreting the events in the way they tell them and in their choice of what to say and what not to, and that their works are not also governed by literary norms and conventions (Úlfar Bragason 2010).

GISSUR AND HIS REVENGE

The main character of the story which will now be told is the first and only earl of Iceland, Gissur Þorvaldsson. For many decades, he has participated in the strife between the leading families of Iceland. 15 years before the episode related here, in 1238, he overcame in battle the leading members of another family and killed many of them, sometime with his own hands. Though some kind of settlement has been achieved, there is nevertheless a strong urge for revenge in that family (*Sturlunga saga*, 629–630).

In the winter of 1253 Gissur narrowly escapes death when his farm at Flugumýri in the Skagafjörður district is attacked by members of this family and his wife and three sons are killed in the battle and burning of the farm. This is truly an encounter with death. Gissur is the prime target of the attack and his escape borders on the miraculous. He hides in a barrel full of sour whey in the freezing cold. The saga describes how he shivers so violently that the liquid is splashing, until

the enemies approach and then he is as still as a corpse. When they have gone, he seeks refuge at the nearby church where one of his sons dies of wounds suffered during the battle (*Sturlunga saga*, 641). Gissur is nearly senseless with cold but recuperates when a woman warms him in her lap. The next morning he comes back to his farm and watches when the bodies of his wife and son are being carried out of the ruins. Of his son, all that remains is the roasted flesh contained by the armour he was wearing. The only body part left of his wife are her breasts. He says to his cousin Páll who is with him: ‘See cousin. This is my wife Gró and this is my son Ketilbjörn.’ Then he turns his face away and tears can be seen flying like hail from his eyes (*Sturlunga saga*, 642).

Gissur’s psyche has been subjected to severe trauma: he was nearly killed himself, and has suffered in his flesh. More acutely, he has lost the wife he has loved for decades and with whom he had three grown sons ready to inherit the power he received from his forebears, but was also able to increase by his own strength, cunning and leadership. These sons are lost to him. The day before the burning he was celebrating the wedding of one of them to the daughter of a member of an opposing family, an event which was supposed to usher in a new era of peace between the warring factions in the country. Gissur is devastated. His behaviour in the aftermath of the burning seems to have fascinated the author of this account, Sturla Þórðarson, who though not present was personally involved in these events (Úlfar Bragason 2010, 182).

Gissur’s reaction upon seeing the grotesque body parts of his wife and son is noteworthy. They have been reduced to meat, roasted meat carried by servants, reminiscent of the food that was presented to the guests at the feast the evening before. It is difficult to imagine a more direct confrontation with our materiality and perishability. What does Gissur do? He gives names to these pieces of roasted meat: ‘this is my wife Gró’. ‘This is Ketilbjörn, my son.’ He restores their humanity, brings them back into the realm of meaning, of intersubjectivity, puts up defences against the atrocity of the real. He then turns his face away and emotion takes over, but he keeps it to himself. He will not allow himself to be overwhelmed by the catastrophic event.

Later that winter he composes a stanza of which here is the first half:

Enn mank böll þats brunnu
 bauga Hlín ok mínir,
 -- skaði kennir mér minni
 minn --, þrír synir inni

(*Sturlunga saga*, 644)

(I can still remember the evil when my wife and three sons were burned inside. My loss teaches me to remember.)

Gissur is a battle-hardened man by this time. He is in his late forties. As far as we know, no major catastrophe has impacted his life. He is a respected leader and has mostly had the upper hand in his dealings with other chieftains. His defences are therefore strong. Nevertheless he must make an effort to recover, to deal with his ‘skaði’, i.e. his trauma. It is interesting to note that he says that it is loss which teaches him to remember. There is one aspect of trauma that is worth thinking about in this context. It is that it escapes consciousness. The memory of the trauma is ungraspable but we must try to reconstruct it in order to regain our humanity. In a way, the trauma opens up the possibility of memory (Caruth 1996, 1–9).

The second half of Gissur’s stanza is as follows:

Glaðr munat Göndlar röðla
gnýskerðandi verða,
-- brjótr lifir sjá við sútir
sverðs --, nema hefndir verði

(*Sturlunga saga*, 644)

(The warrior, the breaker of swords who lives in sorrow, will not be glad unless revenge takes place.)

This is a declaration of intent and it is indeed what will happen. Gissur is determined to kill as many of his assailants as he can and he is able to do so. Let us note however the importance of the emotional aspect of revenge. Revenge is a way to get over the loss, to repair the effects of the trauma. This is far from being unknown in the world of the sagas, both the contemporary ones and the more fictional ones, be they legendary or historical. Gissur’s cousin Kolbeinn kaldaljóss died of grief after the slaying of his son he was unable to avenge (*Sturlunga saga*, 546). Egill Skalla-Grímsson is supposed to have composed the elegy *Sonatorrek*, i.e. on the impossibility of avenging the sons, after his son dies by accident when his boat capsizes in a storm (*Egils saga*, 242–245). Kári, in *Njáls saga*, cannot sleep after the burning down of Bergþórshváll, until he also embarks upon a campaign of bloody retribution.

The striking thing about the contemporary saga’s account of Gissur is how interested he seems to be in this emotional aspect. While the author insists on Gissur’s dignified restraint in the scene I just commented, in the subsequent episodes, he pays much more attention to Gissur’s emotional volatility. Gissur is fidgety, on

edge, frustrated when burners manage to escape or if he feels that the ones that have been slain in revenge are not sufficiently high in rank compared to those he has lost. It is as if the author of the saga understands how long it takes for a soul to get over an experience such as Gissur has gone through. And how exacting revenge relieves the suffering. It is not until one of the highest born of the attackers, Kolbeinn grön, an impressive warrior and close cousin of the Sturlungs, is killed that he begins to feel satisfied.

Shortly afterwards, the author tells us, he takes a young mistress that he soon comes to love dearly.

Why does the author choose to inform us about this? I believe it is because of his interest in and intuitive understanding of the psychological effects of trauma. As modern research shows, people are more or less resilient and much depends on their psychological strength, i.e. the effectiveness of their defence mechanisms. Gissur is a strong personality and does not fall into the melancholic impossibility to grieve which Freud analysed in a famous essay. Instead he is able, after having achieved retribution, to find a new love object to replace the lost ones. He remains nevertheless quite volatile and a few months later, the author describes how close Hrafn Oddsson, who knew of the imminent attack but did not warn Gissur, is to being killed or maimed by Gissur when they find themselves together. Heeding the advice given to him by his uncle, Teitur Ála-son, Hrafn acquiesces to Gissur's every demand, avoiding at all costs to contradict anything that Hrafn says. Later, Gissur says that he did not know what had kept him from killing or harming Hrafn, as he had intended to. I believe that it was Teitur's advice not to give Gissur any reason to fly into the murderous rage that he is prone to after the burning. Gissur is still a victim of what we would call today post-traumatic stress disorder. He is always potentially at the mercy of the blind rage within him. It is important to refrain from doing or saying anything that might provoke his anger.

DEATH INSTINCT AND LITERATURE

The first great study of psychological trauma was Sigmund Freud's 1920 *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In this famous essay, Freud presents and speculates about his observations of patients suffering from what was then called 'war neurosis' or 'shell-shock', known today as 'post-traumatic stress disorder'. The strange thing about these patients – and it contradicted some of Freud's earlier theories – is that they were constantly revisited in their dreams, or rather nightmares, by the traumatic event that they seldom if ever were aware that they were thinking about.

Indeed, says Freud, a trauma victim spends her or his waking hours, deliberately albeit unconsciously, **not** thinking about it. What puzzled the founder of psychoanalysis was the suffering induced by the reliving of the trauma in the dream: sweating, trembling, sensations of intense fear. It contradicted his claim that we fulfilled our deepest unconscious desires in our dreams. Why relive a painful event by dreaming about it instead of confining it to sweet oblivion?

The contradiction might only be apparent. However, Freud's observation of shell-shock victims did not deter him from continuing to see dreams as the 'royal road to the Unconscious', or indeed other forms of behaviour also, such as jokes, works of arts or parapraxis, more commonly known as Freudian slips. However, a new dimension was being added to the Unconscious, which induced Freud to rethink his theory of drives. As if his insistence on the importance of the Libido in the human mind – not to mention his theory of infantile sexuality – were not troubling enough, he now postulated the existence of a second even stronger drive than Eros, a drive he came to call Thanatos or the death drive. Freud's idea that we are not only governed by the search for gratification, i.e. the pleasure principle, but that there is a force within us conspiring for our demise, i.e. the death drive, is an extremely disturbing one and still makes even many a psychoanalyst bristle at the mere mention of it.

What can happen to us when we live a traumatic event, i.e. an accident, the violent death of a loved one, an attack, rape, or just being witness to one or the other of these terrible things? It is, in some cases at least, as if our system has been saturated by the violence of the attack on our senses – by the stimuli as Freud would say – and shuts down because it cannot cope with it. This happens especially if we haven't been prepared for the event, if we haven't rehearsed in our minds beforehand what is going to happen in order to prepare our defences. Indeed our defences have not functioned at all, we have not been able to deal with the stimuli and our consciousness has closed down or at least is in a dramatically altered state. Nevertheless, the trace of the event subsists and even though we are not aware of it, it remains with us in an urge to revisit the psychic wound and repeat symbolically the traumatic experience again and again and again. This entails the neurotic weakening of a self which is unable to grow away from the trauma and condemned to relive the debilitating maiming of its defences unless it finds a way, through therapy, art or through obsessive compulsive behaviour to make some kind of peace with it.

As said earlier, the contradiction with the ideas of dreams as a wish-fulfilment might only be apparent. Indeed, one aspect of the traumatic event, the experience of acute physical danger to the self, but also the denial or almost nullification of

the autonomous self through rape, is that the subject is exposed to what death is. Freud called it the ‘quiescence of the inorganic world’. The death drive would be – and he concedes that this is just speculation – an inbuilt mechanism to be found in all life forms that aims at engineering the end of their own lifespan, to return to the tranquillity of pure material existence.

This confrontation with one’s own nothingness inherent in the traumatic experience poses, as the literary theorist Cathy Caruth argues in her book *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative and History* the enigma of survival (Caruth 1996, 58). Why do we continue to live after having been exposed to our inevitable obliteration? The trauma victim feels – possibly more strongly than others – the terrifying pull of the death drive. Caruth underlines the paradoxical nature of the way trauma works. We both know and do not know what it is and how it affects us. This has to do with on the one hand the unknowability of a situation in which all our psychic defences have been breached and we are thrown out of language and representation. On the other hand – and this is the paradox – the traumatic event, which has imprinted itself into our Unconscious is organizing, without us knowing it, the way we think, the way we make meaning out of our experience, the way we construct reality, our everyday life but also our intellectual and artistic productions.

EXPRESSION IN LITERATURE

I come now to the *Íslendingasögur* or Sagas about early Icelanders. Most scholars now believe that they appear as a literary genre in the decades from 1210 to 1240 or 1250, i.e. a period in which there was much more violence in Iceland than ever before or after (Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 112–116). Armed confrontations involving hundreds, even thousands of men, multiple acts of revenge in cycles spanning decades: the cutting off of hands, arms, feet and legs, killing, maiming, burning down farms. Even women and children fell victim to this violence.

Given the fact that Ari Þorgilsson was already writing about the history of Iceland in the Settlement period and leading up to the Conversion period, in both his conserved and lost works of the early 12th century, and since we also assume that there was, throughout that century and before it, a lively tradition of oral saga entertainment which also involved stories of settlers and their immediate descendants, one could ask: Why didn’t the written *Íslendingasögur* appear earlier?

Several explanations could be offered which won’t be discussed here; however, a possible contributing factor will be proposed. It is certainly not the only one but perhaps an important one, especially in giving many of these texts the particular

power they have. It is that the Sagas about early Icelanders were written during troubled times, that the traumatic experiences so many of the authors and members of the audience of these sagas went through, both directly and indirectly, shaped them as works of art. In other words, that it was ‘skaði’, i.e. the damage, the loss, that taught them ‘minni’ or memory, that induced them to work through their trauma by remembering, exploiting, recreating in their narratives a past which expressed this trauma.

Readings of several of the sagas could be proposed from this point of view, but none, to my mind is as shaped by the peculiarities of the death drive as *Njáls saga* (Tulinius 2015).

One of the distinctive features of this saga is how many of its characters go willingly to their deaths. This is true of the main protagonists: Gunnar decides to return to Hlíðarendi, despite Kolskeggr’s and Njáll’s previous warnings that it will bring about his death (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, 181–183). Njáll, Bergþóra and Skarpheðinn all show in some way that they are willing to die, as does Flosi at the end of the saga (326–330; 463). This is also true of many minor characters, such as Þjóstólfur. He obeys Hallgerðr when she tells him to go find Hrútr after he has killed her husband Glúmr, even though he suspects why she sends him there. The same could be said of Kolr, Atli, Þórðr Leysingjason and other characters involved in the series of vicarious murders committed by Hallgerðr and Bergþóra in their feud (50; 93; 99; 107). They all know what their involvement in the killings will bring upon them.

This is also true of the Norwegian Þórir, who doesn’t want to fight Gunnar but, when prodded by his Icelandic hostess, goes to battle though he knows it will mean his death. Gunnar’s brother Hjörtr also chooses to fight though his death has been foretold in a dream. Not to be forgotten on this list is the young Þórðr Kárason, who prefers dying with his grand-parents, Njáll and Bergþóra, to surviving them (155; 156; 330).

Closely connected to the ideas of foreshadowing and death are the noun ‘feigð’ and the adjective ‘feigr’. A study of the complete corpus of the sagas about early Icelanders reveals that in all of them except *Njáls saga* it only occurs at the most three times and in many not at all. In our saga both noun and adjective happen for a total of ten times. Of course, it is the longest saga belonging to this particular genre. Nonetheless, the density of these occurrences suggests that the author took a particular interest in the idea that the living were destined to die.

Gunnar himself uses the noun in a remarkable way in chapter 68. His brother is warning of a possible danger and he replies: ‘Koma mun til mín feigðin, segir Gunnar, hvar sem ek em staddr, ef mér verðr þess auðit’ (168). ‘Death will come to me no matter where I am,’ said Gunnar, ‘if such is my fate’. What is unusual here is the

choice of the expression ‘að vera einhvers auðit’. It is a positive word, suggesting good fortune, but here Gunnar uses it with the word ‘feigð’ which means ‘approach, or foreboding of death’. This is the only occurrence of this word with this expression and it increases the impression that Gunnar’s attitude to death is quite positive.

One wonders why. Gunnar is a great warrior but also a peaceful man who avoids conflicts, though he will defend his honour when it is challenged. He usually shows forbearance but he can also be carried away by his own ability to fight. Though he kills many men, he doesn’t like it: ‘Hvat ek veit, segir Gunnarr, hvárt ek mun því óvaskari maðr en aðrir menn sem mér þykkir meira fyrir en öðrum mönnum at vega menn’ (139). ‘What do I know, says Gunnar, whether I am less of a man than others, because it affects me more than others to kill people.’

Despite his self-control, Gunnar has strong emotions. He can display anger but he is also a faithful friend to Njáll as well as a loving brother. Finally, he is open to feelings of lust as can be seen in his brash and ill-fated decision to marry Hallgerðr. It is a ‘girndarráð’ or ‘decision based on lust’ and this seems to be the opinion of the saga’s author (87). Here we come to the famous scene, later in *Njáls saga*, when Gunnar changes his mind about leaving Iceland for the three year exile which was one of the terms of the settlement he agreed upon after the killing of Þorgeir Otkelsson. Gunnar’s horse has stumbled on its way to the ship that will take him abroad. Gunnar has dismounted, turns back and sees his home and the surrounding country-side and it has never seemed more beautiful to him (182).

This scene has been interpreted in different ways over the years. Quite a few think that Gunnar is actually referring to Hallgerðr, who stayed behind at Hlíðarendi, and that the meadows and fields stand for her hair and other sexually charged attributes (Helga Kress 2008, 40). It was once brought to my attention that what Gunnar is watching is not only his farm but also the place where his grave-mound will stand, since it was probably on the flatland between his farm and the sea.

Perhaps that mixed feelings is the correct way to describe Gunnar’s emotions at this moment. Indeed, there is no reason to reject any of the interpretations of what is going through his mind. He could be feeling love for his home, and also want to stay with Hallgerðr, the object of his lust. He is also deliberately going against the advice of his two most trusted friends, Njáll and Kolskeggr, who both have said he would die if he didn’t honour his promise to leave the country for three years. Gunnar is a man of strong and conflicting passions, but he doesn’t like them and is never happier than when he has been freed from them and sings alone but content in his grave-mound.

It is indeed quite striking in this context that Gunnar is never portrayed as particularly gay or joyful except when he is seen revelling in his grave mound after

his death (193). There is one exception to this, and that is when he comes to Alþingi after his successful journey abroad. Here he is ‘light-hearted and merry with everyone’, but it is only a matter of hours or days before his fateful encounter with Hallgerðr, who goes out of her way to be attractive to him (85). Blinded by lust he hastily decides to marry her, despite Hrútr’s warnings. It is as if the saga is telling us that sexual passion can only bring tragedy, and that happiness is only achieved by steering clear of desire. That there are close links between exacerbated sexual passions and the death drive is in accordance with Freud’s theory of the interweaving of life and death drives: Eros is serving Thanatos.

The ineluctability of programmed death in the saga is nowhere more striking than in the episode when Flosi dreams that a man steps out of the mountain Lómagnúpr to the west of his home and calls Flosi’s men to him (346–348). The men are called in the order of their death, and also in clusters which shows that their deaths will occur at different moments in the future. From the perspective of Freud’s theory of the death drive, this is a particularly interesting scene for at least two reasons. The first is that it comes to Flosi in a bad dream, not a good one which fulfils his wishes as in Freud’s earlier theory where the pleasure principle prevails. In his nightmare Flosi is living the trauma to come, when so many of his followers will be killed, most of them by Kári, who the saga tells us is lying awake in his bed thinking of his loss at the same time Flosi has his nightmare. The second reason is that here the idea of future death is not presented as an expression of somebody’s insight or foreknowledge but as something which is inherently uncanny: a mysterious man with a no less mysterious and intimidating name coming out of a mountain.

It is no coincidence that Freud was working on his essay *The Uncanny* at the same time he wrote *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The death drive is in itself uncanny. The idea of a force within us that is working towards our disappearance is not only counterintuitive but deeply unsettling. It is however also a fact of life, in the sense that we all grow old and die, that our own passing is already programmed. But Freud’s theory is not a mere statement of this all too well known reality. What troubles us, as in his theory of the Unconscious in a more general way, is that there is a force within us we do not control and do not like. Not only are we not masters in our own house, as in Freud’s famous formulation, but there is an enemy within.

The figure of Skarpheðinn has long fascinated readers of *Njáls saga*. He is indeed an unusual character and in many ways unique in saga literature. In the first part of the saga, he stays in the background, obeying his father and supporting his friends. When he takes a leading role it is almost without exception to commit violent deeds, like killing Þráinn and later his son, but also to destroy his and his fam-

ily's chances of garnering support for their cause after the slaying of Hǫskuldr Þráinsson and finally to ruin the settlement that at last had been reached after much effort by many good people. As Síðu-Hallr says at this occasion, Flosi and he are obviously 'ógæfumenn', men of misfortune (314). He also takes the lead when he decides to obey his father on the night of the burning and retreat into the farmhouse, though he knows it means their death (326).

This would be sufficient to connect Skarpheðinn to the death drive in what could be called the psychodynamics of the saga. He has other aspects that add to this impression. He is in many ways an uncanny figure. He is very often described as pale and betrays strong emotions that he nevertheless does his best to repress. One of his defining characteristics is his mysterious grin which he displays at numerous times in the saga (96; 98; 114; 299; 304; 327). There is something strange about this grin, as if he takes pleasure in negative things, and enjoys being provocative.

This is particularly true in his behaviour at the Alþingi when he and his brothers are seeking support from major chieftains in the lawsuit which follows Hǫskuldr's slaying. This episode is of special interest in relationship to the death drive. It is a series of five scenes which are all structured in the same way and all repeat with variations the identification of Skarpheðinn. As we have seen, repetition is closely related to the death drive, and though there are significant differences between each of the five scenes, it is the repetition that makes them remarkable as well as the fearsome and uncanny behaviour of Skarpheðinn. This eeriness is suggested to the reader in several ways, among others in the way the four successive chieftains describe him. Of particular note is that one chieftain calls him 'tröllsligr' ('like a troll') and another that he is 'so dreadful that it is as if he had walked out of a sea-cliff' (297–306). During this episode, there is something out of the ordinary about Skarpheðinn that awakens a sense of unease in those who meet him, as if death itself were among them. The latter comparison is particularly interesting because of the parallel between Skarpheðinn and the giant, who as we have seen announces the death of those whose name he calls.

As in Freud's theory, repetition is the way in which the elusive death drive makes itself known. It is as if some hidden force has taken over, both human and escaping the control of humans. The only way to stop it is to break the chain of revenge and counter-revenge as Gunnar does after the killing of his cousin Sigmundr, but also Síðu-Hallr by renouncing compensation for his son's death later in the saga. This has – correctly to my mind – been interpreted as part of an underlying Christian message of the saga. As it tells us, both Gunnar and Síðu-Hallr seem to lose honour but actually they don't. Gunnar receives a belated and generous compensation for the cousin he has lost. More importantly, his friendship with

Njáll will help him defend his honour in the future. Síðu-Hallr's speech at the Parliament where he renounces claiming any fines for the killing of his sons brings him much praise and casts him in the role of a Christian hero of peace.

His humility as well as Gunnar's are not sufficient, however. The death-drive cannot be stopped and its destructive forces always prevail at the end.

CONCLUSION: RECONSTRUCTING A TROUBLED IDENTITY IN TRAUMATIC TIMES

The Icelandic chieftains – as did most medieval laymen – displayed a curious blend of Christianity and violent pragmatism, for example in this other scene from the same contemporary saga involving again the same Gissur, some ten years later. He is now earl over Iceland and one of his enemies – and also his cousin – Þórður Andrésón, has been trying to kill him but has fallen into Gissur's hands. After some hesitation, Gissur has decided to have him executed. As he is being taken to the place of execution Þórður says: 'I would like to ask you, earl Gissur, to forgive me for what I have done to you.' Earl Gissur answers: 'I will, when you are dead' (*Sturlunga saga*, 756).

The Icelandic chieftains have to use revenge to protect themselves. Otherwise, they would constantly be attacked. But they are also aware of another set of rules and values, those of Christian charity and forgiveness. They live with these contradictions as this example shows. But it is a painful cohabitation.

In their works of art, however, the authors of the sagas were also able to communicate to us over the centuries about other deeper forces, forces that perhaps transcend culture and society and are possibly the source of every civilisation's discontents: these terrible destructive forces that inhabit us all.

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5

The value of the face

Face, fear, flaw and shame in an Irish king's saga

JAN ERIK REKDAL

ABSTRACT Rekdal presents a reading of one Old Irish King saga, *Echtra Fergusa maic Léti*. Rekdal concentrates on an important honour motive in literature: how honour and shame are connected to the human face and bodily descriptions. Rekdal interprets the tale as an exposition of the meaning and implications of honour-price: The fact that the honour price of a person refers to a word for face underscores how central both face and façade are to honour and to shame; a king whose face is tarnished is no longer fit to rule his kingdom.

KEY WORDS honour | shame | values | loss of face

tāinic Fer Diad leisna techtaib hīsin [ar] ūamun a imderchta dōib *for fear of his being put to shame/made to blush by them* (as a result of satire), **TBC**² 2215 (DIL).¹

The greatest fear in early Irish sagas and tales seems to be made to blush: your face should remain unmarked by outer and inner turmoil. In the above quote we hear about a warrior-champion's fear of being made to blush by others (cf. 'ūamun a imderchta' lit. transl. 'fear of his being made to blush'). The verbs used for blushing are expressing to become red: *ruadaig*, *imdergad* both containing an adjective for red ('ruad', 'derg'). Blushing would, of course, reveal a kind of inner turmoil hence the fear of blushing. Whether the shame is a result of the blushing or the blushing a result of the shame, however, is sometimes hard to say as the face or the appearance

1. DIL: Dictionary of the Irish language (eDIL on the internet), TBC² = Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Yellow Book of Lecan

is supposed to remain untouched and therefore anything that may change it should be shunned.² In the case under discussion in this essay, however, the actual shame can be concealed as long as it does not show. Also for a king – who is the exemplum of a warrior – fear was a great challenge that had to be tackled. Sometimes, however, the fear becomes overwhelming with catastrophic results, an example of which is the well-known king Suibne – a protagonist of the twelfth-century saga *Buile Shuibne* ('Suibne's frenzy'). Suibne's fear at the battle field which becomes a kind of madness makes him incapable of ruling and remaining as king.

The word for face often semantically representing only a part of the face seems to refer to appearance or, façade, more than a restricted meaning of face. In other words it is first and foremost a matter of appearance and façade. We recognize it in the universal importance held by the aristocracy in keeping up appearance.³

The text on which the following analysis is based is the Irish king's saga *Echtra Fergusa maic Léti* ('Fergus mac Léti's expedition'). The saga belongs to the early Irish king tales which in the nineteenth century were labelled the 'Historical Cycle' as they are regarded by historians as historical rather than legendary. In many cases this may be questioned, as none of the tales is contemporary with the king described (Rekdal 2011, 211). Fergus is described as a king of the mighty old kingdom of Ulster that was fragmented and diminished in the fifth century. These king tales tend to criticize royal conduct explicitly or implicitly, so also this tale.

The saga exists in two old Irish versions both closely related to Old Irish law. One version makes up the introductory part of the law called *Cetharshlicht Athgabálae* ('The four divisions of distraint') which is the first law mentioned in the extensive collection of laws *Senchas Már* – and can be dated to the middle of the seventh century.⁴ The other version is part of the commentary to the same law-text *Di Chetharshlicht Athgabálae* ('On the four divisions of distraint'). This commentary is dated to the middle of the eighth century by Daniel Binchy who edited the saga in 1952 (*Ériu* 16, 33–48). From this it is clear that the saga was used as an illustrating example of what the law discusses: distress as part of the compensation of gold and silver, discussed in detail below. The distress in the saga is a woman who gives herself as distress in lieu of her son.

2. The connection was pointed out as early as in the late ninth-century Cormac glossary (*Sanas Cormaic*) which names the blushing in the cheek *náire* 'shame' (*Sanas Cormac* ed. by Meyer in *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts* IV, p. 85, par. 883 (*recte* 993). Cf. also, O'Leary (1991, 25).

3. Cf. the play *Don Ranudo de Colibrados* (1723) by Ludvig Holberg where the gentry's prestigious vestments indicating their stand are so worn and thorn at the back that they can only expose their front and are forced to move sideways (on the stage).

4. Liam Breathnach, *Companion to the Corpus iuris Hibernici* (Dublin, 2005) 338–346, 344

The tale consists of two episodes that may seem not to be well integrated or fused. The first relates how Fergus mac Léti is offended with the ensuing episode about how he gains knowledge that enables him to go under lakes (except for one particular lake) and his confrontation with a sea-beast that frightens him to such a degree that his face becomes distorted by fear, a beast that he finally conquers. Binchy claims that ‘the story about Fergus had nothing whatever to do with the origin of the the primitive legal remedy known to the Irish as *athgábail* [“distrain’t”].’ In regard to this Jacqueline Borsje (1996, 19, n. 47) points out that the tale could serve legally ‘as precedent or *casus* because a woman (together with land and valuables) was distrained’: ‘Without this woman the story loses its point,’ she argues. There is, however, another link to the theme of distraint, if one permits a perhaps wider definition of having your offences compensated according to your wish and not necessarily according to law, as in both cases it is a matter of compensation for offence and that is the compensation offered Fergus by the dwarfs (*lúchorpáin* ‘small bodies’) who try to capture him in the second episode, or part, of the tale, but fail and are confronted by Fergus and offer to compensate for the offence.

The focus of my reading of this tale here, however, is to interpret it as an exposition of the meaning and implications of honour-price (*lóg n-enech* ‘the value of the face’). The fact that the honour price of a person refers to a word for face underscores how central face and façade is to honour and to shame; a king whose face is tarnished is no longer fit to rule his kingdom. This has been precisely formulated by Philip O’Leary discussing laughter in early Irish literature (‘Jeers and Judgments: Laughter in Early Irish Literature’ 1991, 25): ‘For when a person whose self-image is a reflection of public opinion, whose existence achieves meaning only in a social context, is rejected... by that opinion and denied that context, he is in effect stripped of his very identity.’ O’Leary realizes the ambiguity of the word ‘enech’ mentioning our tale only in passing without discussing it (21–22).

The tale opens with Fergus giving regular safeguard (*snádud*) to one of three chieftains who are at war with each other. All three belong to the Féni – one of the peoples living in Ireland at the time (according to the narrative), while Fergus himself belongs to the Ulaid – the Ulster-people. Eochu Bélbuide, one of the chieftains, seeks exile with Fergus. Later on when Eochu returns to his own tribe asking for peace he is killed by six men. One of the killers is the son of Dorn (‘fist’) a chieftain’s daughter who begot the boy with an outlander (*deorad*). In the ensuing settlement of the injustice inflicted on Fergus by killing a man that was in Fergus’ protection, the law demands that this young assassin either must be punished by

death or his mother take on punishment on his behalf since the family does not acknowledge her child with a foreigner. The others can compensate for the punishment of murder by payment, whereas the progeny fathered by an outlander will be punished to death. A foreigner is not legally responsible for the crimes committed by his offspring, according to early Irish law, as he finds himself outside the law. In such cases, however, it is the family on the mother's side that is responsible for the compensation of the offence. In one recension of the text, it is mentioned that the boy was conceived without the family's knowledge or approval. In lieu of her son Dorn gives herself up in lifelong bondage to Fergus. In addition to receiving Dorn as slave Fergus is compensated by land, gold and silver measured out among the other five that inflicted the injustice on him. The exact price or his exact, legal demand (*a riar* – 'his demand') is specified: 3 x 7 *cumal* (a value entity: a female slave, or its equivalent). So he received 7 *cumal* of gold and silver, 7 *cumal* of land, and a female slave.⁵

A free man's status was reflected in his honour-price (*lóg n-enech*, eg. 'price of face'). Unfree men had no such price. The price was exacted to compensate for insults or injuries inflicted on the person himself. It would vary as to the degree of injury, like murder, satire, refused hospitality or, as in this case, ignoring protection, etc. The compensation is assessed according to the honour price corresponding to the status of the injured party.⁶ As Fergus is king, the price is high.

This first episode works in many ways as a frame-story to the next which describes how Fergus lived thereafter – a life in which the female slave, Dorn, plays a minor, but crucial part. In this part Fergus goes on an expedition to the sea accompanied by his charioteer. At the shore they fall asleep and while sleeping Fergus is captured and brought out to sea by *lúchorpáin* – (probably 'small bodies', later forms with metathesis were anglicized into 'leprechaun'⁷) – a kind of submarine creatures. They are also referred to as *abacc* (dwarf). Fergus captures three of them with his hands, and they beg him to release them. So he will provide that he gets the following compensation: knowledge (*eolas*) that enables him to travel under seas, pools and lakes. They agree to give him that knowledge with the

5. There are some inconsistencies here which I do not see relevant for our discussion. They are, however, pointed out and discussed by Borsje (Borsje 1996: 22, n.58)

6. Charles-Edwards points out in his famous article "Honour and status in some Irish and Welsh prose tales" (1978: 130) discussing the corresponding Welsh term *wynebwerth*: '...*wyneb* ('face') is honour and not status: yet *wynebwerth* 'face-value' is determined by status. The reason for this is that public shame destroys the value of status and hence wrongful insult must be compensated according to status."

7. Binchy 1952, 41, n. 2

reservation of not going into Loch Rudraige which is actually situated in Fergus' own territory (possibly Dundrum Bay or Carlingford Lough in Co. Down).

Overcome by temptation Fergus goes into Loch Rudraige. There he is confronted by a monster (*muidris*) which is described as a horrible sea-beast (*peist uiscide uathmar*). At the sight of it Fergus' mouth was wrenched back as far as the back of his head, and he came on land in terror (*ar omon*). On the beach, he asks his charioteer: 'How do I appear to you?' The charioteer confirms that his countenance (*gné* – a word for 'face' is not used here) is bad and advises him to go to sleep in order to let the sleep adjust the deformity of his face. He is laid down and falls to sleep.

The king has attracted a flaw or defect that does not make him fit to continue as a king; a king had to be flawless. While Fergus is asleep the charioteer consults the wise men of Ulster about the king's distorted face. He asks who they shall replace him with as it would not be proper to have a blemished king. The wise men suggest removing all the people of the court who could in any way make the indiscretion of mentioning the blemish to the king – 'throw his blemish into his face' as the text says (*toirbeitis a ainme ina inchaib*⁸). When he had his hair washed, he should be on his back so that he might not see his reflection in the water. This lasted for seven years.

Then somebody 'threw his blemish into his face'. One day Fergus wanted the maidservant Dorn to wash his hair. He thought she was slow and hit her with a horsewhip (*ech-fhlesc*). Humiliated Dorn 'threw', resentfully, the 'blemish in his face' (*dobi a an(a)im fria enechsom* – we note the expression again that the blemish is 'thrown against his face'). It is as if the utterance of the words fixes or attaches the blemish on the face and not the blemish in itself. If the blemish can be unsaid, not hidden, the status quo may be upheld.

The king reacts by cutting her into two pieces with his sword and proceeds immediately down into Loch Rudraige. The sea seethed from the contest between him and the sea-monster and after a day and a night he appeared on the surface of the loch and shows the head of the beast to the Ulstermen saying 'I am the survivor (*tiugba*)' – until he fell down dead. For a whole month the water remained red. It is noteworthy that the first part of the name Rudraige seems to be a variant of the adjective 'ruad' (red) as has been pointed out by Ruairí Ó hUiginn (1993). It is relevant to ask whether there is a wordplay going on in the tale that interconnects the fact of blushing of shame with the reddening sea which for a month remains red from blood after the killing of the sea-monster. Binchy seems to be of the same

8. *Inchaib* is dative plural of *énech* often used for a face as the original meaning of the word seems to be brows or cheeks (cf. eDIL – Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language).

opinion when he suggests that it might have been ‘intended as an “etymological” explanation of the name Loch Rudraige’ (Binchy 1952, 44, n. 3).

What should we make of this ending? When told by the slave woman that his face was blemished Fergus realized that his position was untenable. He could no longer continue as a king. This happened as the slave woman spoke out about his blemish that had hitherto been kept a secret from him and from the people in general. Once it is said aloud, it is made public and the public opinion will reject him. It is clear from the question he asked his charioteer when he came out of the sea that king Fergus himself dreaded that the fright he experienced during his meeting with the terrifying sea-monster may have had deformed his face. His charioteer even told him that it had, but promised that it would go away by sleep. Thus Fergus was well aware that his kingship was at stake. As, however, no step was taken to replace him, one could say that Fergus was led to believe that his face had been cured by the sleep. It must, then, have been a shock for him to realize that he had been deceived for seven years. As his position as king is doomed he can at least try to conquer that which took from him his kingship without risking other than his life: the sea-monster. This will prove his prowess. So he goes immediately down into the loch in order to kill the monster. Thus he dies as a result of violating a prohibition and promise which brought on the shame of being frightened and that fear caused his blemish; his death at least is marked by courage – a virtue for a war-leader and champion. This reveals how the blemish is part of something shameful: fear. A king and warrior-champion should not show fear. The fact that Fergus immediately after being told about his blemish enters the forbidden loch may be read as he trying to amend the shameful state he had brought himself into. By venturing to fight the beast that frightened him so that he was blemished he is showing courage. As he finally conquers it his exclamation serves to demonstrate his virtue of prowess: I, the king, am the survivor and not the beast.

It should be noted that blemish could imply any physical flaw. The flaw, however, needs not to be in the face – the seat of honour and shame – but also loss of limb like king Nuadu who loses his arm, and his kingship, in the tale called *Cath Maige Tuired* (‘The Second battle of Mag Tuired’). It is the physical flaw, wherever it is, that has honour removed from the face and replaced by shame. Consequently, the person has no longer an honour-price. That it in this case is the face, I take it to underscore the consequences a blemish has for a person’s honour-price (*lóg n-enech*), it refers to a literal meaning of the term. The word used – *enech* – was probably still used generally for face when these texts were written in the eighth century. According to DIL, it is supposed that it originally meant eyebrow or cheek more than face as such (‘face, countenance’) and it occurred (therefore)

often in plural form (cf. *ina inchaib* – as is used in the tale). In Old Irish it may seem to appear mostly in compounds and set phrases: *clár-ainech/enech* (flat-faced) and *enech i n-inchaib* (face to face). The more usual word for face was probably *agad*, *aiged* (Cf. the use of *agad* in a gloss in the MS called TCD H 3.18 which preserves a recension of the tale called H, (see Binchy: 44, n.1). *Aiged* in this meaning was eventually in some dialects of Modern Irish replaced by *éadan* (Old Irish *étan*) which originally meant forehead. In the archaic poem based on the same saga as well as in the other prose version different words for face are used ‘*gnúis*’, ‘*gné*’, ‘*agad*’ (TCD H). In this latter recension *gné* is used by the charioteer answering the king about his face (see also O’Leary 1991, 20–21).

The close relation between face and honour seems to occur in many cultures as it is reflected in their respective languages: to lose face, etc. Thus, we can discern two stages in this particular process of losing face. The first phase is how Fergus’ face becomes distorted by fear in confrontation with the beast. In meeting with the beast words for fear are mentioned twice: the beast is described as frightful (*uathmar*) and when frightened Fergus goes ashore in terror (*ar omon*). Fear is related to shame and degradation, but it seems that the distortion caused by Fergus’ fright does not become a cause for shame until it is made official. The story seems to tell that a blemish (*ainim*) first becomes the blemish that precludes the king’s ability to rule when it is uttered loudly, publicized. As long as the people are ignorant of his flaw his image as a just king remains intact.

If we compare these implications of honour in the medieval Irish aristocratic and elitist society with the honour-culture of Arab and Muslim countries of today there are many similarities. We recognize the importance of appearing strong as was also the case for Fergus: more important than the continuation of his rule – even more important than his life. This is commonplace in the Arabic honour-culture as is shrewdly pointed out by James Bowman (29–30) in the case of Saddam Hussein’s way of handling the negotiations with the West concerning the eventuality of his possession of weapons of mass destruction. In the Western culture we cannot easily comprehend the gravity of the offense felt among Arabs as our apprehension refers to the ‘feelings of the individual or the individual in relation to some vague defined public – to people in general.’ (Bowman 2006, 38) Whereas in these saga-tales honour depends on the honour group as is claimed by Bowman for greater parts of the Arab world, and its demands on the individual. Thus, as long as Fergus’ blemish was kept within his small honour-group (the wise men of Ulster) his honour remained intact, but as soon as it was made public, shared with a wider group – as is demonstrated clearly by its being announced by a bondmaid, it became immediately a public issue and had to be defended in some

way. The blemish could not be undone, but his fear could be disproved by fighting the cause of his blemish.

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Part 2:

The individualisation
of the concept of
honour

6

After Honor¹

From Egil Skallagrimsson to Karl Ove Knausgård²

PER THOMAS ANDERSEN

ABSTRACT This article presents how Christianity acquired the notion of honor and that internal honor played as important a role as external honor – at least in the culture of Chivalry and the Victorian gentleman culture. The revaluation in Christian cultures of internal honor leads to the individualization of Western cultural values as well as the decline of Western honor culture. Andersen stresses that modern warfare more or less puts an end to honor culture in the West.

KEY WORDS Christianity | (internal/external) honor | individualization | values | decline of Western honor culture

Social norms are decisive for our emotional life, writes Martha Nussbaum in *Upheavals of Thought*. Her point is that social norms vary, and that culturally specific values therefore influence what we feel. Nussbaum asserts, for example, that “...a culture that values honor highly, and attaches a strong negative value to the slighting of honor, will have many occasions for anger that an equality focused culture ... will not have” (Nussbaum 2001, 157). Nussbaum’s example of a culture without anger is the Micronesian Ifaluk culture in the Pacific Ocean. According to Nussbaum, anger among the Ifaluk is associated with shame. At the other end of the scale one could place the old Norse culture. It is well established knowledge that Old Norse society was to a high degree a culture of honor, and that the duty to and readiness to defend honor was among the most important values in these societies. The ability to be aroused to rage and the courage to convert it to

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1. This article is translated by Marte Hult.
 2. This article is also published as a chapter in Andersens’ book *Story and Emotion* (2016). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

violence were among the foremost qualities people could have. At least that is what Old Norse literature tells us.

Julian Pitt-Rivers, one of the pioneers in modern research into honor, calls attention to three facets in his definition of honor: “a sentiment, a manifestation of this sentiment in conduct, and the evaluation of this conduct by others...” (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 503). This definition has been emphasized as *communis opinio* within the sociological research tradition (Patterson 1982, 79). All the same, it is usual within this field of research to expand further upon primarily two aspects, external and internal honor. External honor deals with one’s good name and reputation, one’s esteem, prestige, position and value in others’ eyes. Internal honor is more or less identical to personal integrity or character, and consists of venerable human characteristics that produce basic self-respect. This division is what Frank Henderson Stewart calls “the *bipartite theory* [of honor]” (Stewart 1994, 19). The distinction is found among many researchers in slightly different variants. For example, Stewart places great emphasis on Moritz Liepmann who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, was occupied with defamation in the German judicial system. Perhaps it is this judicial context that has caused Stewart to view the emotional side of Pitt-River’s definition as unmanageable. It is easy to understand that a subjectively *felt* defamation would not be adequate for conviction in a modern judicial society. Nevertheless, it is evident from most depictions that honor is closely tied to affect and emotion, even if it is not directly regarded as an emotion. Stewart even has a chapter in his book entitled “The *Sense* of Honor” (italics mine). And as we have already seen, honor is also often closely tied to other affects, anger, for example. Many, such as David D. Gilmore, also see honor almost as a counterpart to shame. In all likelihood, Stewart’s effort to tone down the affective aspect is primarily a manifestation of the general discomfort of being occupied with feelings in the context of research. But to consider honor without taking the *feeling* of honor into consideration would seem almost absurd. The “bipartite” theory still makes sense as far as it goes. Stewart found the twopart theory as early as in Liepmann who used the concepts “objectified honor” and “subjectified honor.” Robert L. Oprisko takes the division for granted, and establishes the main outline of his presentation in two sections: “External honor” and “Internal honor”.³

Honor, rage and shame are probably not universal affects, but are tied to social norms as Nussbaum asserted. Honor and a sense of honor are attached to *honor groups* that individuals belong to or identify with.⁴ Disparate honor groups can have different honor codes, and the groups can be far-reaching (for example cultural groups) or smaller, or more specific (for example occupational groups or

similar). There are also sub-groups within larger societal communities where specific and deviant codes of honor are practiced (for example criminal circles within a law-abiding society).

From its Greek and Roman heritage, western culture is an old honor culture. “Homeric man’s highest good is not the enjoyment of a quiet conscience, but the enjoyment of *tîmê*, public esteem” writes E. R. Dodds in *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Dodds 1951, 17–18). Still, today the culture of honor is considerably weakened in the West, and not least in Northern Europe. Several researchers mention this deterioration, among them Stewart and Bowman. But they call attention to different factors that have contributed to the weakening. Stewart points out that subjectivism has occurred in the course of history; increasingly, development privileged personal qualities as a basis for a sense of honor, mentioned as “the integrity position” (Stewart 1994, 51). In addition, James Bowman points out that the two world wars discredited established concepts of honor in the western world, something that is reflected in war literature and in the cultural climate after the wars. The late-modern welfare state is an equality oriented and [human] rights-based society, where hero worship and honor play a lesser role. Actually there are many examples that prior dishonorable or embarrassing characteristics and events can create a basis for fame and interest. What appears beyond a doubt is that the cultural meeting between cultures of honor and cultures that have a weakened code of honor emerges as one of our times’ most incendiary areas of conflict. Thus, there is every reason to place a focus on honor and the weakening of a culture of honor in our own society. In this chapter I will examine the weakening of the culture of honor particularly in a Norwegian context. I will do that by means of some chosen historical moments. I will take my point of departure in Old Norse

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3. James Bowman, who treats honor historically, also works with “The Two Kinds of Honor,” but for him it appears to concern, on the one side, conceptions of honor that he believes are universal, and on the other side, culturally specific conceptions of honor. Bowman calls the universal conceptions of honor “reflexive honor” and the culturally specific ones “cultural honor.” “Reflexive honor” is a rather unfortunately chosen designation, since it is also used by Stewart, but there with an entirely different meaning. With Stewart, “reflexive honor” is the term for the phenomenon that within certain (honor) groups, every challenge to honor can be potentially undermining, that is, everyone must at all times be ready to defend his honor — even if the challenge should be unwarranted or even laughable. (Stewart gives the following example: At the beginning of the twentieth century a general in the Austro-Hungarian army had to show up for a duel if he was challenged by a subordinate private even if the challenge was due to a trifle. If not, the general’s honor would be impugned.)
 4. Stewart employs this concept (Stewart 1994, 54) with reference to Gabriele Taylor 1985. *Pride, Shame and Guilt. Emotions of Self-Assessment*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

culture, and use *Egil Skallagrímsson's Saga* as an example of an extreme culture of honor in our past.

Then I will scrutinize the changes that the two world wars represented in the western world. Finally I will dwell on contemporary culture, and use Karl Ove Knausgård's *My Struggle* as an example of the anti-honor culture of late modernity.

I. OLD NORSE CULTURE OF HONOR

Scandinavian society has traveled the long path from a quite extreme culture of honor to a culture that cultivates equality to a greater extent than most other modern societies. As a reminder of our cultural roots I will tell the sweet childhood story about Egil Skallagrímsson playing ball in *Egils Saga Skallagrímssonar*. It was said about Egil that as a seven year old he took part in a ball game together with other children, among them a ten year-old named Grim. Egil lost to Grim in a test of strength. Egil lost his temper and hit Grim with a bat. But Grim was bigger. He lifted Egil up and threw him to the ground. Egil could not tolerate this. He sought out an adult and borrowed an axe. "Egil ran up to Grim and drove the axe into his head, right through to the brain" (*Egil's Saga* 1997, 77). Egil was not taken in hand by child protection services. But the murder led to hostilities that ended with seven men killed in battle. His father, old Skallagrím, didn't like what had happened, but Bera, Egil's mother, said that "he had the makings of a true Viking and would clearly be put in command of warships when he was old enough" (*ibid.*). Subsequently there is just more of the same. Much more. The modern reader has to remind himself that this is not a story about a problem child, but a tale about a hero. An excess of wrath, a violent temper and hypersensitivity to loss of honor sets the precedence for celebrity in Old Norse culture. The sense of honor and readiness for rage were so prominent that it could make any situation into a life-threatening incident. Outside of "play," in social life, the sense of honor and offences to honor were driving forces that set the gravest events in motion. The events followed fixed *scripts*: a sense of honor – defamation – rage – violence/ revenge – retaliation – re-retaliation (a spiral of violence). On home ground the Scandinavian societies cultivated excessive rage and a volition for violence as the highest guarantor of honor. As a by-product of this domestic policy focus, a general culture of violence sprang forth that made Viking raids and harrying a part of the European politics of the age. The well-off Scandinavians of that time did not make a killing in the stock market. They went on Viking raids for a couple of summers, slaughtering people and stealing their property.

In Old Norse culture honor was more important than life itself. Of foremost importance was a good reputation after death and in order to obtain that, there was merit in dying an honorable death. In his book *Fortælling og ære. Studier i islændingesagaerne* (1993), Preben Meulengracht Sørensen writes that “in the Icelandic sagas, honor and the shape of society are two sides of the same matter” (Sørensen 1993, 187). However in the research literature, social esteem, as mentioned, is only one aspect of the concept of honor. External honor corresponds to internal honor. The internal aspect concerns personal integrity, a more individualized concept of honor that deals with noble traits of character. James Bowman believes that one finds the embryonic development of such an inner concept of honor as early as in the culture of the Greeks. The same tendency can be found in Old Norse culture. Christian culture took over the concepts of honor later on. The honor of the clan was replaced by the honor of God.

The connection between outer and inner interpretations of honor have been variable throughout history. Two of the most well-known representations of Western cultures of honor, the culture of Chivalry and the Victorian Christian Code of Honor, appear as variants in which both inner and outer aspects play an important role. One can generally say that the culture of honor continued, but the honor was to God on high. And yet, a considerable amount of honor trickled down through the ecclesiastical hierarchy also. Popes and priests took possession of property and fortune by other methods than those of the Vikings, but if one inspects the manifestations of “God’s” honor round about in the Cathedrals of Europe, it appears that their methods were just as effective as the raids of the Vikings. Even if you take into account the Christian influence on an old honor culture in this way, it is important to remember that a phenomenon such as dueling, where men settled offences to their honor at the risk of their lives, continued in Europe throughout most of the nineteenth century and in some cases even into the twentieth. Side by side with the Christian culture’s notions of humility and forgiveness, the primitive dueling culture survived and progressed through hundreds of years. A clear change slowly takes place within what one can call the history of modernity. The anti-hero appears, especially in the literary tradition of Rabelais and Cervantes. Already here one finds a nascent undermining of the Western culture of honor. At the beginning of the modern breakthrough, this evolution hastens. Especially in Ibsen one can see a strong heroism put to the test and to a large extent being undermined by ambivalence and criticism.

THE WORLD WARS

The Western honor culture undergoes a powerful, perhaps final weakening in the first half of the twentieth century. In his book *Honor. A History* (2006), James Bowman writes a comprehensive section about “The Decline and Fall of Western Honor Culture 1914–1975.” In this interpretation the two world wars play a decisive role. As Bowman depicts it, the way in which modern warfare was waged contributed to ending the old honor culture in the Western world. In this context it is relevant to see the two world wars in relation to each other. A development that began in WWI was completed because of WWII. There were only twenty years between them, and WWII can in several respects be considered as a continuation of WWI, with an eye to the concept of honor included. In any case, on the German side it was partly a matter of restoring lost honor after the defeat in WWI. Perhaps in Scandinavia there is also a special reason to see the two world wars in continuity. We acquired direct war experiences of waging modern warfare only in 1940, but by then the entire century’s changing experience was included, with overdue force. With the mobilization in 1914, there was actual enthusiasm for war in Europe, and most drew to the front with the thought of winning a quick and honorable victory for their home superpower. Patriotism and the concept of honor very likely preserved their position on the political level, among military superior officers and in propaganda for the civilian population. But it was different on the battlefield. Life at the front had a hand in undermining the fighting spirit and concept of honor. The background was the long-lasting trench warfare that no one was able to win. The undermining of every conception of honorable battle and proud victory was the result, in the first place, of the number of fallen and maimed; but just as important was the anonymizing and industrializing of the acts of war, and the role that sheer chance played in the life-and-death struggle. In *The Social History of the Machine Gun* John Ellis writes,

If a machine gun could wipe out a whole battalion of men in three minutes, where was the relevance of the old concepts of heroism, glory and fair play between gentlemen? ... In a war in which death was dealt out to so many with such mechanical casualness how could the old traditional modes of thought survive? (Ellis 1986, 142).

In addition to the machine gun and mortars there was another new technique of war, namely gas attacks, where one attempted to annihilate entire areas all in one. In retrospect they are regarded as a forerunner for so-called “carpet bombing.” Trench warfare was purely a war of cannon fodder. With a “no-man’s land” between them, many hundreds of thousands of young men lived and died submerged in narrow

muddy trenches that extended over large parts of Europe. In a succession of onslaughts, the soldiers were ordered out of the trenches, into no-man's land to run into the enemies' shower of bullets and die. The attacking side could win a few worthless kilometers of earth full of slippery mud and corpses. Then they had to dig themselves in again after a loss of thousands of men in each wave of attack. The attackers always had twice as many casualties as the defenders. After the day's battle, the wounded were left lying in no-man's land to slowly die. No one could go out and get them. The survivors who were to face the rain of bullets the next day could try to sleep to the screams of pain from their comrades whom they had shared their water rations with the night before. The soldiers were fighting a war there was no use in winning. Many of those who survived the trenches came home as the living dead. Before they arrived at the front they had learned about patriotism, heroic battle and honorable struggles. But they fought in a battle where nothing they had learned had any meaning. Soon something remarkable happened. A new type of wounded began coming home from the front; not just the large numbers of physically wounded, but young men who did not function as human beings any longer. At first there was the attempt to conceal the phenomenon. They were called cowardly, these silent, apathetic and empty-eyed youth who only a short time before had been the brave champions for the future of the fatherland. They risked being executed for desertion. But little by little one had to realize that they actually were wounded soldiers. The injuries were called shell shock.

The effects of modern warfare are documented by the so-called "war poets," among others Wilfred Owen, who was killed in 1918, and Siegfried Sassoon, who survived. Later a succession of novels were published about experiences on the battlefield; for example, Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. In Hemingway we find these famous words: "There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity ... Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages..." (Hemingway 2003, 185). But it wasn't only abstract values that lost their meaning. The very understanding of humanity had to be transformed. The essential image of humanity built on strength, pride, honor and courage fell away to the advantage of a new psychological, therapeutic image of humanity, where trauma was stronger than the sense of honor or courage. This is excellently described by Pat Barker in the biographical novel *Regeneration Trilogy* (1991–1995) where we meet both of the "war poets" Owen and Sassoon, among others, in therapeutic treatment behind the front lines in the care of the Freudian psychiatrist, Dr. Rivers. Despite the excessive losses of human life during WWI, there was great disparity

between the war experiences of the soldiers and the civilian population. To a large extent the civilians were influenced by propaganda, while the actual experiences at the front made the rhetoric of propaganda obscene, as Hemingway said. This was probably one of the reasons for the “taciturnity” the soldiers brought back from the front, such as Walter Benjamin portrays it in his essay, “The storyteller.” So too in Remarque’s novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, where the impossibility of getting [experiences] across to family and friends when home on leave is described. Paradoxically, men would long to return to the war, because there they were together with comrades who knew what it was like. One of the evolving features that can be seen from WWI to WWII is that the civilian population became more involved in the active actions of the war to a greater extent. The movement was from a “world war” to a “total war.” This also had meaning for the fall of honor. From the outset there was a big difference in what one could call the warring parties’ moral capital in WWII. Nazism appeared as a racially based honor culture without morality. The Holocaust confirmed this to a fault. The Allies had an indisputable moral advantage. When the war was over, this advantage felt fairly securely intact. But there were dishonorable acts of war on a large scale on both sides, and in the post-war period these slowly but surely came to be known publicly. What was new in WWII compared to the first world war was especially the extensive use of air forces. The Royal Air Force, which defended England with its fighter pilots, clearly emerged as heroes with great honor. But already the first day at the helm, Winston Churchill supported large scale bombing of enemy territory. Some of this bombing was obviously directed towards military targets such as armament factories and transport systems. The bombers had enormous striking power but poor accuracy, especially because they often bombed at night. In such raids one could consider civilian losses as a kind of consequential error. But gradually the civilian population also became bombing targets for massive air raids. In 1939 the British had agreed that the RAF would not bomb targets on German soil and not ships lying in port. But after the Germans bombed Rotterdam on May 14, 1940, the bombing of cities became an accepted act of war, and it was practiced by both sides during the war. In his book about honor, Bowman writes about the bombing of cities under the heading “Area Bombing and the Demise of Honor Culture” (Bowman 2006, 169–ff). After the war the Germans’ bombing of Rotterdam, London and other English cities and the Allies’ bombing of Dresden, together with the annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki stand as the most large-scale examples of carpet bombing of civilians. Through these actions, western civilization has proven itself dishonorable. What Bowman calls cultural honor, is, so to say, depleted.

“DET ER INGEN HVERDAG MER” [EVERYDAY LIFE IS DEAD AND GONE]

Jeg vil hjem til menneskene (I want to go home to the humans) is the title of the first collection of poetry from perhaps the most eminent author that debuted in Norway directly after the war, Gunvor Hofmo. Even this early title reveals most about the importance of the human factor in her life experiences. She is away from home, and the only home she is yearning for is that of humanity. This feeling of a lost humanity followed Hofmo her entire life, and characterized both her poetry and her state of health. The immediate background was the Holocaust. Hofmo had a Jewish friend and probable lover, Ruth Maier, who came to Norway as a refugee in 1939. But together with 532 other Jews she was deported from Oslo the 26th of November 1942 in the cargo ship *Donau*. She was led directly to the gas chamber at Auschwitz five days later, the 1st of December 1942. She was twenty-two years old. Her diary has been published in both Norwegian and English, and she has been called the Norwegian Anne Frank (*Ruth Maier's Diary: A Young Girl's Life under Nazism*, 2009). A large portion of Hofmo's authorship is directly or indirectly influenced by the inhumanity of the war, so in this sense it can be viewed as a form of witness literature. In her most well-known poem, she describes existence as a permanent state of emergency. The poem is called “Det er ingen hverdag mer” [Everyday life is dead and gone]:

God, if you are still watching:
Everyday life is dead and gone.

There are only silent screams,
There are only black corpses

Hanging in red trees!
Hear how quiet it is.

We turn to go home
But we hear them always.

All we sense each day
Are the breaths of the dead!

If we walk in forgetfulness
We tread on their ashes.

God, if you are still watching:
Everyday life is dead and gone.⁵

5. Few of Hofmo's poems have been translated to English. The translations in this chapter make no attempt at replicating Hofmo's use of rhyme or meter since the meaning would be compromised. The “everyday” of the title refers to the normal weekday. She is stating that a normal day no longer exists.

This is probably as close as we come to a “Zero Hour” experience in Norwegian postwar literature, such as we know if from Heinrich Böll’s and Günter Grass’ Group 47 in Germany. The immediate impact of the war on Norwegian writers was major in many other cases also. Jens Bjørneboe, who debuted in the 1950s, wrote about this experience (with an autobiographical background) in his novel *Stillheten* (1973) [*The Silence*, 2000]:

Then there’s something else, which keeps popping up. It happened thirty-eight years ago, and changed my whole life. I was fifteen years old at the time, and it was all because of a book. I read it through in one day; it wasn’t that long. It was a thin book with contents of a descriptive sort; and even though I had been quite depressed in the previous fourteen years as well, still I can say that since reading this book I’ve never been happy again, or only for brief moments at a time.... It may be the most important book I’ve ever read, and it put an end to my childhood. (Bjørneboe 2000, 164)

The book discussed was Wolfgang Langhof’s account from the German concentration camp Sachsenhausen, *The Peat Bog Soldiers*.

Both Hofmo and Bjørneboe depict the effects of the war in the form of affective reactions. Bjørneboe stresses depression and joylessness; Hofmo places most emphasis on grief, anxiety, despair and loneliness. The two were of the same generation; Hofmo was born in 1921, Bjørneboe in 1920. The war flooded over them with a shock in their youth. They were eighteen and nineteen when the war broke out; Hofmo was in the midst of a vulnerable time of youth when Ruth Maier was deported and executed. She felt that it was humanity itself that had abandoned the world. She was “on the other side,” in “another reality,” as she writes in one of her most well-known poems. But, more than that, Hofmo had possessed a Christian worldview. Now she turned against both believers and against God, and she did that in the only religious genre where there is a place for rebellion and accusations against God, in the *threnody*, the lament (See Andersen 2007). Large portions of Hofmo’s authorship can be perceived as *threnodies*. Like the composers Arnold Schönberg and Krzysztof Penderecki, Hofmo shaped a new, modernistic variant of the *threnody*, an old genre known from both Biblical and Jewish tradition. Hofmo does not just take aim at a human world without purity and without honor, but against the very worship of honor that had distinguished our culture since the introduction of Christianity. Gunvor Hofmo takes aim at God’s honor. She complains to a God who is without shame. In the poem “Vi som er viet” [We

who are wed] from the collection *Fra en annen virkelighet* (1948) [From Another Reality] she refers to God as “a God who sleeps at night while the earth rips apart,/ a God without purity, without shame.” In “Blinde nattergaler” [Blind Nightingales] from the collection of the same name (1951), she expresses herself even more crassly:

But not the barbarian's hand
and not the barbarian's desire
demands us, demands blood
crushes a cross of our spirit!

You, God, are the one who has
poked our eye out,
you are the pain that blends
with the wholeness we once were.

So Hofmo doesn't just turn against a world where humanity has lost its honor. She is part of the dismantling of a thousand year-old honor culture in the religious mold, the Christian devotion to the honor of God. She is left with a shameless God and a world she cannot endure.

THE THERAPEUTIC IMAGE OF HUMANITY

Sigurd Hoel was born in 1890. He published *Meeting at the Milestone* in 1947 when he was fifty-seven years old. He was among those who introduced psychoanalysis to Norway. He was saddled with an old explanatory model from the first half of the century, and he used it zealously and systematically. It was already known from the shell shock victims of WWI that an understanding of men based on heroic and honorable personal characteristics was not adequate to explain the nature of human reactions in war. This had become persistent societal knowledge ever since the days of the war. Psychoanalysis was ready to rationalize the new knowledge. The conception of a complex non-essentialist self that contained forces it did not itself have control over fit very well in explaining and treating these new human forms of reaction. As described by Pat Barker in *Regeneration*, this is precisely what happened with the shell shocked wounded at Craiglockhart Hospital. Dr. William Rivers was the representative of psychoanalysis. Those admitted were no longer executed as cowardly deserters; they were placed in conversation therapy and received anti-depressants. The image of a therapeutical humanity took over from honor. Sigurd Hoel's entire book is an effort to transfer the psychoanalytical “talking cure” to the genre of the novel. In this case it is more a matter of a didactic

analysis than a cure. The first person narrator begins with wanting to understand how ordinary people in Norwegian society could become Nazis. He had several of them in his circle of acquaintances and he refers to a time when it was decisive to know who was friend and who was foe. There was a clear dividing line between “good Norwegians” and “traitors,” those who had their good name and reputation intact and those who had forfeited their honor. At the outset, the narrator is known by the nickname “The Spotless One.” But the book’s analysis leads to the same insights that I have already mentioned with respect to the general history of the war. It is stated early in the analysis: “It is not easy to win with dignity.”

Have we learnt enough? Have we experienced enough, thought enough, felt enough, understood enough – or shall we in winning lose the dignity which we have acquired while we were weak, oppressed and trampled upon? (Hoel 1951, 32).

In a word, the analysis shows that The Spotless One is guilty. He does *not* win with his decency and honor intact. Because of a complicated love affair in his youth, it comes to light that The Spotless One is himself the father of Nazism, literally. The most fanatical Nazi among the Norwegians is his own flesh and blood son, who desires to take his life. Perhaps something rather commonplace in Hoel’s portrayal is that behind the treason lies a betrayal of love. And behind this betrayal of love lies the treachery of the old against the young, the old men’s treachery. Despite possible thematic banality, Hoel’s vote is clear: The Spotless One is guilty. Honor is lost. The human being does not consist of essential and honorable qualities. He is complex, and lacks both control and perspective over his own actions. Even the ordinary, common person is under the magnifying glass of suspicion. We are living *after* the essential individual. We are living after honor.

THE BLACK BIRD

An important characteristic of most honor cultures is that they appear as pronouncedly male cultures. Nini Roll Anker’s *Kvinnen og den svarte fuglen* (1945) [*The Woman and the Black Bird*]⁶ can represent the feminist aspect of Western honor culture’s deterioration in the time after the war. Perhaps this aspect is among the most striking traits in the development of the entire era. I shall not assert what is cause and what is effect here. And of course on this point one can

6. This novel has not been translated to English.

also make delicate distinctions by pointing out that “feminism” had been in the spotlight in the Scandinavian societies at least since the 1870s. But that was also precisely the time Ibsen started his ambivalent undermining of masculine heroism. Nini Roll Anker was born in 1873. She died during the war in 1942, at seventy-nine years of age. Her novel *Kvinnen og den svarte fuglen* was published posthumously in 1945. She belonged to an upper class stratum in Norwegian society but was herself a socialist, pacifist and feminist, something that characterizes her novel ideologically. She was not among the most radical feminists of her generation, but she was certainly among the most zealous pacifists. In *Kvinnen og den svarte fuglen* we encounter Bett, mother of three, two boys and a girl. She is married to Just who works in “Iron and Steel” and produces weapons. Both sons are called up for military duty as soldiers. Hans returns blind and maimed for life. “He was not human any longer ... a figure without hands, without anything in the arms of the jacket. A head without a face” (Anker 1945, 182–83). Otto becomes a deserter. He cannot participate any longer, and his mother helps him to get away. They are captured, and the text is written by Bett in prison while Otto is waiting for his punishment as a deserter. Just is the bearer of the typical masculine culture, in the novel depicted as unimaginative, non-flexible and rigid, an admirer of “Iron and Steel” in several senses, of large muscles and swelling chests. He is proud of his sons who are fighting bravely in the war, his “honor group” is nationalistic and he is insensitive to losses on the enemy’s side. He gets into quarrels with his sister-in-law and his daughter who operate with completely different “honor groups.” They stand for the idea of a working class general strike against war, and the notion that the mothers of the world could end all war when they finally become sufficiently enlightened and realize their potential power. There are many ideological layers in the novel. For my context here, it is most important to illustrate that the deterioration of honor culture clears the way for, or happens parallel to, a new growth of female influence. After the weakening of honor culture in western society there is a new focus directed towards equality and human rights questions, and equal rights for women and men is a part of this development. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948, and underscores the transition to a global philosophy of political equal rights. Shifts in histories of ideas and ideologies such as these are naturally complex. But nevertheless there cannot be any doubt that there is a connection between the deterioration of honor culture in Western societies and the weakening of patriarchal hegemony, something that Bowman discusses in his book (Bowman 2006, 117–ff). This has created a new cultural situation, not least in the Scandinavian societies, where women play a very different and more prominent role than in

most honor cultures. I believe that the weakening of the old honor culture and the transition to an equality based and human rights culture are among the most important changes in Western society. They took place slowly and through time, but the world wars probably played an important role in the process of change, and the establishment of a global network of human rights in 1948 demonstrates that something decisive had happened, at least as far as it concerns the nation as “honor group.” This does not mean that any one of us does not have an individual sense of honor. There is also no doubt that honor culture survives within definite “honor groups,” also in the western world. Especially in criminal gang environments, strict honor codes still rule. In particular areas of competition there are also still elements of honor culture with specific honor codes, for example in sports, artistic or our own academic environments. But the western welfare society does not converge around a concept of honor as the culture’s central code of values. Society’s fundamental, clear value system is equal rights, equal rights to communal public assets.

II. KARL OVE KNAUSGÅRD: MY STRUGGLE

THE LATE-MODERN WELFARE STATE

Consequently, there is good reason to believe that traditional honor cultures in the western world were weakened and changed character in a continuous evolution from the outbreak of modernity and forward to the two world wars. Experiences in the wars represented in their turn an undeniable undermining of what one could call cultural honor. Societies moved in the direction of values based on rights and ideals of equality, that is, equality as principle. Cultural values formulated in legal language, and with intended global validity, could be presumed to be less affectively dependent. They should be able to be asserted and invoked independently of national and cultural feelings that had proven to be so catastrophic in both world wars.

In this time of late modernity, traditional conceptions of honor seem to play a quite subordinate role as culture-carrying and politically controlling incentives in the West.⁷ Actually, there are many examples, especially in art and cultural life, of a type of anti-honor culture, a cultivation of and building of celebrity by means of phenomena that traditionally would have been perceived as damaging to per-

7. One must nevertheless still be somewhat cautious in generalizing on this point. During the big political conflict of the Greek financial crisis, it was noticeable that the top Greek politicians again and again argued from the sense that the honor of the Greeks had been accosted.

sonal honor. The most obvious examples would be the use of *the painful and embarrassing* as a basic element in comic art forms. It is sufficient to mention Rowan Atkinson's success with "Mr. Bean" or Rolv Wesenlund with his "Fleksnes" TV series.⁸ We saw an extreme exploitation of this phenomenon in Sasha Baron Cohen's film "Borat." The paradoxical connection between honor and the dishonorable was accentuated in this case when the film, which is heavily based on embarrassing episodes and shameless or dishonorable and offensive conduct, won a Golden Globe award in 2007, and was nominated for several other highly esteemed prizes. When the late modern Western societies and the Muslim honor culture time and again come into conflict about caricature art, we should not disregard the fact that the Western appreciation of the dishonorable in humor plays an important role in the cultural antagonism. The struggles about caricature are perhaps an example of the collision between an intact honor culture and a comic art form "after honor".

But the representation of the traditionally embarrassing or painful and dishonorable is not only found in cartoons and comic art. The Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik scored considerable bipartisan support by being open about his mental health issue, depression. This example draws attention to an important aspect of the function of the embarrassing or painful and potentially dishonorable in late modernity. In serious, as opposed to comic, contexts they function as an indicator for honesty and authenticity, and those are traits that a person in late modernity considers more valuable than traditional honorable personal characteristics. The courage to reveal oneself is seen as more valuable than traditional daring in battle or other situations requiring great deeds. Shame-ridden phenomena that earlier would have caused shame no longer necessarily do so, but in some cases quite the opposite, respect. Openness surrounding earlier topics of shame can be one of several gains from the weakening of honor culture, be it mental problems, bullying, sexual tendencies or the like. The appreciation for bringing private relationships and concerns into the public sphere is a part of this development, and has clearly contributed to changes in attitudes and greater tolerance. In the last few years this development has been conveyed to newer levels both in traditional and new media such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, etc.

But revealing one's own life also leads involuntarily to the revealing of the lives of others. We live in social relationships. The characterization "ruthless" has become a positive description in connection with self revelation, but accompany-

8. "Fleksnes" was a very popular Scandinavian sitcom, based on the British series "Hancock's Half Hour."

ing problems have been thrown into relief from both ethical and legal quarters. It is perhaps easy to agree that everyone has the ownership rights to his own life story. But most people can see that one treads onto problematic grounds when a person carries out “ruthless” public exposure of information about others, who themselves do not wish the exposure and who often can be defenseless with respect to it (for example, children or the deceased), or who dispute its truth content. In such cases, one deprives the ownership rights of another to *his* life story. Moreover, the sociologist Richard Sennett has pointed out greater societal problems tied to what he calls *The Fall of Public Man* or “The tyrannies of intimacy,” that is, the phenomenon that the public sphere more and more functions on the premises of the sphere of intimacy (Sennett 1974, 337).

MY STRUGGLE

Scarcely any cultural phenomenon in the last few years has actualized these aspects of the changes in honor culture to a higher degree than the publication of Karl Ove Knausgård’s *Min Kamp I–VI* [*My Struggle I–VI*]. Knausgård has won greater prestige more quickly than any other participant in public life based to a large extent on his “ruthless” revelation of relationships that belong to the intimate sphere, and that would traditionally be perceived as both publically irrelevant, partly painful or embarrassing and even quite ignominious. If we deem literary prizes as a badge of “honor,” we can very well say that Knausgård has won considerable honor within a particular honor group precisely by breaking with fundamental traditional honor codes. While the collected reception of the work has shown that this relationship takes place in an affective sphere, the work itself is also quite affective in its method of narration, something that, among others, Eivind Tjønneland has called attention to with his formulation of what he perceives as *Knausgård-koden* [The Knausgård code] (Tjønneland 2010). Knausgård himself writes in *My Struggle II* that the only reason he wanted to write was to be able to express feelings. This is what he says after a powerful musical experience causes him to start crying:

My feelings soared and before I knew what was happening my eyes were moist. It was only then that I realized how little I normally felt, how numb I had become. When I was eighteen I was full of such feelings all the time, the world seemed more intense and that was why I wanted to write, it was the sole reason, I wanted to touch something that music touched. The human voice’s lament and sorrow, joy and delight, I wanted to evoke everything the world had bestowed upon us. (Knausgård 2013, 345–46)

In his book, *Honor: A Phenomenology*, Robert L. Oprisko points out that it is appropriate to distinguish between shame and dishonor in connection with the rupture of honor culture: “Shame is a fact of life. The society will have expectations for each member based upon their identities and their past actions” (Oprisko 2012, 73). He also stresses that “prestige is gained through excelling. Shame is avoided by not failing” (71). Unni Wikan thinks that it is common in honor cultures to be more concerned with avoiding shame than with obtaining honor. This assertion is cited and discussed by both Stewart and Oprisko (ibid.). In the late modern Western variant we encounter in Knausgård, this fear and sensitivity to individual shame appears to be strongly weakened or altered. This is explicitly mentioned in *My Struggle II*: “I don’t give a shit about myself” as an answer to his friend Geir’s commentary on self exposure. What shocked Geir in the reading of Knausgård’s first novel *Ute av verden* [Out of the World] was “the fact that you went so far, put so much of yourself into it” (Knausgård 2013, 166). In this case it concerns a crime, a punishable sexual act committed against a thirteen year old girl – an act that Knausgård in *My Struggle II* certainly does what he can to cast a mystifying veil over. At any rate, he feels no shame. He “doesn’t give a shit” in connection with exposure of painful or dishonorable actions, he claims. An obvious example of this is the description of premature ejaculation in connection with sexual encounters with women. Neither does his own unfaithfulness towards women he is involved with make him uncomfortable. The same is true of unfaithfulness where he himself is cuckolded. In line with statistical knowledge of life in late modernity such occurrences appear rather more commonplace than dishonorable. He also talks about drunkenness, wild behavior, acts of vandalism, failure and stupidity during his time in Bergen, for example, apparently without a need to conceal what is painful or embarrassing. As far as it goes, he seems sensitive to his own failures, but not affected by embarrassment or shame. He is ostensibly indifferent to expectations that society might have for him, and the form of prestige that one gains through “excelling.” *My Struggle* depicts both a recklessly revealing person and a type of shameless person.

Certainly on this point a delicate distinction is needed. It is not the case that the Knausgård whom we encounter in *My Struggle* never feels shame. On the contrary. He is prone to feeling insignificant in relation to others. The most dramatic episode of shame is probably the grave self-inflicted injury he inflicts upon himself at an author’s seminar on Biskops-Arnø. After being rejected by a woman (the woman who later became his wife), he cuts up his own face with a piece of broken glass. (A corresponding episode is found in *My Struggle V*.) When he meets the other authors (including the repudiating Linda) the next day, there is no doubt that

he feels shame. As he does in other situations as well. He can feel intense shame but he is not ashamed of that. The point is that shame never causes him to conceal himself or go into hiding. Here it is appropriate to be reminded of the psychologist Erik Erikson's classic description of "autonomy versus shame and doubt" in his major work *Childhood and Society* from 1963:

Shame is an emotion insufficiently studied, because in our civilization it is so early and easily absorbed by guilt. Shame supposes that one is completely exposed and conscious of being looked at: in one word, self-conscious. One is visible and not ready to be visible; which is why we dream of shame as a situation in which we are stared at in a condition of incomplete dress, in night attire, "with one's pants down." Shame is early expressed in an impulse to bury one's face, or to sink, right then and there, into the ground. But this, I think, is essentially rage turned against the self. He who is ashamed would like to force the world not to look at him, not to notice his exposure. He would like to destroy the eyes of the world. Instead he must wish for his own invisibility. (Erikson 1993, 252–253).

As is evident, Knausgård's *My Struggle* involves a gigantic initiative that consistently moves in the opposite direction from Erikson's description of shame. Knausgård displays it. He talks exhaustively about it. The Knausgård that we encounter outside the work *My Struggle* even appears to make shame a type of psychological basic mode of his life. The issue is that every time he writes what he is ashamed to have written, his editor says he is writing his best, according to the writer himself. He refers to it as his "shame-o-meter" (Knausgård 2013b, 3). It is not the case that shame is something foreign to him. The brazenness consists in that he narrates intimately about it, that he "[doesn't] give a shit" and believes from the editor's statement that he scores artistic points for it. To be sure, the critic Ane Farsethås also believes that the editor is right: "It is when he descends the lowest, and humiliates himself as much as possible, that the literary self arises to the greatest heights" (Farsethås 2012, 305–06).

As opposed to shame, dishonor is, according to Oprisko, directed not at oneself but at an honor group: "Dishonor differs from shame ... because it actively engages the values of a group to dismiss it" (Oprisko 2012, 69). It is likely in this sphere that *My Struggle* has emerged as most controversial in its public reception. If we recapitulate for a moment some of the elements from the old honor culture we came from, it seems undoubtable that the honor group we have the foremost obligations to is the family or clan, then in-laws and those with whom we have

family ties. Those who have protested most vehemently against Knausgård's project are precisely his family and the "clan" he comes from. In a letter to the editor in *Klassekampen* on the 3rd of October, 2009, several family members wrote: "We are talking about confessional literature and factual prose. Judas literature. It is a book full of insinuations, lies, incorrect characterizations of people and disclosures that quite clearly break Norwegian law in this domain." This conflict between Knausgård and his kin is perhaps the clearest example of how far late-modern values have moved from the traditional honor culture. Knausgård does not only disperse disgrace on his father and grandmother's family, he also exposes his own lovers, his nuclear family and his own children. Thus he breaks with the traditional society's primary honor groups. In *My Struggle VI* he touches upon what this has cost the one closest to him, his wife Linda. Even a positively inclined critic like Jon Helt Haarder takes a skeptical attitude towards Knausgård's discussion of his own children: "With his confessions Knausgård places not just himself, but also those closest to him in the hands of his readers. Something that, especially in connection with the children, is risky, if not reprehensible" (Haarder 2014, 203). Knausgård's project exemplifies the clear deterioration of the traditional honor culture, especially by showing an apparent indifference to one's own shame and a corresponding disloyalty to traditional honor groups. Knausgård himself often stresses his need for solitude. He claims that he would prefer to be alone; he wants to be free. He is dependent on having time alone. But Knausgård is not at all alone. On the one hand, he does write himself free from community and honor groups he does not want to belong to. But at the same time he is writing himself into new honor groups, late-modern honor groups that are not based on family and kinship, but on "fame." Late modernity's primary honor groups are based on prestige, excellence, fame and celebrity or star status:

Prestige is the conception of honor that positively affects an individual's hierarchical social value in a group. Prestige is the process whereby external groups grant honor to a member for achieving or displaying excellence in deeds and attributes considered good by said group. (Oprisko 2012, 63).

This is Oprisko's definition of prestige, and he asserts that the concept corresponds to Stewart's term "vertical honor." "...vertical (or positive) honor [is] the right to special respect enjoyed by those who are superior, ..." writes Stewart (Stewart 1994, 59). He lists a long series of characteristics or qualities that can be the basis for such respect, but ends his litany by saying "or anything else." Oprisko also concludes: "A person can get honored for anything as long as it is of value to

and considered virtuous by the honor-bestowing sovereign” (Oprisko 2012, 63). So it should not surprise anyone that one can obtain “vertical honor” based on phenomena that *outside* of a specific honor group (authors) traditionally would be considered as covered in shame and disgrace. W. L. Sessions in his book *Honor for Us: A Philosophical Analysis, Interpretation and Defense* (2010) distinguishes between, among others, *conferred honor*, *recognition honor* and *positional honor*. In the case of Knausgård, initially it is a matter of recognition honor, which according to Sessions ranks the highest. There is nevertheless no doubt that this creates a basis for *positional honor* in the next instance. Knausgård’s work *My Struggle I–VI* has won him a position as perhaps Norway’s most famous writer, at home and abroad. By this I do not mean to claim that it was just the break with traditional honor codes that has earned Knausgård recognition honor. Many have called attention to the aesthetic and artistic merit of *My Struggle*. My point, in the context in which I place *My Struggle*, is that the break with traditional honor culture has not made Knausgård dishonorable. Quite the contrary. It demonstrates the weakened honor culture of our time.

It is also fitting to remark that Knausgård obviously pokes into a real and bitter family conflict. My point is not in any way to take a position on the matter in dispute. For all I know, Knausgård as well as his kin can have their legitimate concerns. My focus is the symptomatic in the relationship between the individual and a traditional honor group and its honor code. It should also be added that, of course, family conflicts have followed the history of literature throughout time. What is special in Knausgård’s case is that it is a question of an actual, known family in a recognizable local environment – not this or that literary Oedipus or a staged Doll House. As an autobiographical text, *My Struggle* therefore accomplishes what autobiographies are in the habit of doing. The work projects and constitutes a self. Autobiographies are not neutral accounts of a life lived. They also create what they write about, that is, a self that the author or writer can identify with and live with. In Knausgård’s case it is clearly evident, as mentioned, that in that process there are several communities that he wants to write himself out of, especially traditional honor groups – and some communities that he wants to write himself into, especially the community of authors. As a consequence of succeeding so well at this, “for achieving or displaying excellence” he also achieves being taken up in the late-modern media society’s special honor group, the celebrity or star status group. Such honor groups are distinguished to a large degree by late modernity’s general “fluid” nature. The celebrity’s star lights up the sky for a while, but can often be extinguished after a time. Late-modern communities rarely hold guarantees of durability. They are also to a much lesser degree marked by

loyalty than traditional fellowships were. Inner competition is more conspicuous than solidarity and equality. There is competition for the attention of the media and the public, and those are limited, as is well known. Seen in this light, this type of prestige is similar to what Stewart calls *competitive honor* (Stewart 1994, 59ff). One does not gain attention by being loyal and adapting oneself to established social codes. One gains attention by forcing open established borders, breaking with recognized codes, also recognized honor codes. Here is where Knausgård's ruthlessness has its effect. Knausgård himself reflects over this ruthlessness that causes him to break with accepted decency:

One of the questions this book gave rise to for me when I wrote it is what there is to gain by transgressing the social, by describing what no one wants described, that is, the secret and the hidden. Expressed in another way: what value does ruthlessness have ... its consequences do not only affect me, but also others. At the same time, it is true. To write it, one must be free, and to be free one must be ruthless. (Knausgård 2011, 970, my trans.)⁹

Knausgård writes for his freedom, not for fame. That is definitely an artistic fact. But the social fact is maximum prestige in the honor group in this cultural arena. The first fact takes place in the text; the other fact takes place in public – both the ignominy that he casts over traditional honor groups and the inclusion in the late-modern honor group of celebrities. As little as *My Struggle* can be regarded from a text internal perspective (with its ambiguous status as novel and autobiography); just as less can the reception of the work be regarded as a purely aesthetic judgement of quality. The text is a performative speech act. It creates a celebrity, a prominent member of a late-modern honor group. And it disgraces traditional honor groups. It is evident in the work that the author himself reflects on honor. His conceptions of honor are, quite surprisingly, strikingly old-fashioned, almost Old Norse. It is also obvious that he sees – and regrets – the weakening that the traditional honor culture has experienced in late modernity. We find Knausgård's fascination for elements from traditional honor culture in his interest in boxing, the boxing environment, and his friend Geir. The boxing environment is precisely a special honor group where it is a matter of quite simple, traditional honor codes that distinguish it from the rest of society – but that can perhaps be reminiscent of values from way back in Egil Skallagrímson's time. Knausgård puts the blame on the society of the welfare state when it concerns the weakening of these values:

9. This quotation is from Book VI of *My Struggle*, which has not yet appeared in English translation.

He [Geir] had boxed at a club in Stockholm for three years in order to gain a firsthand view of the milieu he described [in the book *The Aesthetics of a Broken Nose*]. There the values that the welfare state had otherwise subverted, such as masculinity, honor, violence and pain, were upheld, and the interest for me lay in how different society looked when viewed from that angle, with the set of values they had retained. (Knausgård 2013, 126)

What Knausgård touches on here is precisely how different society appears when one contemplates it through the eyes of a different community or the codes of different honor cultures. He himself represents precisely the characteristic welfare state's late modern "fluid" values. The group that has accused him of writing "Judas literature," represents – parallel to the boxing environment – another honor group with a different honor code.

In toto, Karl Ove Knausgård's *My Struggle* reveals the status of the honor culture and concepts of honor in late-modern, Western society. An almost total emancipation from traditional honor groups is possible. It is not just possible but even highly esteemed to rid oneself of traditional honor codes as well, including widespread ethical norms. In line with developments in other fields in late-modern society, belonging to honor groups and loyalty to honor codes are topics for choice and rechoice (what Anthony Giddens calls *second choices*). At the same time, both the work itself and its reception show that traditional feelings of honor are still found as residual values in society. The exposure of traditional honor groups evokes frustration, anger and despair, even illness reactions, in these same honor groups; but, of course, without mobilization of the judicial system to take a position against honor infringement (even if lawsuits are threatened).¹⁰ It is perhaps somewhat surprising that the "emancipated" one also shows frustration in connection with the deterioration of the honor culture. This frustration is expressed espe-

10. The relationship between honor and law is a wide-ranging subject. Stewart has a separate chapter about it in his book. He shows that in countries where there has been a close connection between honor and law, the number of litigations about insults to honor have greatly decreased, which underscores the weakening of honor cultures. (At the beginning of the 1900s there were 50,000 cases per year in Germany. In the 1960s this was reduced to between 8000 and 10,000. See Stewart 14). In addition, Stewart cites Montaigne who wrote that "there are two sets of laws, those of honor and those of justice, in many matters quite opposed" (cited in Stewart 79). Montaigne also said that "He who appeals to the laws to get satisfaction for an offence to his honor, dishonors himself" (Stewart 80). It is clearly a common feature in the history of honor that such a discrepancy between the judicial system and the honor culture has existed. In European history this meant, for example, that one turned a blind eye to a dueling tradition that actually was illegal — in the same way as other honor cultures have continued to take lightly phenomena such as so-called murders of honor, for example.

cially in the relationship of the feminist sides of the lost honor culture. As mentioned, most honor cultures are very much dominated by males. Late-modern Western society, which is heading towards equality, shakes the honor culture's traditional male role. *My Struggle* shows considerable frustration in connection with late-modern gender identity, something that especially emerges in the context of parental roles. But Knausgård also shows interest in the values of traditional, masculine honor culture in connection with his admiration for the boxing environment. Therefore he turns against the same late-modern welfare state society that has made it possible for him to be emancipated from traditional honor groups and honor codes.

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7

Men's and women's honour

ANNE-MARIE MAI

ABSTRACT This article has the conceptions of honour in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879/1889) as its springboard, includes the concept of honour in Thit Jensen's novels about the modern, emancipated woman *Gerd. Det tyvende Aarhundredes Kvinde* (*Gerd. Woman of the 20th century*, 1918) and *Aphrodite fra Fuur* (*Aphrodite from Fuur*, 1925), then focuses on the concept of honour in Suzanne Brøgger's collection of essays *Kærlighedens veje og vildveje* (*Love's Paths and Pitfalls*, 1975) and compares it with Pablo Llambías' rewriting of the work from a male point of view in *Kærlighedens veje og vildveje* (*Love's Paths and Pitfalls*, 2009).

KEY WORDS Ibsen | *A Doll's House* /honour | gender roles | identity

TO SACRIFICE ONE'S HONOUR

Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879/1889) is a classic of world literature. The drama of Nora, who leaves her husband Thorvald and her children in order to become a real person, still grips audiences all over the world because of the power of its plot and the boldness with which Ibsen draws conclusions from the suppression of women in a patriarchy. The play depicts the marriage between the childish Nora and the domineering bank man Thorvald, who worships Nora for her youth, lack of independence and irresponsibility. The pair belongs to the upper middle-class, but Thorvald has been seriously ill, and Nora has secretly borrowed money for a trip to Capri, where Thorvald regains his health. In order to take out the loan, Nora has forged her dead father's signature, and the dangerous situation in which she now finds herself ends up threatening Thorvald's career. He is prepared to cover this up, but even though the danger of being exposed drifts over, Nora realises that their marriage cannot continue. In her life together with Thorvald she has never been an independent, grown-up human being.

It is in the confrontation of the final scene between Nora and Thorvald that the concept of honour directly becomes involved, and it becomes one of the several

points of no return that lead to Nora leaving her husband, her children and her home.

The first point of no return in the play takes place when Nora takes off the masquerade costume she has been wearing at the evening's party. The audience becomes aware that she is in the process of breaking out of the gender role in which she has been living until then. She can never again become the sweet little songbird, the little squirrel and the romantic girl of Capri that Thorvald is so taken up with.

The second point of no return takes place when Thorvald, after the exposure of Nora's actions, talks about re-education, and Nora asks him who is to be re-educated. When Thorvald then points to Nora and the children, Nora states that she intends to leave him. If Thorvald had spoken of his own re-education along with that of her and the children, her reaction might possibly have been a different one.

A third point of no return takes place when Nora declares that she is a human being, just like Thorvald:

HELMER: First and foremost you are a wife and a mother.

NORA: I no longer believe that. I think that first and foremost I am a human being, I just as well as you – or at any rate that I must try to become one [...]
(Ibsen 1879)

(‘HELMER. Du er først og fremst hustru og mor.

NORA. Det tror jeg ikke lenger på. Jeg tror at jeg er først og fremst et menneske, jeg, liksom vel som du, – eller iallfall at jeg skal forsøke på å bli det [...])’

A fourth point of no return takes place when Thorvald declares that he is not prepared to offer his honour for love of Nora. Nora had been hoping for ‘the wonderful thing’, i.e. that Thorvald openly and honestly would defend her action. But Thorvald replies:

HELMER: I would happily work night and day for you, Nora, put up with sorrow and loss for your sake. But there is no one who offers his honour for the person he loves.

NORA: Thousands of women have done that, Helmer. (Ibsen 1879)

(‘HELMER. Jeg skulle gladelig arbeide netter og dage for deg, Nora, – bære sorg og savn for din skyld. Men der er ingen som ofrer sin ære for den man elsker.

NORA. Det har hundre tusen kvinner gjort.’)

The final point of no return points directly forward to the scene where Nora gives Thorvald her wedding ring back and asks for his ring in return.

In her own self-understanding, Nora has acted unselfishly in secretly trying to save her husband from his illness, whereas he is unwilling to lay aside his public reputation and the respect of others, his honour, for her sake. He gives honour greater priority than love, while love is the origin of bold and honourable actions to her way of thinking.

So the play implies that the future life of the sexes with each other must be based on a completely new set of values. Nora's critical questions regarding religion, classical humanism, legislation, and the concept of love start with her criticism of Thorvald's concept of honour.

Thorvald's concept of honour belongs to a modern, patriarchal set of values – as a successful citizen he positions himself among a group of people where public reputation regarding his familial power, status and business acumen foster his social advancement. Thorvald's career as a bank man is linked to his ability to stay within a code of honour which, as James Bowman points out in *Honor. A History* (2006), originates from an aristocratic, military context, but which becomes modernised and altered during the development of modern capitalist society.

The modern patriarchal conception of honour places the man as the subject of honour, while women, as Nora states in her remark, are obliged to renounce honour and thinking in terms of honour in order to live and survive in the world of reality.

Nora's concept of honour is far from being as clear and unequivocal as that of Thorvald. It springs from her love of her husband and represents a form of subjectivisation of the concept of honour where, as the honour researcher Alexander Welsh emphasises, it becomes internal honour, i.e. a question of personal integrity or character.¹

Nora wants to save Thorvald, but at the same time has to act within his code of honour – i.e. avoid behaving as an independently acting subject. She has to conceal her act of rescue, and she goes beyond the limits of both the law and her female gender role, but her act gives her a sense of self-esteem and self-respect. At one point in the play she remarks to her friend Mrs Linde: 'Well then, what do you say of my great secret, Christine? Do you still think I'm of no use?' (Ibsen 1879).

Nora mentions that in her work she has almost felt herself to be a man, but she makes much of the fact with Mrs Linde that she could have prostituted herself and been given the money by a rich admirer. To Nora's way of thinking, honour and

1. Welsh *What is Honor?*, 9–23.

sexuality are not each other's opposites, as they clearly are to Thorvald. Prior to Krogsted's revealing letter and the great point of no return, Nora finds herself in a double game in which she at the same respects Thorvald's code of honour and fulfils the role of the irresponsible childish woman but also undermines that code of honour with her own ideas as to how far she can go beyond the limits of her own gender role, her social status and patriarchal honour while continuing to live in the doll's house. When Nora leaves her home, she does so with the aim of testing all values – not only the concept of honour, but all the ideas about society and human beings she has known up to that point.

The Norwegian writer Camilla Collett, in the same year that *A Doll's House* is performed for the first time, also has her own thoughts about the male code of honour. In her opinion, the concept of honour are shared by both old and new patriarchal ideals, and 'honour' has to do with men's ownership of women. In her essay 'Vort Festliv' (Our Festivities), 1879, she writes:

There is a kind of chivalrous obligation of rank that has applied ever since Adam walked the earth and will apply for all time, for the eskimo as well as the sophisticated man of culture, for the wretch who maltreats his wife to the man of feeling who worships her like a goddess: every husband's affront of his wife applies to himself, every sin committed by her is his shame – Louis XIV's 'L'état c'est moi' applied to the perfect power of the married man is: Ma femme c'est moi.

We do not need to point out that the chivalrous identity of honour with his wife by the husband has its beautiful and noble side. It gains its most characteristic form of expression, however, through jealousy, and it expresses itself in a real desire, according to circumstances, to beat or murder both her and everything that even arouses the suspicion of seeking to question his absolute mastery – a desire that is most pronounced in nations and individuals that are themselves the greatest sinners against their wives and most in need of their forgiveness. (Camilla Collett 1879)

[‘Der gives en Art Standsforpligtelsens Ridderlighed, der lige fra Adams Dage har gjældt og vil gjælde gennem alle Tider, for Eskimoen som for den raffinerede Kulturmand, for Uslingen, der mishandler sin Hustru, til Følelsesmanden, der dyrker hende som en Guddom: Egtemandens. Enhver Fornærmelse mod Hustruen gjælder ham selv, enhver Forsyndelse af denne er hans Skam -- Ludvig den Fjortendes "L'état c'est moi", anvendt paa den egteherrelige Magtfuldkommenhed: Ma femme c'est moi.

At denne Egtemandens chevalereske Æresidentitet med sin Mage har sin smukke og noble Side, behøver vi vist ikke at bemærke. Sit mest betegnende Udtryk naar den dog gennem Skinsygen, og den ytrer sig da i en levende Lyst til, efter Omstændighederne, at banke eller at myrde baade hende og alt, hvad der blot vækker Mistanken om at ville gjøre ham hans Enehæredømme stridig, -- en Lyst, som man altid vil finde mest udpræget hos Nationer og Individuer, der selv er de største Syndere mod sine Hustruer og mest trænger til deres Tilgivelse.']

Unlike possessive male honour, modern women and men, according to Collett, are in the process of developing a new concept of 'respect' where women make common cause with each other. If a gender-based wrong is committed against an individual woman, it is one committed against all women: '*La femme c'est moi*' (ibid). Collett gives the same description as Ibsen of the whole problem of the patriarchal concept of honour, but she also emphasis a new modern formation of values to do with honour and respect, which men and women of the future ought to share with each other.

HONOURABLE EMANCIPATION

We find an important example of the treatment of the relationship between honour and female emancipation in the short letter novel *Clara Raphael. Tolv Breve* (Clara Raphael's Twelve Letters, 1851/1994) by the Danish writer Mathilde Fibiger about a romantic young woman who dreams of taking part in the struggle of the age for nation, folk and spirit. Clara, who is a governess in a small provincial town, subscribes to the male concept of honour, and she defends men who leave their wives and family to volunteer for the war between Denmark and Prussia. In one of her letters she mentions an exchange of views she has had with one of the local women:

Today I am in an indescribably good mood, I think because I have teased Madam Star, who finds it impossible to refrain from attacking me with sarcastic remarks. She was so eager in her condemnation of a man who left his wife and the needle factory last spring to volunteer for the war that I, who felt that the man had done his duty, felt called on to defend him. 'A married man,' she said, 'has no other duty than to provide for his wife and his children.' 'No,' I replied, 'no relationship in the world can free him from his obligation to his mother country! The wife who is egoistic enough to want to force her way between her husband and his honour and conscience makes herself unworthy of his obligation to provide for her.' 'Oh,' she exclaimed in a derisive tone,

let's keep things down to earth, shall we!' 'Yes,' I replied, anyone unable to get any higher than that I would also advise to make a virtue out of necessity.' (Fibiger 1851/1994)

[Jeg er idag i ubeskrivelig godt Humeur jeg troer fordi jeg har drillet Madam Star, som aldrig kan opgive sin Lyst til at anfælde mig med Spydigheder. Hun drog saa ivrig tilfældts mod en Mand, som forrige Foraar forlod sin Kone og Naalefabrik, for at gaae med som Frivillig, at jeg, der fandt at Manden havde gjort sin Pligt, paatog mig hans Forsvar. 'En gift Mand,' sagde hun, 'har ingen anden Pligt, end at sørge for sin Kone og sine Børn.' – Nei, svarede jeg, intet Forhold i Verden kan løse ham fra hans Forpligtelser mod Fædrelandet! Den Kone, som er egoistisk nok til at ville trænge sig imellem sin Mand og hans Ære og Samvittighed, hun gjør sig derved uværdig til at han skulde tage Hensyn til hende. 'Aa,' udbrød hun i en spodsk Tone: 'Lad os nu bare blive paa Jorden!' – Ja, svarede jeg, hvem der ikke kan komme høiere, vil jeg ogsaa raade til at gjøre en Dyd af Nødvendigheden.]

Mathilde Fibiger's errand is to show that women can have the same unselfish national sentiment as men can. In actual fact, she shares the concept of honour that Ibsen's Thorvald expresses, since she claims that such a view of honour ought to be extended to also include women. They too can experience a call to honour and choose to follow that call rather than supporting the traditional female role. Clara Raphael finds an opportunity to live out her national commitment by marrying a man who wishes to live with her like a brother, raise himself to her spiritual level (as he puts it) and help her in her struggle for the nation and 'Ladies' emancipation' (Fibiger 1851/1994).

The story of how this struggle will realise itself and how Clara will live together with her Axel is a bit airy, but the main thing for Mathilde Fibiger is the idea and the spiritual striving, not a detailed description of concrete avenues open to 'the ladies' and their longing to take part in honour.

The concept of honour is also central to the Danish writer Thit Jensen in her feminist series of novels *Gerd. Det tyvende Aarhundredes Kvinde* (Gerd. Woman of the 20th century, 1918) and *Aphrodite fra Fuur* (Aphrodite from Fuur, 1925), which deal with a young woman who liberates herself from the old gender roles and the world of Romanticism. Here it is interesting to note that emancipation has as its aim that the main character 'Gerd' wishes to acquire a new set of basic values and maintain a personal honour, which is seen as a prerequisite for self-esteem. The patriarchy she feels is insulting, deprives her of her self-respect and

personal honour. Emancipation, self-esteem and honour form a complex of values on which she attempts to build her life. Gerd's conflict consists in the fact that she is unable to unite her longing for honour and self-esteem with her longing for love and happiness.

In a conversation with her father she says:

'But father, when I know deep down – if one gave me the choice between roses and laurels, with roses being happiness and laurels honour, and I know that I would not hesitate for a moment – I would try and seize the laurels...'

'My dear Gerd,' Pastor Palludan interrupted, extremely gravely, think before you speak! you do not know at which moment you decide your own destiny – you do not know how many tears you perhaps are committing yourself to.'

Gerd sat upright on his knee and looked out into the room with large eyes, clear with vision.

'Then I will commit myself to tears, father'. (Jensen 1918/1975, 91).

['Jamen Far, naar jeg nu inde i mig selv ved – hvis man gav mig Valget mellem Roser og Laurbær, Roserne var Lykken og Laurbærrene Ære, og jeg ved, at jeg ikke et Øjeblik ville betænke mig – jeg ville gribe efter Laurbærrene....

Lille Gerd, afbrød Pastor Palludan dybt alvorlig, tænk får du taler! du ved slet ikke, hvad Øjeblik du afgør din egen Skæbne – du ved ikke, hvor mange Taarer, du maaske vier dig til.

Gerd sad oprejst paa hans Knæ oig saa med store, visionsklare Øjne ud i Stuen. Saa vier jeg mig til Taarerne, Far.]

Gerd's emancipation requires her to renounce her sexual desire and leave her betrothed. The price for the new female honour is sexuality, and the reader sees the lonely, honourable Gerd set out into a life full of emotional deprivation.

The personal feeling of honour is the prize of emancipation, but the suppression of sexuality its cost. While this solution works – as a vision at any rate – for Mathilde Fibiger's Clara Raphael, the same does not apply to Thit Jensen's Gerd.

In *Aphrodite fra Fuur* (Aphrodite from Fuur), Gerd has become a social-democratic member of parliament, and she gets involved in a love affair with the country's prime minister, who belongs to the Conservative party, and who in addition is a married man. She finally breaks out of the love affair, but not before she has had a prolonged conversation that includes various concepts and forces in herself, including man, woman, reason and the wolf, i.e. the sexual urge. Honour also comes forward and speaks to her. But during Gerd's long inner trial, her former

fiancé comes to his senses and realises that he must learn to respect her. Finally, it is possible for the two to be reunited, and, it should be noted, Gerd has maintained her honour. When she listens to the voice of her honour it says:

‘When you redeemed the wolf in you, you thought you redeemed the woman, but you were wrong, and if you return to Philip Bull, I, your honour, am safe.’
(Jensen 1925/1981,193)

[‘Da du forløste ulven i dig, troede du at forløse kvinden, men du tog fejl, og vender du tilbage til Philip Bull er jeg, din ære sikker’]

Thit Jensen’s novels are an example of how a personal and subjectivised concept of honour is central in many of the modern stories of emancipation that depict breaking out and revolting against patriarchal forms of life.

WELFARE AND HONOUR

In 20th century Nordic literature we find examples of texts and works which, in narrating and portraying the establishing of the Nordic welfare states refer to conceptions of honour, or rather the absence of honour, in the new social contexts that the welfare state brings with it.

In the Nordic countries, the welfare state was especially characterised by a defamiliarisation² that placed children, young people and adults in new situations and tested them in ways that were unpredicted.

The nuclear family, with two providers out at work, consisting of a father, mother and children quickly gained ground in the 1960s and early 1970s, supported by laws and national regulations to do with childbirth, family planning, the building of day-care centres and care of the elderly.

The welfare state, even in the early stages, was on its way into a societal situation where potential behaviour and sex roles were not predetermined for either father, mother, grandparents or children. The family that both Ibsen’s Nora and Jensen’s Gerd knew as a stable, close-knit institution started to resemble a provisional unit loosely held together by sex roles that were constantly being reformulated at the same time as the state was trying to become a national people’s home with room

2. The social researcher Gøsta Esping-Andersen lists three characteristics of the Scandinavian welfare state: Universalism, Decommodification, and Defamiliarisation; cf. Esping-Andersen, *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*, 25ff.

for everyone.³ The welfare state was planned to become an institutionalised version of the love of one's neighbour which people did not have the time to exercise personally, while close human relations in the home and family became increasingly unstable and the basic values themselves for the family and living together became shaky.⁴ The new life forms positioned the individual relatively equally in both the family and society. What both children and adults met with was, to an increasing extent, powerful welfare institutions rather than fellow human beings.

In the 1970s, the Nordic countries acquired a feminist literature which – further developing the tradition of the modern breakthrough – described women's emancipation and the breaking out of the patriarchal family as an important driving force in the development of welfare. The thread from Henrik Ibsen was picked up, since one of the aims was to tell the story of where the modern Nora would go off to when she 'left'. The novel *Orange* (1972) by the Danish writer Jytte Borberg and the debut novel *Brud* (The Break-Up, 1977) by another Danish author, Bente Clod, are examples of this emancipation literature about seeking new paths and new feminist communities. But neither the concept of personal or collective honour is central to these works.

A critique of social barriers and of the suppression of the female body and sexual desire were also dealt with in works by, for example, the Norwegian writer Bjørk Vik, the Swedish writer Kerstin Ekman and the Danish writer Jette Drewsen. Personal self-esteem and self-realisation were important values in the feminist writing of the 1970s, while the conceptions of collective honour were peripheral.

HONOUR, BODY AND SEXUALITY

There is however a writer in the 1970s, the Dane Suzanne Brøgger, who actually tries to inscribe herself into a collective concept of honour and create the connection between honour, body and sexuality that was impossible for Thit Jensen and the women of the modern breakthrough. With her first two collections of essays, *Deliver us from love* (1973/ 1976) and *Kærlighedens veje og vildveje* (Love's paths and stray paths, 1975) Suzanne Brøgger reformulates a concept of honour in her clash with the petit bourgeois nuclear family, the prevailing sexual morality and so-

3. For a more detailed description of changes to the family structure during the early stages of the welfare state see: Christoffersen *Familiens udvikling i det 20. århundrede*: 'Between 1940 and 1965, almost half the women between 15 and 74 were housewives on the day of the count. This proportion then fell rapidly. In 1990, housewives made up only 5 per cent of the same group on the day of the interview,' 129.

4. See Petersen et al., *Dansk Velfærdshistorie*, 6.2, 761ff.

called private life. She writes critically about the new nuclear family of the welfare state and the homelessness and impotence that in her opinion characterises the nuclear family and the new institutions. Her public appearances in the 1970s resemble a personal performance that points in the direction of the individualisation and subjectivisation of emancipation and a parodical reflection on the transformation of honour to 'Celebrity', as analysed by James Bowman in *Honor: A History*. Brøgger's concern is an attempt once more to formulate honour in the sense of self-respect and mutual respect as a collective value. *Deliver us from love* has it out with the nuclear family, marriage and life in the welfare state, and it discusses life-forms and modes of thinking where 'genius' and 'genitals' are connected to each other, as stated in the first essay 'The Last Tango' (Brøgger 1973, 19).

Brøgger's special point is that female emancipation ought not to lead to differences between all kinds of gender-determined differences being neutralised and raised into a concept of 'the human', but that the differences can be retained and promoted via self-respect. The welfare state makes people uniform, Brøgger claims and emphasises that there is a need for both myths and witches to avoid the standardisation of welfare life and the nuclear family. Brøgger does not want to turn woman into a male human being but to make room for completely new gender conceptions.

Both men and women ought to try to formulate myths and ideas that can liberate them from the unhappy Western conception of love and give them back self-esteem. The collection of essays concludes, typically enough, with a visit to an Iranian baths where a woman washes and scrubs the author so that she is freed from the dirt and filth of the old culture and can step out pure and fresh once more into existence. The writing has functioned as a kind of ablution of old patterns of conceptions and ideas. The writer does not say much about how genius and genitals are to be united, but the pitch has been marked out for an unusual debate of ideas and of gender, and it continues in the following collection of essays, *Kærlighedens veje og vildveje* (Love's paths and stray paths).

AN HONOURABLE MORALITY

Kærlighedens veje og vildveje (Love's paths and stray paths) tries to isolate a set of basic values in which desire and honour are important, and give the reader examples of life-stories and stories about desire and reason. The first essay deals with a female I-figure that tries to say goodbye to a lover by giving him a flower, as an expression of the fact that she still has feelings for him, even though they are unable to speak together and round off their relationship verbally.

However, she finds it very difficult to get around to visiting her ex-lover. She is afraid that someone will see her carrying flowers on her way to a man. It is not usual to give flowers to a man, and not at all to a man one has left. She also feels that it is a challenge to visit him at his place of work, and can imagine that the gift of flowers will offend his sense of honour:

I looked for his name on the board, all the other names were listed but not his, and because I gradually started feeling with all his emotions, this knocked me out completely. I experienced it as a daily pain for him and felt I was an active part of the conspiracy that was only intent on humiliating him and insulting his honour. It was my fault that they had omitted his name, I was part of the attempt to ignore him. Wasn't that precisely what he accused me of: of ignoring him and wounding his pride, and therefore he always had to take revenge out of despair which turned into viciousness, and it was extra-humiliating to be forced to be vicious – and it was a vicious circle. (Brøgger 1975, 15–16).

[‘Jeg så efter hans navn på tavlen, alle de andre navne var anført, kun ikke hans, og fordi jeg efterhånden følte med alle hans følelser, blev jeg slået helt ud. Jeg oplevede det som en daglig pine for ham og følte mig som et aktivt led i den sammensværgelse, der bare var ude på at ydmyge ham og krænke hans ære. Det var min skyld, de havde udeladt hans navn, jeg var jo med i dette forsøg på at negligere ham. Var det ikke netop hvad han anklagede mig for: at negligere ham og såre hans stolthed, og derfor måtte han altid hævne sig i desperation, der blev til ondskab, og det var ekstra ydmygende at være nødt til at være ond, og det var en ond cirkel.’]

Their love relationship has simply collapsed because of the clash of values and interpretations of existence in which the two of them find themselves. In certain ways he still resembles Ibsen's Thorvald, since he perceives her public appearance as a confessional author as an insult to his honour. She doesn't want to be a 'Woman' with a capital W, and his self-confidence is crushed by the many critical discussion of the age about the relationship between the sexes. The flower for him is a symbol of all that she does not want to be: nice, quiet and well-adjusted, and therefore he will have to make do with a pot plant. The situation where she attempts to pay a visit on him becomes increasingly awkward, and she ends up by placing the flower on the kitchen staircase – once again an image expressing that her access to his life has gone via the traditional female role.

After this introductory tale there follows a series of essays about breaking free of traditional gender roles and the necessity of creating other ways of living. ‘The problem is not that men suppress women, or that ‘the system’ suppresses human beings, but that we all suppress ourselves, our innermost dreams and longings. We suppress ourselves out of a fear of what would happen if we were honest.’ (Brøgger 1975, 21).

In *Kærlighedens veje og vildveje* (Love’s paths and stray paths), Brøgger shows herself to be a moralist speaking for honesty, honour, respect, the difference between the sexes rather than nuclear families, one-to-one relationships, self-destructiveness, the absence of myths and the dominance of welfare conformity. In the penultimate essay’s interview with the hat maker, Nynne ‘It ought to have been forbidden to put up with it’ (Brøgger 1975, 181 ff.), a woman’s life is portrayed that is lived in self-respect, joy and sorrow with husbands, children, grandchildren and lovers. Nynne’s life is, to put it mildly, complicated, but her thoughts about the good life are actually simple: ‘Make things a bit nicer for other people, teach them something, make them a little happier, make life a little easier. That you enjoy yourself in the process doesn’t make it any worse either!’ (Brøgger 1975, 206).

Brøgger returns to the discussion about men’s and women’s honour in her so-called serial *Yes* (1984). Here she once more deals with the story of the difficult lover who feels that her writing threatens his honour:

He had started to talk about his ‘honour’ that I mustn’t encroach on. His ‘honour’ that I must respect and cherish, he said.

‘I think you ought to start by respecting yourself.’

‘I do. You’re the one who doesn’t.’

‘You’re completely unable to distinguish between honour and vanity. A person’s honour and dignity are something that is completely a matter of course, that cannot ever be intruded on under normal circumstances, for I’m not talking about concentration camps or torture. The dignity of a lion lies in the fact that it allows itself to be perceived as a lion, and that one thus naturally does not treat it as a squirrel. Just as one must refrain from decking elephants out in lace bonnets. In the same way with your honour, you don’t have to worry about it at all, for it is there as long as you leave it in peace.’

‘You’re the one who won’t leave it in peace!’

‘That brings us precisely to vanity, which is something quite different. It is a false self-conception, a lack of a sense of reality, a wrong sense of proportion, a distortion and an illusion. And I’m ready any time to give vanity a poke in the eye, including my own.’

(Brøgger 1984, 283)

[‘Han var begyndt at tale om sin “ære”, som jeg ikke måtte gå for nær. Hans “ære” måtte jeg respektere og værne om, sagde han.

– Jeg synes, du skulle begynde med at respektere dig selv.

– Det gør jeg også, det er dig der ikke gør det.

– Du er overhovedet ikke i stand til at skelne mellem ære og forfængelighed.

Et menneskes ære og værdighed er noget helt selvfølgeligt, som slet ikke *kan* antastes, under normale omstændigheder, for jeg taler ikke om koncentrationslejre eller tortur. En løves værdighed ligger i, at den lader sig opfatte som løve, og at man selvfølgelig ikke behandler den som et egern, ligesom man må afholde sig fra at give elefanter blondekyser på. På samme måde med din ære, du behøver slet ikke at bekymre dig om den, for den er der, hvis du bare lader den være i fred.

– Det er *dig*, der ikke vil lade den være i fred!

Her er vi lige præcis ved forfængeligheden, som er noget helt andet. Det er den falske selvopfattelse, manglende realitetssans, forfejlet proportionssans, forvrængning og illusion. Og jeg er til en hver tid parat til at give forfængeligheden én i øjet, inklusive min egen. ’]

Brøgger fights for a collective honour, as opposed to the patriarchal conception of honour which her lover shares with Ibsen’s Thorvald. Her line of argument is inspired by Karen Blixen’s rhetoric and her discussion of how a woman’s ‘being’ is suppressed and repressed in the patriarchal culture. Brøgger is very interested indeed in Karen Blixen’s ‘Oration at a bonfire, delayed by fourteen years’ (1953), in which Blixen claims that modernity has disturbed the relationship between men and women and suppressed the ability ‘to be’ that women master and that formerly used to be appreciated. Modernity builds solely on the ability of men ‘to act’, which Blixen sees as being profoundly problematic.

The early collections of essays by Suzanne Brøgger are an attempt to formulate new moral values, oppose welfare conformity and the tendencies of the new feminist movement to get rid of the female sex and, in the name of emancipation and equality, turn women into men. Her essay is written from a female point of view, but in 2009 the writer Pablo Llambías took up her *Kærlighedens veje og vildveje* (Love’s paths and stray paths) and rewrote it.

TOWARDS REGIMENTATION

Pablo Llambías’ version of *Kærlighedens veje og vildveje* (Love’s paths and stray paths) is considerably shorter than Brøgger’s, and he omits very time-bound passages; but the surprising perspective of the work is that he lets Brøgger’s female

I-figure become a male counterpart. Everywhere, his version adopts a male point of view. The result is exciting and invites discussion, since the shift from a female to a male I-figure reveals the great extent to which the development of welfare and the defamiliarisation of the welfare state has fostered the tendency that Brøgger feared in 1975: that female emancipation will regimentalise genders.

In the essay ‘The Flower’ already mentioned, it is a male I-figure who pays a visit to his former lover with a flower in order to conclude the relationship, since the lovers are no longer able to speak to each other. He has experienced her love as restrictive – it increasingly threatens his integrity. He is unable to live up to being a full-time husband and adapting himself to her norms and live and idea of giving him ‘a free rein’. This irritates her, and he writes about men’s ‘self-inflicted strangulation’ (Llambías 2009, 13), and she hates the debates in the newspapers about men and women. She has never, she says, had any problems with suppressed men.

“‘My Jutland husband,’ I used to call her. She was incapable to admitting her mistakes. She was unable to say sorry. With her great belly and her hand thrust well down into the copious pockets of her overalls, with her characteristic under-shot jaw well to the fore, her brow furrowed, there she stood as if there was someone about to trespass on her land.’ (Llambías 2009, 13). [“‘Min jyske mand,’ plejede jeg at kalde hende. Hun kunne ikke indrømme fejl. Hun kunne ikke sige undskyld. Med tyk mave og hænderne stukket godt ned i overallens store lommer, med det karakteristiske underbid skudt frem, med rynker i panden, stod hun, som om der var nogen, der var ved at gå ind over hendes marker.’]

His writing insults her honour:

‘Because I gradually started feeling with all her emotions, this knocked me out completely. I experienced it as a daily pain for her and felt I was an active part of the conspiracy that was only intent on humiliating her and insulting her honour. I was part of the attempt to ignore her. Wasn’t that precisely what she accused me of: of ignoring her and wounding her pride, and therefore she always had to take revenge out of despair which turned into viciousness, and it was extra-humiliating to be forced to be vicious – and it was a vicious circle.’ (Llambías 2009, 16-17).

[‘Fordi jeg følte med hendes følelser, blev jeg helt slået ud. Jeg oplevede det som en daglig pine for hende og følte mig som et aktivt led i den sammensværgelse, der var ude på et ydmyge og krænke hendes ære. Jeg var jo med i dette forsøg på at negligere hende. Var det ikke netop hvad hun anklagede mig for: at negligere hende og såre hendes stolthed, og derfor måtte hun altid hævne sig

i desperation, der blev til ondskab, og det var ekstra ydmygende at være nødt til at være ond, og det var en ond cirkel.’]

The story of the businesswoman and the male author functions as an eye-opener that shows how the development of welfare and equality have not resulted in giving genders better chances of developing in relation to each other. Brøgger's earlier dream of new myths and a diversity of gender identity has not become reality. The visionary, fantastic hatter of Brøgger's essay is admittedly still there. She tries to keep her courage up and her lovers fired-up, but the essay about her ends up in thoughts of death. The hatter says that for many years she consoled herself by thinking of ending up as ashes strewn over the pavement, so that people would not fall down when it was slippery. Now she feels that the idea is far too pretentious, and she intends to concentrate on looking with loving eyes at the fat women on the bus who will probably become her carers when she lies on her deathbed. In Llambías' book the big dreams really have come down to earth.

Despite this, Llambías' essays are promising, because they demonstrate in practice Brøgger's emphasising of the need to think about and formulate values and also to look at the concept of honour that was part of the conflict between man and woman in 1879 and 1975 as well as 2009. Llambías' book ends with a rewriting of Brøgger's essay about life in the provinces, mixed up with long quotations from Joan Riviere's essay, 'Femininity as a masquerade' (1929/1992). It seems a bit of a parody that the good farmers and mechanics toss around theoretical explanations. The Freudian theories are also mentally stiff-legged and do not provide answers to the many questions that the other essays have asked. But that too is perhaps a point. The present day is up to its neck in theory, incapable of living life, cultivating love and honour. The last move where Llambías remixes Brøgger is to be found in the bibliography, where Llambías inserts a piece of text from Brøgger's essay 'Kyssets historie' ('The history of the kiss'). And with this gesture Llambías concludes by pointing to the potential of the body to, via desire, gain bliss and the experience that the universe can be well-ordered and harmonious – for as long as the kiss lasts. It is still a question of uniting genius and genitals, of finding desire and insisting on living not in joy, welfare and sorrow, but in desire, self-esteem and honour.

Llambías' book is unique in its remix of a feminist classic, but it is also part of a new male literature that includes works by the Norwegian Karl Ove Knausgård and the Dane Jens Blendstrup, who draw attention to the extent to which feminist literature has introduced a present-day discussion of men's and women's honour, a discussion that men at the beginning of the 21st century are ready to take up.

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8

'His name is man!'¹

The chieftain hero as type and topos in Norway around 1900

MADS BRECKAN CLAUDI

ABSTRACT With a historical and cultural approach to literature and poetry, Claudi demonstrates the English writer Thomas Carlyle's influence on individual authors, e.g. Kristofer Uppdal, but also how it inspired a collective of poets, including Tore Ørjasæter and Olav Nygard. Claudi indicates that such an individual and person-oriented progressive movement as the chief cult eventually came into discredit in the wake of both World War I and changed conceptions in modern research of how history develops.

KEY WORDS chief cult | chieftain | heroism | honour

When Arne Garborg dies in January 1924, Uppdal writes an obituary in the magazine *Syn og segn*. The obituary is in prose, but Uppdal also writes a version of it in verse. Odd Solumsmoen includes this poem in his 1963 collection of Uppdal's posthumous poetry titled *Hestane mine* [My horses]. Here it is:

Hovding,
kvass,
og fârlæg for uvener!

Sanningsleitar.
Og aldri undan du rygde i reddhug,
um på livet laust det bar,
du sa frå, når eit ord skulde segjast.

Du, den trauste og ærlege stridsmann,
verd å bli lik,
deg, stridsmann, elsker eg,
i kjærleik

1. This article is translated by Richard Burgess.

lik dei som glad og stolt fylgjer hovdingen sin
i dauden.
Eg minnest frå mine barndoms og ungdoms år
den døkke tonen din mot meg,
som ropa,
ja ropa på meg òg.
Til eg måtte koma.
Og eg kom.

Eg har høyrd mælet ditt,
gjenom min eigen strid,
når eg har vore nær å orvonast,
og har då mintest striden din.

Ein takk frå meg!
i denne herdsleblåe edeltistel eg legg ned.

(Uppdal 1963: 41–42)

[Chieftain,
sharp,
and dangerous for enemies!

Truth-seeker.
You never backed off in fear,
though life was at stake,
you spoke out, when a word needed to be spoken.

You, the reliable and honest warrior,
worth emulating,
you, warrior, I love,
in love
like those that happily and proudly follow their chieftain
unto death.
I remember from the years of my childhood and youth
your dark tone towards me,
that summoned,
yes, summoned me too.
Until I had to come.
And I came.

I have heard your voice,
through my own struggle,
when I have been close to despair,
and have remembered your struggle.

I thank you!
with this hard-blue thistle that I lay down.]

The poem is Uppdal's eulogy to one of his greatest heroes, so naturally the poem aims to describe the greatness of the deceased. But the way Uppdal canonises his poetic hero may seem odd. The poem opens by characterising Garborg as 'kvass' [sharp] and 'fårleg' [dangerous]. The first adjective is accentuated by being placed on a line of its own, and the final exclamation mark in the third line gives the sharpness and danger extra emphasis and pathos. The description continues in the next stanza in a somewhat milder tone as the characterisation of Garborg as 'Sanningsleitar' [truth-seeker] is expanded on through the emphasis on his fearlessness in what we understand to be intellectual struggles of great importance. This is followed up in the third stanza where Garborg is referred to as a 'stridsmann' [warrior]. This is more or less what we are told about the man who, apparently at least, is the thematic focus of the poem. From here on, the poem is at least as much about 'I' as 'you'. '[D]eg, stridsmann, elsker eg' [You, warrior, I love] Uppdal declares – if we may venture to identify the poem's 'I' with the poet – before comparing his love for Garborg with the fanatical soldier's love for his commander. '[V]erd å bli lik' [worth emulating], it says in the second line of the stanza, and from here on it is not so much a poem about Garborg as a poem about the relationship, and not least the similarities, between Uppdal and Garborg. Just as Garborg wanted to devote his life to struggle, Uppdal wants to follow his hero into death; just as Garborg has had his struggle, Uppdal has had his. And not least, Garborg has called out to Uppdal, summoning him 'til eg måtte koma./ Og eg kom.' [until I had to come./ And I came]. Uppdal is not just a Garborg fan, he is his appointed successor. Thus Uppdal's poem about Garborg can be read as more than just a homage to a dead colleague; it can also be read as a poem about the kinship between the old and the young, between the receiver and the giver of homage, and as Uppdal's appointment of himself as Garborg's successor.

The intense admiration expressed in the poem places the poem within an intellectual framework of what may be called a chieftain cult in the decades around 1900. During this period the influential figures in Norwegian public life display a striking idolisation of the 'great man', the 'representative man', the 'heros', 'genius' or indeed 'chieftain'.² This chieftain culture also leaves its mark on the Norwegian literature of the period, and this article will examine both the cult itself and how it is

2. Historians Bodil Stenseth and Narve Fulsås use the concepts 'høvdingkultus' [chieftain cult] (Stenseth 2000, 48) and 'førarkultus' [leader cult] (Fulsås 1999, 226) in reference to the phenomenon.

expressed in poetry, specifically in the poems of Kristofer Uppdal, Tore Ørjasæter and Olav Nygard, with emphasis on the first and last of these. All of them demonstrate a clear idealisation of ‘the great man’, and a belief that heroes – and the worship of them – can have a progressive influence on society and history.

THOMAS CARLYLE AND HEROES

The foremost theoretician of the chieftain cult is undoubtedly the Scottish historian and philosopher Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881). Though relatively unknown today, and almost completely overshadowed by Friedrich Nietzsche, in Norway in the decades mentioned Carlyle was perhaps as important a figure as Nietzsche. It appears that interest in Carlyle began to really take off during the 1880s, not least due to the work of author and translator Vilhelm Troye. Troye opens his biography *Thomas Carlyle, hans liv og hans værk* [Thomas Carlyle, his life and work] from 1889 by explaining how ‘the positive response that my translation of Carlyle’s ‘On Heroes and Hero-worship’ received last year and the interest for Carlyle expressed from all quarters has led me to believe that the time was ripe to make our public better acquainted with this man, who for over a generation was the most remarkable teacher for a great and, for us, kindred nation’ (Troye 1889, preface, unpaginated). The translation he mentions is the book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* from 1841, published in Norwegian in 1888 with the title *Om herosdyrkelse, eller store mænd, deres væsen og betydning*. In 1890 Troye published his third Carlyle book in as many years, a translation of *The French Revolution, A History* from 1837.

It is unlikely that Troye’s description of the contemporary interest for Carlyle was just self-praise or a marketing ploy. From the late 19th century until well into the 20th, Carlyle had a high standing in Norwegian public life, so high that Fridtjof Nansen in his eulogy to Roald Amundsen, broadcasted on the radio in 1928, not only refers to him without any introductory comments, but also lets Carlyle’s portrayal of courage, strength and fearlessness stand as a yardstick for measuring Amundsen:

Carlyle talks of the old Norwegian maritime kings with their indomitable, ursine determination. He sees them standing on their small boats ‘silent, with closed lips, [...] unconscious that they were specially brave; defying the wild ocean with its monsters, and all men and things’. Is this not as if spoken about him, the Roald Amundsen of our own times; he was truly cast in the same mould (Nansen 1942, 692).

More than 60 years have passed when Nansen gives this speech since Aasmund O. Vinje, writing in the newspaper *Dølen* on April 14, 1866, refers to 'this Carlyle' who according to Vinje 'believes so strongly in great men that he turns them into gods and other folk into nothing' (Vinje 1971, 214). Vinje himself seems to regard Carlyle's ideas as part of broader and apparently widespread cultural trend; 'This "cult of the genius", as it is called, resembles in many ways a modern version of the Catholic "cult of the saints". People need something to believe in' (ibid.). 12 years later the historian Ernst Sars advocates Carlyle's ideas in an article in the periodical *Nyt norsk Tidsskrift* in 1878 when he discusses Carlyle's *The Early Kings of Norway* (1875) and in that connection presents and endorses Carlyle's ideas concerning great men and their role in history. 'You have never had more substantial and interesting reading', Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson writes in 1890 in a letter where he mentions Troye's editions of Carlyle and advises the recipient to buy both the biography and *The French Revolution*. He also expresses his own kinship with Carlyle when he writes; 'and when you read these books, you will see into my own soul better than if I now was to write about myself, which I would find repulsive. For Carlyle's view on what is important and unimportant in life and learning *is mine also*.' (Bjørnson 1953, 16, Bjørnson's emphasis). In 1913 we find an article in *Syn og Segn* by Otto Minde called 'Carlyle i framtid' [Carlyle in the future], where 'the prophet in Chelsea' (Minde 1913, 499) is referred to as the man with the solution to how mankind is to avoid the collapse of civilisation. And when Christen Collin publishes his study of genius, *Det geniale menneske* [The person of genius] in 1914, he does so endorsing Carlyle as his authority on the subject. Just two paragraphs into the book, Carlyle is allowed to supply the theoretical premises for the study of genius: 'Thomas Carlyle, the great Scottish historian and sage, extolled the genius as *heros*', Collin writes, 'seeing in this *heros* a reflection of the divine Creator, a leader for a group of people in their striving to assist the Eternal in a divine daily labour to form cosmos out of chaos, create order and light, unite contending forces into harmony' (Collin 1914, 1).

In a combination of leadership ideology and historical theory, the special personality is made the very agent or catalyst of history: 'World history is the biography of great men', quotes Sars (1912b, 399). Both the politico-ideological and the historiographical impulse is evident in Troye's introduction to *Om herosdyrkelse*: 'As opposed to the levelling tendency of our democratic age to see leaders as a product of circumstances, the creations of their times, Carlyle argues that the truly great men are the creators of their times' (Carlyle 1888, preface, unpaginated). From a historiographical perspective, the cult of 'great men' implies a rejection of the determinism that resulted from 19th century positivism and histo-

ricity (cf. Fulsås 1999, 89), and a protest against a materialistic approach to the study of history. It can be seen as an attempt to restore the individual, the human being and free will as the decisive factor in history at the expense of historical structures and laws. As Troye writes, Carlyle is ‘the passionate spokesman of idealism in a predominantly material age’ (Carlyle 1888, preface, unpaginated).

Chieftainship is a form of spiritual aristocracy. In politics, in society and in art, respect for the exceptional individual is required. Narve Fulsås writes that Sars saw a possible danger in democratic majority rule curtailing the spiritual freedom of ‘the spiritual aristocracy formed by men of free thought’ (quoted by Fulsås 1999, 225). In Norwegian history, as Sars described it in *Udsigt over den norske historie* [Survey of Norwegian history] (1873–91), the success of the nation rests on an aristocratic foundation, Bjørnson argues in his speech on the occasion of the publishing of the book’s final volume: ‘Our path through history is the path of aristocracy towards democracy. Aristocracy is absorbed into the people and thereby bestows it its nobility. Therefore, chieftainship has characterised our democratic labours so far. Respect for spirit as for law. Letting the great be great and the low be low’ Bjørnson 1913, 221).³ And although Bjørnson tries to give the aristocratic attitude a democratic purpose, meaning that the spiritual aristocracy in a sense dissolves itself by raising the people to their own level, it is quite clear from what follows that the chieftains have far from lost their historical relevance. The wellbeing of the people still rests on them:

[...] the power of chieftains is won by endeavour. He who relaxes, loses it. Our humble circumstances, our deficiency in numbers, obliges us to endeavour; it is required that the chieftains set courageous, long-term goals and that it is an honour to follow. If the chieftains of our little nation lower their endeavours by compromising on their goals, whatever they may gain in the short-term of peace and advantage, it will corrupt our practices (Bjørnson 1913, 223).⁴

3. According to Fulsås (2009), Sars’s understanding of history gained complete dominance as a result of the dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union in 1905, and when he celebrated his 70th birthday during the autumn of that same year, he was acclaimed ‘as a unifying national figure’ (ibid.), ‘as a national hero’ with both the prime minister and the foreign minister present (Fulsås 199, 11). He was a personal friend of Vinje and Bjørnson, Welhaven’s nephew and Nansen’s brother-in-law, and through his mother Maren Sars’s social connections – he lived with her until her death in 1898 (https://nbl.snl.no/Maren_Sars 23.03.16) – he found himself in the middle of what Stenseth terms ‘the most influential cultural and political circle in Norway’ during the decades before and after 1900 (Stenseth 2000, 32).

4. There is a clear parallel in the first sentence here to Carlyle’s view of the necessary conditions of genius, quoted by Collin: ‘A transcendental capacity of taking trouble’ (Collin 1914, 1).

The chieftain has the role as history's trailblazer, the one that drives society forward – cf. the 'courageous long-term goals' – not least by taking care of society's spiritual health. In order to ensure that the chieftain can perform his cathartic spiritual and social function, the attempt is made – by Sars, Bjørnson, Collin, and Nansen, by Uppdal, Ørjasæter and Nygard and by many others – to foster a culture where the exceptional individual is respected and allowed to take his well-deserved place as chieftain and leader. It is a question of honour, of establishing a code of honour where honouring and admiring great and exceptional men is itself regarded as honourable. And by expressing one's admiration for these chieftains, one can borrow some of their honour and glory, and thus also show one's kinship with them.

So who is this 'great man'? In his lectures Carlyle differentiates between six different forms an exceptional personality can take: god, prophet, poet, priest, author and king. But as he also states, these forms are really just different manifestations of the same unique capacity: 'Heros, prophet, poet – we give great men many different names, according to time and place' (Carlyle 1888, 68). Immediately afterwards he writes: 'I must admit I cannot imagine a truly great man who could not become every sort of great man' (ibid., 69). One can suspect, as Vinje hints at with his comparison to the cult of the saints, that there is a certain religious aura associated with the chieftain. 'Hero worship – burning, boundless devotion and admiration for a worthy human figure that reflects the divine – is this not the seed of Christianity itself? The greatest of all heroes is one that we will not mention here!' quotes Sars (1912b, 380). As mentioned before, Collin stresses that Carlyle sees in the hero 'a reflection of the divine Creator' (Collin 1914, 1).

So the chieftain is an epitomised figure with an element of supernaturality. However, the actual chieftains – at least most of them – are first and foremost worldly figures dealing with worldly tasks. They are individuals who, due to exceptional abilities or capacities – though not in the prosaic sense of talent, flair or ambition – are especially qualified to lead their contemporaries and their society ideologically, politically and intellectually. Sars explains:

[...] while it is the case that in every person there is invested a capacity for heroic sacrifice, an urge to live for higher goals than just pleasure, it is first and foremost the case for the representative men, the geniuses and the heroes of history. And if this urge is an emanation of the eternal and divine in our nature, then these heroes in whom it is most strongly manifested must be regarded as especially 'god-given' – 'god-missioned men' with a divine right to rule over their fellow human beings and lead them (Sars 1912b, 379).

‘The legitimacy of the chieftain’s power base lay in his intuitive ability to know what was best for the people. The chieftain enjoyed the trust of the people by virtue of his high moral qualities, his marked sense of duty and his selflessness’, writes Stenseth (222, 48). Sars deems that this trust is almost instinctive; ‘The masses have an instinctive urge to submit to exceptional leaders and often follow the born ruler in blind devotion when he has stepped forward’ (1912b, 401). The ruler is born ruler, the people are born with an urge to submit; the chieftain’s legitimacy is innate, if not given by higher powers.

For Sars and many of his contemporaries, there is a type of chieftain that stands out as particularly significant and influential, namely the poet chieftain [‘dikterhøvding’]. Fulsås writes that self-government by the people was for Sars ‘the spontaneous affinity between the chieftain, preferably the poet chieftain, and the people in a sort of poetocratic Bonapartism’ (1999, 227). Wergeland and Bjørnson are foremost the Norwegian poet chieftains, with Hamsun as a stumbling successor after Bjørnson’s death (cf. Rem 2014, 48ff). In reference to Sars’s concept of poetocracy, Stenseth writes that, in the case of Wergeland and Bjørnson, ‘the politician, the educator, the agitator, the writer of articles and letters functioned alongside or alternately with the poet and the artist’ (2010). It is a matter of a poet ‘entering into his age and engaging with its challenges’, writes Leif Longum (1996, 406), ‘a poet with a responsibility to society’, according to Ronny Spaans (2014, 231). It is this role of the poet that Uppdal includes Garborg – and himself – in when he refers to his role model as a fearless ‘truth-seeker’ and ‘warrior’.

POETRY AND STRENGTH

‘The most striking feature of the genius is his abundance of strength’, Collin asserts (1914, 4), citing as distinctive features of the great man’s greatness his reserves of spiritual strength that, when allowed free expression, will work to the betterment of society. ‘The colossal capacity for work – which for the genius often means working alone, in sleep or while the conscious self is busy with other things – demands an unusual ability to call forth an abundance of energy’, Collin continues. ‘The genius is someone who struggles with a huge abundance of energy and in whom this capital is constantly renewing itself and growing over time’ (ibid.). The same parallel between individual spiritual strength and physical energy for social improvement serves as metaphorical foundation when Uppdal characterizes Hans E. Kinck in an article from 1917:

Just as for hundreds and thousands of years, waterfalls have idly rushed and roared, squandering their energies, in the same way Kinck portrays how it is rushes and roars in the soul of the nation. These are the forces in the people that have not been tamed to useful labour and the good of the country, but that squander their energies, destroying themselves like the waterfall. Our waterfalls move us towards the future. And these torrents of energy within the heart of the people, just like the waterfalls, will also be let loose – for anything but self-destruction. But the waterfalls and energies are there, beautiful and proud in their wildness, a bounty for the future. And that is how Kinck appears, as a bounty for the future. A spirit so great it is difficult to take it in at a glance. Turning one's gaze to his work, it is difficult to know where to start or finish. There is 'Driftekaren' [The Drover], the thwarted energy that, finding no outlet, bursts the dam and breaks itself asunder in shafts of colour, with pieces of crystal reflecting Norwegian temperament as it has never before been known in our literature.

The imagery implies that 'the heart of the people' ['folkedjupet'] contains forces that have not been tamed and put to use 'to useful labour and the good of the country'. This is not so much a matter of muscle power, but rather of spiritual forces. Uppdal is suggesting metaphorically that Kinck's work contains these forces, that they are mapped, described and embodied in his work. The analogue with the waterfall implies that this literature is the first step in the direction of harnessing these same forces. 'Reflecting Norwegian temperament', this literature becomes a source of energy in itself that can be used productively. Thus the poet too becomes a resource than can be used to the betterment of the people and the nation.

The same imagery can be found in the cycle of poems called 'Aasmund Vinje'. First published in the newspaper *Den 17de Mai* on April 6, 1918, it is included in the collection *Solbløding* [Sun bleeding] from the same year with the subheading 'Til hundradaarsdagen 6-4-1918' [On the centenary March 6, 1918]. When Uppdal allows it to be republished in *Altarelden* [Altar fire] (1920), a new poem is added as the third in the cycle. It goes like this:

Menneske-ætta liknar ein sjø som er stemd
ei kraft som er temd.
Og vass-stemen jamnar ut so vatnet skal renne
i like eins straumar dag etter dag.
Men um stemen er trygg kan det likevel hende
han ryk sund
med dun,

og ei storbaare velter
 fraa vass-stemens djup.
 Og den galning i ætta
 set utfor kvart stup.
 Og naar han har rasa og rusa av
 og slaatt seg i sunder paa vegen mot hav,
 – daa er ingen ting som før.

– Men ein stem, ei ætt, har løyst seg ut – –

(Uppdal 1920, 95–96)

[The human race is like a lake that is dammed up
 a force that is tamed.
 And the dam evens out so that the water runs
 in identical streams day after day.
 But even if the dam is safe it could still happen
 that it bursts
 with a rumble,
 and a huge wave surges
 from the depths of the dam.
 And the madman of his race
 plunges down from every precipice.
 And when he has finished raging and rushing
 and has smashed himself to pieces on the way to the ocean,
 – then nothing is as it was before.

But a dam, a race, has set itself loose – –]

Here too hydropower functions as a metaphorical resource in the allegory of the poem, but while the power of the people in the Kinck text is a wild force to be tamed and exploited, in the Vinje poem it is a tamed force waiting to be released and liberated. The human race is a dammed up lake, a fettered force. The allegorical depiction of the dam bursting and ‘the madman of his race’ plunging down ‘from every precipice’ is a form of popular, revolutionary liberation. It must be understood as an interruption of social order where ‘a huge wave’ creates chaos and upheaval, before a new and different normality is established when the wave and the madmen have ‘finished raging and rushing/and has smashed himself to pieces on the way to the ocean’. The theme is also emphasised formally in the poem; after five long and calm opening lines, a dramatic break in the poem’s rhythm and tempo occurs in the sixth line. In six short and swift lines the destruction of the tidal wave is described, before the wave and the poem both lose speed

and settle down in the last three lines of the main verse paragraph, accentuated by the blank line before the poem's single-line conclusion.

Through the use of water metaphors, and in line with the organic teleological view of history propounded by Sars and many others, progress is depicted as the result of a sort of national force of nature. In the same way, hydropower in the 1910s was becoming inextricably connected both to the Norwegian mountain landscape and to national progress in terms of technology, industry and economy. Uppdal's Vinje is depicted as the figure that harnesses this power for constructive purposes (although there are clearly also destructive aspects to this constructive enterprise). Vinje sets off a latent potential in humanity ('Menneske-ætta') itself; 'he is the revelation of an ideal or a notion which has been worked on in silence and darkness for generations, and which, without such a revelation, would have lived in vain, without benefitting the nation or humanity', as Sars writes when he appoints 'the representative man' as both 'the goal and the means of progress' (1912b, 399–400). Vinje the chieftain ensures that the dam breaks in the fifth line, thus triggering social and historical change, as emphasised in the imagery, allegory and form of the poem.

THE GREAT AND THE SMALL

'To let great be great and low be low', stressed Bjørnson in his speech to Sars (Bjørnson 1913, 221). 'And the whole time you have that rare feeling, that hardly ever grips you otherwise when you are reading, that you can sense the breathing of a poet so great that everything around – and within you – feels small', writes Uppdal in his conclusion to the Kinck essay (1965, 82). Kinck's writing shows us a true yardstick for what is great and what is small. This is precisely the focus in the second of two poems about 'Fjella' [The Mountains] in Uppdal's 'Haaløygiske sonettar' [Sonnets from Hålogaland], a poem cycle of 19 sonnets with themes and motives from Northern Norway:

Vi mæler tindane paa fjellheim-røstet,
men hugsar ikkje smaafjell stundom dyl
dei fjernar storfjell med sin rygge-kryl
– og difor ruver svær, og blir den største.

Men stig ein undan – over kryle-nøstet
ein solskins-boste ris sin straale-syl,
so høgt han andar blaa-rein æther-kyl
og krylekulen naar kje upp til brøstet.

Og etter som det store stig i ruv
dreg jorda til seg krylen, ét han upp
– til storfjellkroppen i all blaane raar.

Den byrge krylen blir ein køyne-kuv
med rot i taa-a paa den store kropp
– og reint ein pigg for dei som nedfor staar!

(Uppdal 1920, 136)

[We measure the peaks on the mountains' rooftop
but forget that sometimes hills hide
the more distant mountains with their humped back
– and therefore stand out and seem the largest.

But if you step back – over the little hump
A broom of sun raises its shining awl
so high that it breathes blue-clean ether cold
and the hump does not even reach it to the chest.

And as the great [mountain] towers higher
the earth draws in the hump, consuming it
– until the great mountain rules in the blue distance.

The proud hump becomes a wart
A corn on the toe of the great body
– and a very peak for those standing beneath it.

The central motif here is the difference between the great and the small, between 'krylekulen' [the little hump] and 'storfjellkroppen' [the great mountain body]. The main point is that whether something appears great or small depends on perspective; if you are standing too close, 'smaafjell' [hills] may hide 'dei fjernar storfjell' [the more distant mountains]. The imagery is anthropomorphic, with the hills described in condescending terms. The phrase 'den byrge krylen' [the proud hump] has a sarcastic ring to it, which is accentuated when the little hump is reduced to 'ein køyne-kuv' [a wart/corn] on the toe of the mountain. It is also evident that smallness shrinks when greatness shows its true dimensions; while the hill is smaller in the second stanza, although not so much smaller than the mountain than that it nearly reaches it to the chest, in the last stanza it is drastically reduced – after the mountain 'stig i ruv' [towers higher].

Those who believe in the greatness of the little hill are also denounced. For one thing, when in the third stanza the earth itself reduces and consumes the little hill,

the notion of regarding it as great is made to seem unnatural. Also, the reference to the wart on the mountain's toe being 'reint ein pig' [a very peak] for those that are standing beneath it, seems to bear witness to a profound lack of judgement. The enormous contrast between the dimensions of the mountain and the hill makes the mistake appear ridiculous. And when this is the concluding point of the sonnet's tercet, whose purpose, according to Hallvard Lie, is to make the insight of the quatrains 'the subject of a more thorough consideration resulting in a "synthesis", a more or less concise coda', (Lie 1967, 655), it seems clear that the poem is not simply making the in itself obvious point that perspective can lead to a misjudgement of the greatness of mountains (i.e. poets). The poem is also – and perhaps primarily – saying that one can distinguish between great and small individuals on the basis of their ability to distinguish the great from the small.

It is therefore fitting that Uppdal follows up this poem with a portrayal of one of the greatest – and most controversial – contemporary writers, Knut Hamsun:

Han ris upp fjellstor under vindlys'-plogen
i havblaa natt som galdre-diger grunar,
med' glasgrøn snø-bre' over svaet dunar
og mél seg sund til mjell mot snølys'-logen.

Og snø skin jarnnatt-blaa mot stjernebogen,
der braget spinn mangleta fosfor-spunar
med silke-skraav som gir og elskhug runar,
og rullar galdr og faun-spel gjennom skogen.

Ei jord-aand, ør av storaars nattsvevn, vaknar,
d'er gjekk og faun-spel, vaarvarm aandraatt ryk,
det fløyter, gjigjar, millom hornlur-knegg.

Og risen skjék' sitt mjell-snø-haar og skjegg,
det breier seg lik uvers-él som flaknar,
og bringa skin der lynet glør i stryk.

(Uppdal 1920, 137)

[He towers like a mountain under the plough of the aurora
in ocean-blue night that ponders, full of sorcery,
while the glass-green glacier thunders over the bare rock
and is ground to dry snow under the flame of the snow light.

And snow shines blue in the iron night under the starry arch
 where the gleam spins many-coloured phosphor threads
 with silk-rustling that conjures desire and love,
 and rolls sorcery and faun-play through the wood.

An earth-spirit awakens, dizzy after centuries of night-sleep,
 there is japery and faun-play and steam from spring-warm breath,
 there is fluting and fiddling, interspersed with the whinnying of horns.

And the giant shakes his snow-powdered hair and beard,
 it showers like a storm flurry in flakes
 and his chest shines where the lightning gleams.]

The mountain metaphors link the poem directly to the previous one, and this structural and metaphorical connection supports the assumption that the two poems ‘Fjella’ I and II are to be read allegorically as poems about poets. Moreover, the connection is strengthened by the use in the first stanza of the adjective ‘fjellstor’, which is an inversion of the noun ‘storfjell’ in the third verse of ‘Fjella’ II. The inversion also expresses in concentrated form the tropological reversal from one poem to the other; while the ‘Fjella’ poems portray mountains in terms of anthropomorphic metaphors, the poem ‘Knut Hamsun’ portrays a person – a poet – in mountain imagery.

As with the other five portraits of poets in ‘Haaløyske sonettar’, there is little at first glance that points in the direction of the poet that is being portrayed. Instead, the portraits are very abstract, almost non-figurative, and it seems as if whatever features of the portrayed that are present can only be seen metaphorically or allegorically, as possible similarities between the poem’s natural imagery and the poet thematically focused on in the title of the poem. In this case, one can imagine Hamsun towering like an enormous, exposed mountain in the literary and intellectual landscape of Norway. As such, the poem can obviously be read as an expression of Uppdal’s admiration for Hamsun (which he has clearly expressed elsewhere, cf. e.g. Uppdal 1965, 57–63).

However, Hamsun is also visible in a different way in the poem. As in the other Hålogaland portraits of poets, the poet appears by means of intertextuality. This is revealed through an examination of the poems seasonal metaphors. Vigdis Ystad sees Hamsun portrayed ‘as an enormous mountain, giddy and full of the vitality of spring and summer’ (1978, 143), an impression she probably has from the imagery of the second half of the second quatrain and the first tercet. It seems to me, however, that Hamsun is pretty consistently portrayed through winter imagery in the poem. In the first stanza this is clearly the case; he stands up under the

plough of the aurora in a 'galdre-diger' [full of sorcery] night, perhaps referring to the polar night. The winter metaphors continue in the images of snow and stars in the first two lines of the second stanza. But here there is a change of season, at least apparently. However, the spring motif that emerges in the stanza's last two lines and is continued in the next stanza is in a sense on a different level to the winter imagery. A close scrutiny of the second stanza reveals that spring is magically conjured up – cf. the verb 'runar' [conjures] – by means of the poem's 'silkeskraav' [silk-rustling]. What is this silk-rustling? It is the sound of the aurora. The metaphor plays on the notion that the Northern Lights could be heard, a notion that was prevalent until well into the 20th century. We find, for example, an article in *Aftenposten* June 8 1913 (nr. 283, 4) entitled 'Nordlyset. Følges det af nogen lyd?' [The Northern Lights. Do they make a sound?] in which the notion is discussed and rejected. It refers to a 'very widespread notion among the population of the northern regions' that there is such a sound, 'called by most a rustling sound'. And 'braget' [the gleam] in the second line of the stanza should be understood as the same Northern Lights, spinning their 'mangleta fosfor-spunar' [many-coloured phosphor threads] in the starry night sky. This seems an appropriate metaphoric description of the aurora, which can appear in varying and shifting colours structured in staves or stripes resembling threads.

In much of his poetry from this period, Uppdal uses starlight, and especially the aurora, as an image of spiritual power (cf. Claudi 2016, esp. 277–282). If we let this apply to the poem 'Knut Hamsun' too, our reading of the second stanza must be that the Hamsun spirit conjures up a spring in its poetry, rather than that spring comes to the Hamsun-mountain. The third stanza contains an allusion to Hamsun's writing, namely the novel *Pan*. In this work Hamsun awakens a 'jord-aand' [earth spirit], the first part of the word having connotations, in a vitalistic context, of eroticism and procreation. Here there is spring, warmth and 'faun-spel' [faun-play] (Faunus being the Roman equivalent of the Greek Pan, god of passion and fertility, in other words for 'gir og elskhug'). Hamsun is a figure drawn metaphorically in terms of a mountain in winter, i.e. as a tremendous, powerful, supreme and perhaps terrifying figure, but one who creates literature that contains the forces of spring and passion.

So the poem 'Knut Hamsun' contains an important allusion to Hamsun's *Pan*, and when Uppdal allows Hamsun's writing to, as it were, fertilise or infiltrate his own in this fashion, he is placing himself in a form of intertextual debt to his predecessor that is reminiscent of what I pointed out earlier in connection with the poem written to Garborg. He is carrying on the legacy of Petter Dass, John Klæbo, Jonas Lie, Elias Blix, Bernt Lie and Knut Hamsun, all of whom are given a literary

portrait in ‘Haaløyske sonettar’, and all of whom can be similarly glimpsed through allusions. Thus Uppdal shows not only his admiration for the older poets, but that he also has followed in their footsteps and included elements of their writing in his own. In this way he demonstrates his literary kinship with them and places himself in a succession of chieftain poets from Northern Norway.

Here, as in the poems about ‘Fjella’, we see the reflexive aspect of the chieftain cult. By showing one’s admiration for others, one shows one’s own greatness. ‘A person’s worth can be measured by his ability to admire’, Sars writes, endorsing Carlyle (Sars 1912a: 471). The ability to admire is seen as a highly attractive personal characteristic, evidence of greatness and fearlessness, even of masculinity, as suggested when Francis Bull writes that Gerhard Gran’s Ibsen biography from 1918 ‘bæres oppe av en *mandig beundring* og forstaaelse’ [is supported by a *manly admiration* and understanding] (Bull and Jansen 1929, 557, my italics). It is also clearly an expression of a positive appraisal when Hans Eitrem in his preface to Troye’s posthumously published Wergeland biography writes that the biographer found in Carlyle ‘the clearly developed and expressed need to devote himself to spirits greater than himself, a need Troye had to an exceptional degree. He had the distinguishing characteristic of the true hero-worshipper – a complete lack of self-idolisation and the need and ability to devote himself to admiration of greatness’ (Troye and Eitrem 1908, viii). We sense here what Marianne Egeland points out in her analysis of the Wergeland cult around the the turn of the last century: ‘By understanding him better than his contemporaries did, by defending him against petty, reactionary opponents and conveying his visionary ideas, the biographer and his subject become allies’ (Egeland 2000, 183). By emphasising the chieftain, one emphasises oneself. Fulsås refers to and gives his support to Trygve Ræder’s assertion that ‘Sars developed his own self-esteem through his worship of Bjørnson’ (1999, 226).

ADMIRATION AND PROGRESS

When Sars emphasises ‘the importance of great men in history and the veneration that is due to them and their memory’ as ‘the core point in [Carlyle’s] historical philosophy’ (1912b, 380) he is also emphasising how important it has been, both in and for history, to remember and admire these chieftains. Admiration and veneration are progressive forces in history because they have an ennobling effect on the individual. Sars quotes:

No nobler feeling than this of admiration for one higher than himself dwells in the breast of man. It is to this hour, and at all hours, the vivifying influence in

man's life. Religion I find stand upon it; not Paganism only, but far higher and truer religions,—all religion hitherto known. (Sars 1912b, 380).

‘Ah, does not every true man feel that he is himself made higher by doing reverence to what is really above him?’ Carlyle writes himself (1888, 14). The purpose of both hero worship and religion is to ennoble the individual, in other words to ‘nourish the inner flame that is called conscience’ and ‘to remind us of what we already know, that there is an endless distance between a good man and a bad man, to exhort us to love the one endlessly and hate the other endlessly and to strive endlessly to be like the one and not the other’ (Sars 1912b, 377). Hero worship and religion merge. Through veneration the flame of conscience is lit; the admirer is ennobled and learns to distinguish good from bad, great from small. By looking up to one more gifted than oneself, one acquires in a sense the characteristics one admires. Thus the hero functions as a role model and a pioneer, and the admiration ensures that the admirers follow the hero along the path he has marked out for his community.

This same notion is central in Tore Ørjasæter’s poetic eulogy to Lars Eskeland, ‘Kvæde til menn og til mannen’ [Ode to men and the man] (1915). As the title suggests, the poem is directed to men in general, but also to ‘the man’, which is probably the chieftain in the shape of Eskeland. This is the first stanza:

Kvæde til menn, er aa la mann’
 kjenne sitt andsvar til grunnen;
 kveikje hans hug i ein viljebrand,
 leggje ‘om ord i munnen,
 prise den hovding som heil og sann
 fører striden.

(Ørjasæter 1915, 37)

[Odes to men are about letting the man
 know his responsibility completely,
 kindling his mind to a fire of the will
 putting words in his mouth,
 praising the chieftain who, wholly and truly,
 leads the fight.]

The poem and the stanza feature several of the same motifs as we saw in Uppdal’s ode to Garborg: the chieftain’s tireless mind, his spiritual combativeness and his honesty. But unlike Uppdal’s poem, Ørjasæter’s contains an explicitly didactic element. Through his ode to the exceptional man, the poet can arouse a sense of responsibility and determination in ‘the man’ in general. Not only that – the man’s

mind and sense of responsibility is aroused by the poet ‘putting words in his mouth’, which in this context means teaching him to praise the chieftains, as the last two lines suggest. The poem is not just didactic, it is exemplary, in line with the notion of the chieftain as role model. By demonstrating his admiration for those who deserve admiration, the poet can have an ennobling effect on others, as the dual address of the poem’s title emphasises. The project of the poem is to praise a chieftain – Eskeland – so that others can see, learn from and participate in his responsibility and determination. The same meta-poetic point is made to apply to the whole collection by virtue of its title *Manns kvæde* [Man’s ode] (1915). These are odes about the man, to the man and from the man.

The theme of the Man with a capital M can also be found in the poems of Olav Nygard, and here too we sense that the man’s endeavours serve a socially and historically progressive function. ‘Det var helgstilt i himlom den dagen han sprang / som eit stupande stjernerap fram / or det æveleg avlføre allskaparfang / og tok buland paa jordarvangs-tram’ [It was quiet in heaven the day he leapt / like a shooting star down/out of the eternally fertile lap of the creator / and landed on the doorstep on a grassy knoll]; these are the first four lines of the poem ‘Mann’ [Man] from his best known collection *Ved vebande* [By the enclosure⁵] (1923). The man in question is sent by the creator, a sort of Messiah figure, sent to a yearning earth. The poem continues:

Det var songdiser, bylgjunn med sylvrende skaut;
han er fødd, og hans namn det er mann!
Det var heimkomegaava, den gullsaum som flaut
ut or sol-aaren, helsing til han.
Her var lengta i langbil – kven talde dei aar
ifraa fornalders flogskoddegry,
ifraa sola vart barnkjømd og jorda fekk vaar
og laag linda i dvaletung sky?

(Nygard 1923, 39)

[There were goddesses of song, waves of silver-threaded shawls;
he is born, and his name is man!
That was his homecoming gift, the golden seam that flowed
from the sun’s artery, a greeting to him.
He was long-awaited – who counted the years
from the swirling mist of ancient times,
from when the sun became fertile and the earth had spring
and lay swaddled in slumbering cloud?]

5. Translator’s note: ‘Vebande’ (from Old Norse vébønd) refers to ribbons that were used to fence off a sacred area.

The man is portrayed in clearly vitalistic metaphors as a gift from the heaven and the sun to earth, like the outbreak of summer and sunshine on a cloud-shrouded earth. The imagery is continued in the next stanza, where the earth is portrayed as a store of nourishment and a wet nurse for the man as it 'fløder med sevje og merg' [flows with sap and marrow] and 'nøyter kvar bot mellom berg/til aa auka hans avle og kraft' [makes use of every patch between rock/to increase his vitality and strength]. In the second half of the stanza, man's spirit of endeavour is also aroused, strikingly focused on the same thing – ensuring his own growth and strength:

Og den mergtyrste vaaen er sjølvminnt og bryt
seg med berrhendes braaofse inn
til si sogmør, riv klæde fraa brjost; og det tryt
fyr han trøyttnar i sogsterke kinn.

(*ibid.*, 40)

[And the marrow-thirsty daredevil looks after himself and breaks
in with bare-handed impetuosity
to his wet nurse, rips the clothing from her breast; and it is emptied
before he tires in his strong sucking cheeks.]

By means of the metaphorical combination of a suckling child and a 'våe' [daredevil], the man is portrayed as a fierce, self-assertive figure, but at the same time a figure that is lovingly nourished and prepared for just such a role. In the stanza that follows we learn why the earth puts all its energy into nourishing this man. 'Det ligg songstein i fara hans' [There are song stones in his tracks] the fourth stanza starts, introducing a meta-poetic perspective to the poem; 'gromolda nyt / kvart eit slag som hans fotsole gav; / ut der storbylgjeskavlen um marbakken ryt / dreg han perlur og dyrder or kav' [the soil enjoys / every blow his soles gave; / out where the great wave breaks around the underwater shelf / he finds pearls and splendours in the depths']: The man himself contributes to growth, drawing riches from the chaos of the deep, which, in the light of the wave motif in the second stanza, must be understood as a sort of cosmic-spiritual primeval ocean.

The meta-poetic theme is continued in the fifth stanza. The first half establishes a connection between the word or the song and the deed, accentuated by the rhyming pair 'raad' [means] and 'daad' [deed]. In the second half his gaze too has acquired a sort of performative power, a power that once again stems from creation itself:

Han hev ljustreng i strupe, den rike manns raad
utav ord i si tunge; han stend
som ein steinmann og tunglessar tanken med daad

som kann skuve ein jordklot i vend.
 Kor det ropar or augo naar tunga ligg bleik
 under byrda, og lippa fær kvil.
 Men naar styrken er mod, og han kjenner seg veik
 faar han flodmagt av allskaparsmil.

(*ibid.*)

[He has the string of song in his throat, the rich man's store
 of words in his tongue; he stands
 like a stone man and burdens thought with deeds
 that can change the direction of a globe.
 How his gaze shouts when his tongue lies pale
 under the burden, and the lip rests.
 But when his strength is dulled and he feels weak
 he receives a flood of power from the creator's smile.]

A prophetic figure is portrayed here, 'ein steinmann' [a stone man] who endows thought with a heavy but potent burden through his song and his art. He burdens his audience with a deed that has the potential to 'skuve ein jordklot i vend' [change the direction of a globe], to change the world. In lines five and six we learn that it is not just through his art, but also by virtue of his personality, his gaze, that he exercises his 'power over the tides'. It is this prophetic role that makes the man glow in the last stanza, accentuated by the introductory conjunction 'Og' [And]:

Og daa gløder hans kraftmerg, og fangarmar triv
 liksom flogkilar endelangs inn
 gjennom grjotheimen, gravheimen; hungeren driv
 han paa landvinnarferd til han finn
 sine bivrande bruer til grøderikt land
 uti æva, hans tropelandsdraum;
 han vil sjølv kveikje soler med æveleg brand
 og sjaa heile Guds allmagt i flaum.

(*ibid.*, 41)

[And then his (bone) marrow glows, and tentacles grasp
 like wedges all the way in
 through the world of rock and graves; hunger drives
 him on a journey of conquest until he finds
 his trembling bridges to fertile land
 in eternity, his dream of the tropics;
 he wants to kindle suns himself with eternal fire
 and see all God's omnipotence in flood.]

The frequent caesuras and the consistent enjambement in the first six lines of the stanza create a staccato and ecstatic effect as the glowing man extends his tentacles into other worlds and domains. In this way he reaches 'til grøderikt land' [to fertile land], the fertility being of the spiritual sort. The last two lines of the stanza express a dream of participating in divine creation. Here the stanza and the poem come to rest, also formally, in two complete sentences (although the second is in apposition to the subject and verb of the first). The man has reached his destination, which is to (attempt to) work in the name of creation itself. Both the paradisiacal *telos* and his semi-divine ambitions, in addition to the notion of extracting of riches from the chaos of the deep, harmonise well with Collin's previously quoted characterisation of the genius as being 'the divinely-inspired creator' who assists 'the Eternal in a divine daily labour to form cosmos out of chaos, create order and light, unite contending forces into harmony' (Collin 1914, 1).

The poem's meta-poetical aspect is underlined by the image of 'bivrande bruer' [trembling bridges] in the fifth line, a motif that refers back to the first stanza of 'Bru' [bridge], the first poem of *Flodmaal* (1913), Nygard's first collection of poetry; «Eg bygger i tru / ei skjelvande sjulita verbogebra / fraa trongrømde tune i dalskuggen graa / til himelen høge og heilage blaa.» [I build in faith / a trembling seven-coloured rainbow bridge / from a cramped yard in the grey shadow of the valley / to heaven high and sacred blue]. According to Eirik Vassenden this poem deals not least with 'giving form to inspiration' (Vassenden 2002, 51), and by drawing parallels to the three Christian virtues of faith, hope and love, he connects it to a passage in St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians which states that 'he that prophesieth speaketh unto men *to* edification, and exhortation, and comfort'. Vassenden also quotes Johs. Dale's assertion (1957, 86) that the poem can be read as 'a plan, a list of contents, not only for "Flodmaal", but for all of Nygard's poetry' (Vassenden 2002, 53). The allusion to his own poetry implies that it is through artistic creation that the man can see his own work – and himself – as part of 'Guds allmagt' [God's omnipotence]. The implication is thus that the thematic focus of the poem is not just a man sent by God, but a poet chieftain. This is further underlined by the fact that the poem shares the same structure and metre as two other poems in *Ved vebande*, 'Til gampen min' [To my nag] and 'Wergeland' – and only these two. Both poems are clearly meta-poetic, and perhaps these three poems can be seen as representing a development within the collection in the direction of a universalisation of the poet and his work. While the first seems to be connected to the poet's own role as a poet, (cf. Vassenden 2002, 184), the second deals with Norway's foremost poetic chieftain, perhaps alongside Bjørnson. In the last of the three poems the perspective is broadened; 'Mann' casts the poet in the role of a divinely

inspired, but earthly nourished artistic benefactor. Thus Nygard, both in ‘Mann’ and throughout *Ved vebande* develops a heroic role for himself and his peers.

Nygard’s depiction of the great man’s spiritual ‘landvinnarferd’ [journey of conquest] also illustrates what appears to be a common denominator in the portrayal of past and contemporary chieftains in the early 20th century; the reason why Wergeland and Bjørnson, Nansen and Amundsen are the nation’s heroes is because they are seen as pioneers or conquerors on behalf of humanity. In 1911 Sigurd Ibsen writes:

The intellectual liberty of science, which breaks established doctrines, like artistic autonomy, which will only obey the laws of its own genius, is closely related to the revolutionary self-assertion of born leaders who are not satisfied with the circumstances they find, but who forge their own special fate, not just adapting to social and political conditions, but forcing them to fit their own aims and needs (Ibsen 1911, 210).

So artistic and scientific obstinacy is compared to political rebellion, and for Ibsen, as for Carlyle, greatness appears in different forms; the kinship between the artist, the scientist and the leader is that they are all chieftains, and the comparison implies that scientific and artistic freedom and self-assertion also has a social benefit. It is by choosing their own paths, by adopting their own rules that ‘great men’ show their greatness, and in doing so they ‘show us an extension of human possibilities taken to the uttermost’ and ‘reveal how far man can move the boundaries of what is achievable, and to what heights he can lift his existence’ (ibid., 213). Thus it is legitimate, perhaps even imperative, that the chieftain’s focus is on his own spiritual development and forceful appropriation of spiritual nourishment, as illustrated by the suckling chieftain child in ‘Mann’. It is not a question of vanity or greed, but of realising his abilities and capacities, of driving himself to the limit, and thus fulfilling not only his own potential, but also humanity’s, cf. Ibsen. ‘What we need most of all is free spirits, men who have achieved the ultimate, which according to Goethe is to fulfil oneself’, argues Gerhard Gran in 1916 (p. 259). And as Eric Bentley comments in his study of what he calls ‘heroic vitalism’, ‘He who believes in the Elect seldom believes that he is not elected’ (1957, 20).

CONCLUSION

‘He is an uncompromising figure who primarily listens to his own inner voice, a freedom fighter who loves to bare his breast in an aesthetically effective gesture

[...]’ writes Asbjørn Aarseth about the romantic hero that he sees as an important figure in 19th century Nordic literature (Aarseth 1985, 261). This hero has a central position in what he identifies as a romantic thematic complex consisting of ‘certain postures, manners, ways of thinking and points of orientation that appear to have been particularly favoured and accentuated by contemporaries’ (Aarseth 1985, 261). Aarseth doesn’t mention Carlyle, but his heroic figure is closely related to the Carlyle-inspired chieftain who serves as a fundamental topos in the Norwegian chieftain cult and the poems referred to here. The connection becomes even clearer when Aarseth explains his concept ‘liberalromantikk’ [Liberal Romanticism]. In his historiographically challenging chapter in *Norsk litteratur i tusen år* [Norwegian literature during a thousand years] he writes: ‘Liberal Romanticism is heroic individualism, focused on the development of the self, idealistically as in Kierkegaard, and primarily in pursuit of liberty’ (Aarseth 1996, 324). Neither is Aarseth’s romantic continuum limited to the 19th century – it stretches ‘a fair way into the each of the adjoining centuries’ (Aarseth 1985, 261).

The disappearance of the notions and ideals of the chieftain cult from literature and intellectual life during the course of the 20th century probably has explanations. ‘The life of his spirit might plausibly be dated 1795–1945’ writes Bentley about Carlyle (1957, 4) and makes the obvious point that the experiences of the Second World War lead to the worship of strong leaders falling into disgrace. It is also possible that the extreme masculinity of the chieftain cult meant that it increasingly came into conflict with the politically progressive forces that were gradually gaining ground in Northern Europe, and that it therefore appeared much less acceptable. The strong focus on individual agents probably helped alienate historians who were gradually shifting their emphasis to structural, economic and institutional factors. As far as literary history is concerned, Uppdal’s, Ørjasæter’s and Nygard’s chieftain cult can be seen, within the framework of Aarseth’s model of Romanticism, as the product of an overripe (liberal) Romanticism that was beginning to lose literary status. Thus there is, in spite of Uppdal’s and Nygard’s sometimes pioneering style and imagery, a retrospective thematic and ideological element in what was intended to be poetry dedicated to historical progress and its agents.

‘Could we see them well, we should get some glimpses into the very marrow of the world’s history’, writes Carlyle about the heroes (1888, 2). In the present context we must be satisfied with a lesser ambition. By attempting to understand the chieftain cult and its exponents, we can catch a glimpse of an aspect of recent Norwegian literary and cultural history that has been underexposed. As I have tried to show, these ideas have been of crucial significance for some of the central figures

in Norwegian public and intellectual life, as evidenced by Harald Beyer's comment on Nietzsche's impact in Scandinavia reflected in Norwegian periodicals during the 1890s: It is 'easy to overestimate the role he played in the intellectual life of the time. It is therefore worth mentioning that if we did a similar selection regarding Darwin or Carlyle, we would see that Darwin is mentioned at least as often and Carlyle (and Kierkegaard) not much less' (Beyer 1958, 186). The comment is most likely as valid today as when Beyer wrote it. But while every humanist is familiar with the essentials of Nietzsche's philosophy, Carlyle and the hero cult that he inspired was rapidly overshadowed by history – or perhaps by Nietzsche. And even if the notions themselves, in terms of ideology and historical theory, deserve to remain there, the philosophy, and the honour code that originated from it, deserves attention as a significant if strange phenomenon in recent Norwegian history.

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9

The Genealogy of Belligerent Affects¹

MIKKEL BRUUN ZANGENBERG

ABSTRACT The initial purpose of this article is to explore the variegated negotiations of notions of ‘honour’ in an historical setting, and a multitude of generic registers, extending from Cervantes to Al-Qaeda, and by implication Daesh/The Islamic State. The second, but central aim is to suggest that a specific, affective logic is at work across apparently widely different works and phenomena, namely the way in which failed intersubjective or political recognition results in various types of metaphoric and literal warfare, in the hope of gaining ‘honour’.

KEY WORDS war | hate | affects | dis-honourable | respect | recognition

INITIAL INROAD

In what follows, we are going to embark on a series of brief, interlinked encounters with widely different works and phenomena. The claim is, that this meandering series will allow for a gradual unveiling of a particularly problematic, social logic whereby the trauma of (perceived) withheld recognition leads to an affective quest for ‘honour’. It is perhaps superfluous to mention that we are very much in the midst of social passions², feelings of slight, jealousy, envy, resent-

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1. This was originally given as an experimental talk at a research-seminar whose theme was “war-affect-honour”, organized by Aasta Marie Bjorvand Bjørkøy, Stefka Georgieva Eriksen and Thorstein Norheim and, at the University of Oslo, 25 September 2015. I would like to thank Thorstein warmly for inviting me, and all the participants for a most generous and perceptive response to this paper; a set of responses that rendered any subsequent quest for honour entirely and mercifully superfluous.
 2. There is a huge span between, say, A-J Greimas’ *Semiotics of Passions*, Minnesota UP 1992, and Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, Harvard UP 2005. Although Ngai slightly veers away from the domain of affect theory proper, her study is a brilliant and thought-provoking analysis of these minor and shameful emotions, as they play themselves out in literature, and in our culture at large.

ment, all of which Nietzsche stigmatized as base, reactionary sentiments. While this may be true, one of the major problems haunting contemporary, global society is a radically widening gap of inequality between the super-rich and all the rest of us, and in that context, feelings of anger and indignation perhaps ought not be brushed aside as merely yet another tiresome display of feelings of inferiority? Peter Sloterdijk, Axel Honneth, Thomas Piketty, Stéphane Hessel³, all of these widely different figures have suggested that anger and resentment might be transformed into a positive, political force for the good, ideally helping us turn towards a state of more evenly distributed recognition, and at least less inequality. One of the hypotheses of this article, is that such a project is not merely desirable, but extremely acute and necessary, in that frustrated reactions to withheld recognition all too easily turns into violent and belligerent quests for what is strikingly often termed ‘honour’.⁴ An adjunct suggestion is, that once subjects renounce the struggle for recognition, we leave the realm of emotions, and enter a territory of affects.

Briefly put ‘affects’ are collective, bodily mediated passions that circulate *between* individuals, and are organized *pre*-individually; an example might be the sudden sense of panic in a crowd: single individuals in the crowd may have all sorts of conscious, well-shaped emotions, but once panic erupts, a strong current of bodily affects cause the crowd to stampede heedlessly along. In that case, ‘emotions’ have turned into ‘affects’, an affect that circulates in-between all the bodies in the crowd, and that have barely become conscious and fully shaped in the minds of the panicking individuals. But what has all of this got to do with literature, and with notions of honour, one might ask?

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3. Cf. Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time. A Psychopolitical Investigation*, Columbia UP 2012; Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, Polity Press 1995; Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century*, Penguin 2014; Stéphane Hessel, *Time for outrage/Indignez-vous!*, Twelve/Hachette 2011. To these names and positions (widely divergent, but they strikingly converge in emphasizing the problem of inequality, and the possible, positive role played by anger) might be added Chantal Mouffe’s *Agonistics*, Verso 2013. Mouffe forms a quiet backdrop for my argument, in that she proposes that the legitimization of conflict in the arena of politics, divert us from becoming embroiled in warfare.
 4. I have found very useful, in terms of historicizing and contextualizing the concept of “honour” in regard to a literary analysis, Thorstein Norheim’s article, ‘Et spørsmål om ære. Om Dag Solstads krigstrilogi som æreslitteratur med vekt på *Krig* og Fredrik Lindgren (2016). And as well Frank Henderson Stewart’s *Honor*, Chicago UP 1994, and James Bowman’s *Honor. A History*, Encounter Books 2006, both pointed out to me by Norheim.

CLARIFYING DIGRESSION

Put otherwise: How to think more carefully about the possible interlinking of ‘affect’ and ‘honour’, as they occur in aesthetic works, and in a contemporary social and political setting?

I am inspired in my endeavours by two or three currents that would seem to commingle and intersect, albeit not always in straightforward ways.⁵

On the one hand, what we might describe as a re-introduction and re-legitimization of passions and emotions into the academic study of literature. In particular, I’m thinking of two seminal works, Rita Felski’s *Uses of Literature*, and Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht’s *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung*.⁶ All differences aside, they both would seem to advocate a rejection firstly of the semi-automatic hermeneutics of suspicion, the spontaneous ‘critique’ of everything, which is by now most uncritical, and stem from what has become, in the wake of Cultural Studies, a habit, perhaps even a bad, lazy habit.⁷ And secondly, they reject a certain form of deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis, that would always be able to find, at the end of any reading, an experience of difference, deferral, absence, spectrality. Thirdly, they take aim at a more vague, but widespread ethos in the Humanities, to do with something we admonish our students not to do: ‘don’t feel – instead, make observations, and argue based on those’. Felski and Gumbrecht converge in pleading that as readers, even professional readers, we do in fact have all sorts of emotions in the encounter with literary texts; we identify with characters, we are fascinated and wrapped up in plots, we are deeply ensconced in sensations of series of moods and atmospheres, and in this respect we completely resemble all other lay readers. In the words of Felski: ‘A phenomenology of reading calls for an undogmatic openness to a spectrum of literary responses; that some of these responses are not currently sanctioned in the annals of professional criticism does not render them any less salient’ (2008, 18).⁸

5. I should mention that these works are not merely included by way of being “inspirational”; apart from playing a local and tactical role in providing a framework for mapping the aesthetic logic of belligerent affects, they might very well go into a syncretistic, future welding together, with a view to explore further the complexities at work in the production of warlike, honorific affects.

6. Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature*, Blackwell 2008; Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung. On a Hidden Potential of Literature*, Stanford UP 2012.

7. Duly noting that Gumbrecht is of course an important figure in the American landscape of people doing Cultural Studies; whereas Felski draws on a historicist-hermeneutical and neo-phenomenological strand, indebted to e.g. Paul Ricoeur, cf. Felski 2008, pp. 16–20.

8. Felski, *op.cit.*, p.18. Felski is responding to a general legitimation crisis for literary studies in the US, and one element in that response consists in trying to bridge the gap between lay and professional readers, partly by way of owning up to the fact that even the most professionalized reader is (also) a lay reader, with all of the attendant reactions of such a reader.

This is of course not to imply that any of them advocate a crass, anti-rationalist obscurantism that would take us straight back to the regressive ‘je ne sais quoi’ of père Bouhours in 17th century France, far from it, that would be suicidal, worse: uninteresting, in the academe. But they do suggest, on this reading, that we take these phenomena into account, and reconsider them anew, and in earnest, rather than pretend they don’t exist.⁹

Secondly, however, since the mid-1990’ies we have had the so-called *Affective Turn* in literary studies¹⁰, inspired quite heavily by the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari¹¹, and later their translator, the political philosopher Brian Massumi. From that ‘turn’, I extract the suggestion – as touched upon above – that we should distinguish sharply between emotions and affects. Whereas the first are strictly individual and fully conscious, the latter are posited as being pre-individual; to circulate in-between affected and affecting bodies; affects are not necessarily fully conscious; and they may organize themselves as ‘machinic assemblages’¹², and lastly, would seem to work in ways that are not entirely unrelated to Bruno Latour’s notion of actor–network theory (ANT), i.e. with fluid and elastic boundaries between human and non-human actors.¹³

I’m going to draw on both layers of signification today, those of Felski/Gumbrecht, and Deleuze/Guattari, and so will shift between using ‘emotions’ and ‘affects’ to signal those two modalities, or registers of meaning, as a platform for what is to follow. The common denominator, one might say, between the reappraisal of the status and function of emotions, and the relatively novel interest in ‘affects’, is – negatively put – the principled rejection of what is sometimes described as a reductive form of dualist, rational thinking. As always, Descartes is

9. While this is true, Gumbrecht does polemicize against the general use of method in literary studies, instead valorizing the heuristic value of experimental intuitions, cf. Gumbrecht, op.cit., pp.14–20.

10. An important marking of this general surge, was *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, Eds. Clough and Halley, Duke University Press 2007.

11. Cf. *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Continuum 1987, especially pp.78–72. As well Félix Guattari’s *The Machinic Unconscious* (1979), Semiotexte 2011.

12. A ‘machinic assemblage’ is one of the many neologisms Guattari and Deleuze came up with. In this context, I am going to use it in the following way: A machinic assemblage is what occur when strict boundaries between subjects and objects are transcended in a complex, interlinked series of events that violently transforms hitherto safe limits and conditions, e.g. in the case of high-technological warfare, or even a tornado.

13. Cf. Bruno Latour’s *Reassembling the Social*, Oxford UP 2015, especially *Third Source of Uncertainty: Objects Too Have Agency*, pp. 63–86. This latter notion (that objects have agencies of their own) was transferred onto the terrain of literary studies by Rita Felski, cf. her ‘Context Stinks!’, *New Literary History*, vol.42, no.4, Autumn 2011, pp. 573–591.

the arch-enemy.¹⁴ The kind of persistent schema that distinguishes sharply between mind and body, reason and emotion, subject and object, and so forth, and that tends to privilege mind and reason heavily. Ontologically, this means that reality is deemed to be something that we can cognize, grasp in thought, and epistemologically this obviously entails a trust in rational procedures, and a certain scepticism of what is considered to be the imprecise and unreliable registers of emotions.

This is close to being a caricature, but it nonetheless has a very pervasive influence in shaping the typical *ethos* of a researcher, even in the human sciences – and it is against this backdrop that the efforts of Felski, Gumbrecht, Guattari, Massumi and many others might best be gauged.

SPAIN 1605

It also allows me to build a convenient bridge onto the topos of Cervantes' *Don Quijote*, according to Kundera the first proper novel in European literature. On a standard reading, Don Quijote might be said to be caught in an unsure oscillation between reality and phantasm, rationality and madness, i.e. a Cartesian trap. But I would like to focus on a slightly different aspect. For, the opening scene is one of striking loneliness and isolation, and thus a glaring lack of acknowledgment. Don Quijote de la Mancha is a petty nobleman, but he is quite poor, he doesn't have a wife, he is getting on in age, nearing fifty, he lives in the provinces, and he's a very bad businessman, spending all of his meagre income on what is widely considered to be merely silly books. In many ways, he's a nobody, a loser even.

According to the omniscient and playful narrator: 'his mind was so tattered and torn that, finally, it produced the strangest notion any madman ever conceived, and then considered it not just appropriate but inevitable. As much for the sake of his own honour, as for his duty to the nation, he decided to turn himself into a knight errant, travelling all over the world with his horse and his weapons, seeking adventures and doing everything that, according to his books, earlier knights had done' (1999, 15).¹⁵

The point is to suggest that we may be allowed to read the figure of Don Quijote not only in the light of the affective turn, and the pervasive role of emotions in literature, but as well within the framework of Axel Honneth's theory of recognition.

14. I suspect this is why neither of them tap into the slightly boring territory of cognitive science, and that field's mode of analysis of "emotions". Both Felski and Gumbrecht are more inclined to adopt a position that is broadly historicist and phenomenological.

15. Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quijote*. Eds. de Armas and Wilson, Norton 1999, p. 15.

As is well known, Honneth claimed – in his emphatically social and normative¹⁶ rethinking of the Hegelian notion of the formation of collective and reciprocal forms of subjectivity as a life and death fight for recognition – that all subjects need to receive a sufficient, minimum amount of acknowledgment in the three elementary and interlinked domains of love, work and society. So recognition of being worthy of love and devotion by family and friends, recognition by colleagues that we are not entirely incompetent, and, lastly, recognition by civil society that we have certain basic legal and political rights. If recognition is lacking, in any of these domains, a struggle for it ensues.¹⁷

If – for some reason – one, or all of these forms of acknowledgment is withheld, or retracted, there arises a ‘crisis of recognition’, and we are then bound to try to resolve this conflict, and establish or re-establish a suitable level of acknowledgment. Now I want to return to Cervantes, for his narrator explicitly uses the term ‘honour’ to describe the legitimizing fantasy of the ‘ingenious gentleman’ of *La Mancha*: ‘As much for the sake of his own honour’ the narrator put it in the above passage.

My first working hypothesis is, that the contentious issue of ‘honour’ only ever arises in the wake of a conflict of acknowledgment. More precisely, ‘honour’ is something you seek, only if you haven’t received proper acknowledgment.¹⁸ Had Don Quijote gained a wife, and had children of his own, established a thriving household, and perhaps achieved some measure of political success amongst his peers, the problem of ‘his own honour’ would never have arisen. Instead, Don

16. Cf. Honneth 1995, *op.cit.*, p. 1. It is extremely important to take note of the fact that Honneth’s essay explicitly and consistently abandons a merely individualist perspective; the premise is, that there is no sovereign, autonomous “I”, but that we are always already ensclosed in the ongoing formation of a complex collage of political and social subjectivities. From a somewhat different, theoretical perspective Judith Butler explores other aspects of this, cf. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, Verso 2010, e.g. pp. 31–32, in which passage Butler interestingly takes off from Hegel as well, but in other directions than those of Honneth, cf. e.g. Butler 2010, pp. 39–42, 52–54, 137–163. Butler never mentions or quotes Honneth’s work, but she takes aim at a certain too bland and quick implicit understanding of what it might mean to gain recognition, cf. *ibid.*, p. 137–145, e.g. questioning the oftentimes skewed understanding of gaining citizenship (‘skewed’ in the sense that the new subject must comply with all the conditions of being recognized as a legitimate, juridical subject, but cannot begin to question or problematize those conditions.). Butler would appear, however, to use ‘emotions’ and ‘affects’ as synonymous terms.

17. A crucial point being, that for all of the abovementioned, errant figures a Honneth-like socially legitimate and legitimizing struggle can be said to be dismissed out of hand, or to have been left behind. Why? Because – bearing in mind Enzensberger, see below – that form of struggle comes to look impossible and pointless for the radical loser; the radical loser, instead, is bent on destruction and apocalypse, rather than forming a part of collective movement to improve the plight of any given group of social individuals.

Quijote sought to turn himself into an artificial knight errant¹⁹; which catapults us to quite another part of the world.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, 1982

For, at the very end of Sylvester Stallone's first 1982-installment of the Rambo-films, 'First Blood', the deeply traumatized, mostly silent Vietnam-veteran John Rambo, who has incidentally received the congressional medal of honour, and who has been utterly humiliated by the sheriff in the small town ironically named 'Hope' (situated in British Columbia, USA), finally speaks out, and says: 'Back in the field we had a code of honour' (1982, 1:18:32). He goes on to explain how in Vietnam, he was a hero given great responsibilities and shown 'trust', but back in America he couldn't even hold a simple job in a car-wash, and was met everywhere by scorn and contempt.

Rambo is very much, in the universe of Stallone's film, a (veteran) knight errant, but a knight in the midst of an acute crisis of recognition, and struggling desperately to achieve honour. The fact that all three types of acknowledgment have been withheld in civilian life; he has no wife or children, no friends (as the film opens, he is told that one of his very few, surviving soldier friends just died of cancer), he has no job, he is treated like a vagrant vagabond – propels him into a desperate attempt to attain at least a shred of honour. In causal terms, the effective agent is the sheriff. In 'Rambo', the sheriff takes one glance at Rambo walk-

18. There is a potentially pointless argument lying in wait here, concerning the semantics of the term 'honour', for is it not synonymous with 'esteem' and 'respect' e.g.? In the English translation of Honneth's 1992-work, the translator has chosen 'esteem', 'respect' and 'dignity' seemingly almost at random, cf. Honneth 1995, pp. 92–129. As well, there's the issue of relative cultural contexts: In a late-modern, Scandinavian society 'honour' will strike most as antediluvian, quaint, ridiculous even; but in Pakistan or Afghanistan, at least in certain segments in those countries, it is probably safe to assume that things look slightly different. And then there's the problem of crimes named 'honour killings' e.g., that bizarre oxymoron whereby an attempt is made to legitimize killing an innocent woman. To be sure, all of these descriptions are quite normative. My point is, that I will suspend those considerations for the sake of carrying through my line of argument here, and based on the belief that what 'honour' is made to mean in all of the works analysed above, is shorthand for unsuccessfully trying to resolve a crisis of recognition by reverting to forms of symbolic or physical violence.

19. It is worth pointing out, that all of these figures (Don Quijote, Rambo, Kierkegaard, Al-Qaeda) are, in manifold ways, nomadic, itinerant, vagabondages, non-sedentary. First of all, this would appear to make them particularly amenable to a Deleuze and Guattari-style 'nomadic' reading, but as well underscores the point I am trying to establish, namely that the unresolved struggle for recognition propels the subject into a belligerent quest for 'honour'.

ing into town, and immediately classifies him as a stray vagabond, an uncouth, subaltern subject deemed highly undesirable in the small town of Hope. This is central, for ‘Hope’ (the naming of the town is glaringly symbolic, and deliberately ironic) is, before all else, a topological scene of recognition: a place, where Rambo might in principle have settled down, gained a job, got a family, achieved a minimal dosage of recognition, and thereby reinserted himself into American society as a so-called proper, well-functioning subject. Now the fact that the sheriff offers him a lift, only to drop him off outside of town; compounded by the fact that once he stubbornly returns, he is subjected to a series of humiliating manoeuvres (he is made to undress at the local police station, he is showered down by a water hose, etc.), cause the cessation of apathy and resignation in Rambo, and an explosion of rage and violence erupts.²⁰

Likewise for Don Quijote, who only becomes well when, at the end of the second volume, he renounces the search for honour, and replace it with a willingness to receive ordinary respect or mundane acknowledgment: ‘I was mad, and now I am sane; I was Don Quijote de la Mancha and now, as I have said, I am Alonso Quijano the Good. I pray that my repentance, and my honesty, may return me to the good opinion your graces once held of me’ (...) The scribe was present, and remarked that in none of the books of chivalry *he* had read had there ever been a knight errant who died in his bed (...) as had Don Quijote, who, amid universal sympathy, and tears from everyone who was with him, surrendered his spirit – that is to say, he died’ (1999, 744–745).²¹

Let us note that Don Quijote finally leaves the zone of knighthood and honour, he lets go of the pompous and pretentious title, and what he receives in turn is ‘universal sympathy’, and he can therefore die redeemed, and with a crisis of recognition that is properly resolved – unlike poor John Rambo.

In addition, we should take heed of the fact that there is a subtle theological subtext in both narrative universes, that of Cervantes, and that of Stallone. Formally

20. In the local context of the film itself, there are very clear indications that Rambo suffers from PTSD (hallucinations and flashbacks, e.g.), but while acknowledging this is obviously the case, I want to make the argument that a merely clinical and diagnostic approach doesn’t take us very far, in terms of comprehending the problematic of a crisis of acknowledgment. Brushing aside Cervantes and Rambo as nothing but patients, would seriously underestimate the very real problems to do with the social logic of recognition.

21. Amidst the narrator’s consistently ironic tone, we should observe the fact that Don Quijote is returned to an un-heroic everyday stratum of the life-world; in that stratum, any notion of being a martyr, a prophet, a knight or a hero, is simply senseless. These figurations of subjectivity need never be summoned, for Alonso Quijano dies submerged in ‘universal sympathy’. Quijano is then remarkably unremarkable.

speaking, the last scene in *Don Quijote* has the Catholic structure of sacrament, confession and redemption, so that all is again well with Alonso Quijano. And in David Morell's 1972-novel²², on which the film is based, Rambo is described as something of a Jesus-figure, a messianic ghost left in the lurch; he sacrificed himself for the glory of the American nation, and got nothing in return. Which very much brings us to the Danish philosopher-poet Søren Aabye Kierkegaard.

COPENHAGEN, DENMARK 1843

It is now time to broach two texts by Kierkegaard, *Frygt og bæven*, og *Øjeblikket*. In the one, Kierkegaard depicts Abraham as 'Troens ridder'²³, 'the knight of faith', as opposed to e.g. the hero of infinite resignation, the one who feels that he has to give up everything to accept the absolute reign of God. Being the knight of faith means – in contradistinction – having endorsed *credo quia absurdum*, and thereby having accepted that the inaccessible objective always justifies the means: 'Men Abraham troede og tvivlede ikke, han troede det Urimelige (...) Men han tvivlede ikke, han skuede ikke ængstelig til højre eller venstre, han udfordrede ikke Himlen ved sine bønner' (1962, 22–23). This is why Abraham – on Kierkegaard's interpretation – can commence bringing his only son to Mount Moria without a moment's hesitation, and without ever feeling that he gives up on anything, because he has already been given all, and therefore never lost anything.

Even the most superficial reading of Kierkegaard, however, quickly reveals a chilling similarity between Kierkegaard's knight of faith, and the fundamentalist terrorist: Both are willing to sacrifice all in the name of an allegedly higher cause.²⁴ And in *Øjeblikket*, those last belligerent texts, 'flyveblade', launched against Den Danske Folkekirke, the Danish people's church, Kierkegaard time and again underscores the likeness between a true Christian, and a soldier on a rampage. What emerges in Kierkegaard's brand of devout, late-protestant theology, is an implicit sense of honour tied to absolute and unmitigated devotion to a stern and capricious God.

22. David Morrell, *First Blood*, M. Evans and Co. 1972.

23. Søren Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven*, in *Søren Kierkegaard's Samlede værker*, ed. Peter P. Rohde, Gyldendal 1962, bd. 5.

24. It would perhaps be potentially interesting to pit Alberto Toscano's *Fanaticism*, Verso 2010, against the general schema I draw on here, in that Toscano attempts to argue that fanaticism is a very central part of Western enlightenment itself, and thus does not allow for a simplistic, mutually exclusionary and bipolar reading.

But why this fanatical fury on the part of Kierkegaard? I suspect that part of the psycho-social reason has to do with the fact that acknowledgment was being withheld from Kierkegaard. All of Kierkegaard's writings on religion had been more or less ignored by the people's church, he had to finance the publication of all of his writings himself, and Kierkegaard was seen as a highly gifted, but at the same time whimsical and flamboyant person, definitely not bishop-material (as was his brother). As well, when Kierkegaard wrote *Øjeblikket* he was at his wit's end, in that the significant fortune he had inherited from his father was all spent, and hardly anything was left. So we might harbour suspicions that Kierkegaard was embroiled in a crisis of acknowledgment, and that his obsession with the honour and glory of Abraham, was somehow related to this crisis, or even coming out of it.²⁵

Kierkegaard held the 'spidsborger', the bourgeois, in great contempt, but why exactly? One possible motive being that the bourgeois had settled for a wife and children, a family, a business, a busy life. Notwithstanding his early fondness for the ethical stance²⁶, in his writings scathing comments on the ludicrousness of the bourgeois are to be found in great numbers. *The* preminent bourgeois hypocrite was, in Kierkegaard's view, the officially sanctioned state priest; all of the ones who had ignored or brushed aside Kierkegaard's writings as merely peculiar, and who had attained a solid amount of acknowledgment in all of Honneth's registers.

This brings us to the second hypothesis: If the crisis of acknowledgment and the ensuing struggle for recognition is not resolved, or even dealt with, a series of warfare is launched. Don Quijote immediately begins a string of minor and ridiculous battles and skirmishes in Cervantes' novel, Rambo launches a hysterical large-scale attack on the town of 'Hope' and its hopeless sheriff, including the National Guard; and Kierkegaard ventured forth into an increasingly aggressive, futile and bizarre battle against the Danish people's church, culminating in *Øjeblikket*, and then collapsed and died.

There is thus an odd and thought-provoking relation of similarity between Don Quijote, Rambo and Kierkegaard: their obsession with 'honour' comes out of an unresolved crisis of acknowledgment, and 'honour' signals the initiation of a series of warfare, battles, belligerence of all kinds. Let us note as well that they are

25. To be sure, this is potentially a rather reductive take on the Kierkegaardian crisis; quite evidently, there are central religious and philosophical concerns at stake for Kierkegaard, but at the same time, I would claim, there is this striking, temporal and perhaps causal relation between withheld recognition, and belligerent quest.

26. Cf. Assessor Wilhelm in *Enten-Eller* (1843). In *The Milblogger as Truth Witness, in Krieg – Kunst – Emotionen*. Herausg. Fauth, Süsselbeck, Green Krejberg, Göttingen, Wallstein Verlag, 2012, pp. 149–160, I attempt to trace some of the convergences between warfare and Christian witnessing in the work of Kierkegaard.

all single and childless, and hold no offices; thus, they are situated on the margins of established society. Their modes of warfare are internally different (Don Quijote uses a horse and a lance, Rambo a knife and various machineguns, and Kierkegaard pen and word), but they converge in attacking civil society, and in setting up a physically or symbolically violent scene that revolves round a fight for ‘honour’.

Which brings us to the third hypothesis: the launch of warfare betokens the production and establishment of affects in machines of assemblage. What happens every time, is that the single, isolated individual, the one endowed with emotions of humiliation, rage or boredom, even, stages a network of steeply rising intensities in a cluster of machinic assemblages.

In the case of Don Quijote, this not only involves *re-naming* himself and Dulcinea and his horse, but as well turning windmills into dragons, and so forth; belligerent affects suddenly circulate in a series of rapid intensities. The lone figure of Rambo, who in the opening scenes wander into ‘Hope’, is brought into intensive connection with the deputies, the woods in North-western America (in one famous scene he completely blends into a tree), a helicopter, the national guard, and so forth. Likewise, in Kierkegaard, the church institution is turned into a behemoth, a Leviathan, and the citizens of Copenhagen are involuntarily enmeshed in the assemblage by virtue of receiving all of these ‘flyveblade’, *Øjeblikket*.

So the hypothesis I propose is, that in all these instances, and setting aside (obviously) for a moment the many distinctive differences between Cervantes, Rambo and Kierkegaard, damaged or weakened acknowledgment-emotions are turned into intensive affects, and affects are organized as a series of belligerent, machinic assemblages chasing the production of ‘honour’.

ENZENSBERGER’S RADICAL LOSERS, 2005

To the extent that there is some heuristic gain to be had from these hypotheses, we are now in a position to move on to Al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State. And I’ll open this final and fourth visit with a brief detour, by way of an enlistment of Hans-Magnus Enzensberger’s 2005-description of the so-called ‘radical loser’.²⁷

27. Enzensberger originally wrote this as an essay in German, published in *Der Spiegel*, 7 November 2005. Later, an English translation was published here: <http://www.signandsight.com/features/493.html>. Eventually, Enzensberger expanded the text into a smallish book, *Schreckens Männer. Versuch über den radikalen Verlierer*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp 2006. In what follows, I quote from the English translation listed above.

In Enzensberger's view, the mostly male soldiers, killers and terrorists in Syria, in Paris, in Molenbeek, are all descendants of Dostojevskyi's man from the underground. As opposed to the 'normal', non-radical loser, who resigns and accepts his defeat, or the victim (who may demand satisfaction), or the defeated (preparing for next round) – the 'radical' loser has completely and irreversibly interiorized the judgment of his peers, has actively imbibed the idea that he is a loser, *and nothing but a loser*. But he carefully keeps this a secret to the world at large.²⁸

Out of this point zero-position, this nadir of non-recognition, anti-recognition even²⁹, comes an unstable, highly volatile condition. Oscillating between self-hatred, the sense that his life is utterly worthless, and megalomania, the desire to become a master over life and death. So initially, he literally isolates himself, or enters into a mental crypt.³⁰

Enzensberger remarks that modernity has accelerated the production of this type of loser: 'Over the past two centuries, the more successful societies have (...) democratized the struggle for recognition and awakened expectations of equality, which they are unable to fulfil. And at the same time, they have made sure that inequality is constantly demonstrated to all of the planet's inhabitants round the clock on every television channel. As a result, with every stage of progress, people's capacity for disappointment has increased accordingly' (2005, 3). Enzensberger add that: 'What the loser is obsessed with is a comparison that never works in his favour (...) The irritability of the loser increases with every improvement that he notices in the lot of others' (2005, 3). The radical loser unconsciously begins to look around for some semi-ideological program that might legitimize and channel his feelings of impotence and rage for revenge.

28. Enzensberger's typology is quite hasty; but concerning a further reflection on these types, it might be worthwhile to draw on the work of Simon Critchley, particularly his *Infinitely Demanding*, Verso 2007, examining the consequences of a sense of disappointment and loss, and the ways in which an active and a passive nihilism might arise as part of a set of responses to that. Critchley then goes on to – plausibly – suggest the formal structure of an ethical reaction that far surpasses the blind alley of nihilism. The problem being, self-evidently, that Enzensberger's radical losers are not very receptive readers of a work like Critchley's.

29. We may term persistent discursive stigmatization and vilification a sort of 'anti-recognition', a systematic work seeking to degrade a given group of subjects.

30. Cf. for a pertinent enquiry into the problem of the mental crypt, Nicolas Abraham, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*. University of Minnesota Press, new ed., 2005. Sadly, Omar Mateen, the Florida-killer; Larossi Aballa, the recent Paris-killer; and Thomas Mair, who killed British politician Jo Cox, all would seem to fit into the pattern described by Enzensberger. The only, and quite disturbing, difference being that these were not Arab or African, but so-called 'homegrown' murderers.

Enzensberger drily observes that there is no shortage of such programs. And next points out that the radical loser is caught in a vicious circle between two opposed notions: ‘It’s all my fault’, and ‘it’s all the fault of the others’. Note that in both cases all forms of acknowledgment is withheld, and the mutually intensifying quest for honour commences. The only solution, on the description of Enzensberger, is for the radical loser to simultaneously destroy himself and all the others. ‘Glory’ or ‘honour’ then becomes names that the active nihilist might bestow on his rampage of destruction in order to lend it a glorifying aspect.

But first, quite often he’ll enter a ‘loser-collective’, headed by a charismatic *super-loser*: from Hitler to Osama Bin-Laden, the logic of the inferiority complex runs its course; a heinous scapegoat is found, the Jews or America, or the social-democrats, or immigrants, or some other suitable generality; and the scene is set for apocalypse.

According to Enzensberger, radical losers have difficulties distinguishing between mutilation and self-mutilation, and unfortunately so-called ‘globalization’ has spawned a particularly nasty affective and machinic assemblage of loser-collectives. Al-Qaeda’s, and now Daesh/The Islamic State’s (per)versions of Islam, are characterized by 1, a fusion, or amalgamation between religious, political and social motives; 2, a rhizomatic network structure of organization; 3, the eclectic appropriation of a rich pre-history, borrowing rhetoric and strategies of self-staging from all sorts of antecedent terrorist groups in Europe, 4, not least an extreme deftness in the use of all current social media, and 5, lastly, the strategic use of suicide attacks.³¹

The backdrop for all of this is, I contend along with Enzensberger, a pervasive, virulent sense of loss and humiliation in the Arab world, and in parts of the African continent. Enzensberger: ‘The Arab world’s sense of pride is hurt not only by military inferiority to the West. Far worse is the impact of intellectual and material dependency.’ (2005, 8). Every Arab is heavily reliant on Western technology, and there has been a significant brain drain from the Arab world; in addition, leadership is most often despotic and closed in on itself. All of this creates a double-bind of attraction and revulsion in the migrant, and in the average Arab, and it this ubiquitous sense of shame, irritation and dependency that enables the formation of virtual death-cults, such as IS. Unfortunately, their efforts lethally damage the prospects of the Arab world and of Islam in general, and Enzensberger ends by

31. It might be fruitful to look into Talal Asad’s *On Suicide Bombing*, Columbia UP 2007, in that Asad questions the stark pitting of Western, allegedly just war, against the vilified acts of suicide bombing. Asad’s point is not that terrorism is under any condition morally legitimate, but that the contrast between just (state)war and terrorism is far from straightforward.

prosaically noting that: ‘In a global society that constantly produces new losers, this is something we will have to live with’ (2005, 10).

SOMEWHERE IN THE DESERT OF PAKISTAN, POST 9-11

By way of entering into the final stages of these brief encounters, it is now time to visit a few passages in the writings coming out of Al-Qaeda.

First, this is a quote from Osama Bin-Laden’s open letter to the Americans in 2002, titled ‘Why We are Fighting You’. This ‘letter’ followed in the wake of other letters from a group of American intellectuals, and then Saudi-Arabic intellectuals, all based on a distinction between Islam proper, and militant Islamism.

Bin-Laden answers by way of emphasizing: ‘the *Umma* of honour and respect’, and quoting the Koran: ‘But honour, power and glory belong to Allah, and to his Messenger (Muhammad), and to his believers (63:8). So do not become weak (against your enemy), nor be sad; you will overcome if you are indeed true believers (3:139)’.³² It should be noted that Bin-Laden explicitly invokes the terms ‘honour’ and ‘glory’, and as well quotes the term ‘enemies’ from the Koran: this is the asymmetric statement of a radical loser, forming a part of the machinic assemblage, Enzensberger termed a ‘loser-collective’, and actively trying to raise the intensity of belligerent affects, and as well attempting to avoid any sign of compromise or mutual understanding.³³

Later, in 2006, an audio-taped message from Bin-Laden once again was addressed to all Americans, and bizarrely contained a ‘truce offer’, among other things featuring this revealing passage: ‘You have tried preventing us from leading an honourable life, but you will not be able to prevent us from a noble death’.³⁴ The implicit assumption, in the midst of the pompous rhetoric and the conspicuous assumption of a zero-sum game at work, is that since there is no ‘honour’ to be had in life, the only remaining possibility of gaining honour is in death. In passing, let us note that this is an age-old, pre-modern schema or pattern being revived,

32. *The Al-Qaeda Reader*, op.cit., p. 207.

33. It’s interesting that on one reading the US and Europe never acknowledged Al-Qaeda as an enemy proper, cf. Carl Schmitt’s early work (*Begriff des Politischen*), this would be the avoidance of the political: insisting that the ‘war on terrorism’ is not political, but merely a matter of removing a virus from the social body. Accordingly, Osama Bin-Laden’s approaches became more and more desperate and pathetic: No one was ready to acknowledge him as an enemy proper, and his own suspicion of being merely a loser was strengthened.

34. Op.cit., pp. 224–225.

a schema that would be in full flourish in some of the chivalric novels Don Quijote read³⁵, e.g.

My third example is taken from the ideological figure behind Al-Qaeda, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, and was part of a film being broadcast by Al-Sahb Media Productions in 2005, titled ‘Wills of the Knights of the London Raid’. Let us note that the title of knighthood is explicitly made use of. In it, Al-Zawahiri berates the Queen of England, and in passing state this: ‘Let Bush, Blair, and those that march behind their Crusader-Zionist banner, know that the honourable mujahidin of Islam have made a covenant with their Lord to fight them until victory or martyrdom’.³⁶ First, what we might term the rebirth, or re-production, of theological affects and terminology appear striking; secondly, let us register an implicit, but distinctive sense of insecurity: ‘to fight them until victory or martyrdom’ (my underlining) implies that the speaker is far from sure of victory, and would hasten to add that death is indeed ‘honourable’ and glorious.

All of these traits and examples serve to show the precision of Enzensberger’s analysis of the radical loser. It also seems to confirm some of the hypotheses of this article: that the issue of ‘honour’ only ever arises out of an unresolved crisis of acknowledgment; that this typically launches a series of belligerence, or what Deleuze and Guattari would call the ‘war machine’³⁷; thirdly, that this machine takes the form of turning emotions into intensified, quasi-theological affects, and into ‘machinic assemblages’ – all of the pent-up emotions of isolated, individual losers are gathered together in the machinic collective of the terrorist rhizome, being produced by and producing belligerent affects.

TOWARDS THE LIBERATING LOSS OF HONOUR

Don Quijote was ridiculous, and Cervantes was deeply ironic. Yet, in the midst of all that ridiculousness and comic insignificance, he nonetheless served as a formal matrix for what later erupted in Rambo, in Kierkegaard, and lastly in Al-Qaeda and The Islamic State. This obviously prompts us to reflect further on how this intensive re-production of belligerent affects between politics and aesthetics might be dampened, lessened, if not eliminated. Enzensberger kept a cool, cynical head, but perhaps Enzensberger’s phlegm is slightly too defeatist and fatalist: Is

35. And in the Icelandic sagas, *Chanson de Roland*, etc. The link between warfare and ‘honour’ is evidently very strong, and predominantly pre-modern. The interesting thing is, that notions of ‘honour’ would seem to persist.

36. *The Al-Qaeda Reader*, op.cit., p. 239.

37. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, op.cit., pp. 387–467.

there really nothing at all to be done, other than resign and accept? The implicit common-sense argument of this article will have been, that working towards a less unjust world possibly would weaken the ominous nexus between the frustrated desire for acknowledgment and belligerent affects. In that case, the psychopolitical ideal would be an uneventful, a-heroic, honour-less society, but at the same time a society based on a far more even, global distribution of acknowledgment and justice. The problem is, that this is in a sense far too self-evident, and too glib. Part of the problem is the barrage of obstacles, psychological, historical, economical, technological, that would seem to hinder any easy form of solution. Don Quixote repented on his deathbed; Rambo was salvaged by his old superior; and Kierkegaard was posthumously redeemed and canonized. But what to do with all the little men, all the radical losers seeking out ‘honour’ in future skirmishes? Producing a societal state in which we could safely say that we had now left behind honour, that we came after honour, constitutes a minor, utopian ideal. But to uphold and nourish that ideal, is perhaps more important than ever.

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Part 3:

Honour in the late
modern welfare state

10

'At dead of night'¹*Abo Rasul's Macht und Rebel as dystopia and story of honour*

THORSTEIN NORHEIM

ABSTRACT The novel is read as a literary dystopia and an honour narrative by suggesting that the misanthropy in the novel and the Marcussian repressive tolerance of the welfare state, are dystopian expressions of the lack of traditional honour culture. The novel tries to oppose this by its main plot: the depiction of the two protagonists' radical and rebellious resistance work. This is seen as a utopian initiative, promoted by the need to revitalise a kind of traditional honour culture.

KEY WORDS literary dystopia | honour culture | rebellion | after honour

According to the American scholar James Bowman, post-war, late-modern Western society is a 'post-honor society', i.e. a society in which Western honour culture has been undermined or has disintegrated. Our own egalitarian, Scandinavian welfare society seems particularly suitable to illustrate this 'after-honour' tendency. As Bowman points out: 'Honor can be made compatible with a great many seemingly antithetical ideas, but it can never be compatible with any serious degree of egalitarianism' (Bowman 2006, 312).

In his book *Honor. A History* (2006), Bowman doesn't just set out to describe this process of undermining. He goes as far as to bemoan it. Conservative, almost reactionary in his attitude, Bowman wants to recreate some forms of honour in defiance of Western, especially American objections. Firstly, we must combat the opposition to, and fear of, war that is so widespread in Western society. Secondly, we must make social differences between people (other than pecuniary ones) acceptable again, especially where respect and prestige for good deeds and great achievements are concerned. Thirdly, we must combat celebrity culture, and, fourthly, we must speak up for the existence of gender differences, thus making traditional female roles acceptable again (see Bowman 2006, 307–324).

1. This article is translated by Richard Burgess.

There is much to suggest that Bowman is right in his belief that we live in a post-honour society. Other researchers in the field point out that the concept of honour plays a lesser role today than in earlier times. Defending Bowman's recipe for a revitalisation of the concept of honour is all the more difficult. However, even if his recipe is wrong, we cannot ignore that even in our Scandinavian welfare system there are symptoms of an 'honour's revival'. This is most obvious in cultural encounters between Western welfare societies and intact honour cultures. These symptoms and encounters are also reflected in art. In this article I am going to consider one of the novels of contemporary Norwegian literature that seems most interesting in this connection: *Macht und Rebel* (2002) by Abo Rasul. The novel can be seen as a literary dystopia and a story about honour. It seems to assume close connections between the two traditions it subscribes to. By examining the novel as a dystopia and as a story about honour, I hope to illustrate how its expression as 'honour's revival' is based on a dual connection. On the one hand, the dystopian and misanthropic keynote of the book seems related to the 'after honour' culture that marks Scandinavia social democracy, a society where traditional honour culture is more or less absent. On the other hand, the revitalisation of honour culture that the book is an expression of, is conveyed using the genre conventions of dystopian, especially critical dystopian, literature. My examination aims to moderate the perhaps most central point made in Anders Skare Malvik's doctoral thesis *Grensesnittets estetikk [The Aesthetics of Interface]* (2014), the most in-depth and vigorous interpretation of the Abo Rasul's novel so far: that the novel is evil and impossible to read.²

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Macht und Rebel (2002) is the second novel by the Norwegian author and artist Abo Rasul's (alias Matias Faldbakken) in his trilogy about Scandinavian misanthropy, the others being *The Cocka Hola Company* (2001) and *Unfun* (2008). All three novels attracted great attention from Norwegian reviewers. This was partly because of the many forbidden and tabooed themes the books deal with – in the case of *Macht und Rebel*, primarily Nazism and paedophilia. As Eirik Vassenden writes: 'Den ene provokasjonsmarkøren i denne romanen [...] er altså pedofili' [One provocation marker in this novel [...] is paedophilia] while the other is 'nazisme [...] og en ganske avansert form for rasisme.' [Nazism [...] and a rather advanced form of racism.] Partly it was because on the novel's form. Vassenden

2. See Malvik 2014, 95–126. Many thanks to Malvik for his critical comments to a late version of this article.

was one of the first to characterise the novels as conceptual art. Rasul's novels are not based on a view of art that assumes the work of art to be an autonomous work and an exalted object (Vassenden 2004, 124). His literature is not about producing 'gode eller verdifulle objekter' [good and valuable objects], his approaches are not original (Vassenden 2004, 134). It is rather a matter of a sort of prefab, a glorious mixture of notes, non-authentic quotations, jokes and 'fikse og plumpe ordspill' [clever and tasteless puns] (Vassenden 2004, 127). Thus Rasul's literature is rather to be seen as 'idéarbeid og kontekstualisering' [work with ideas and contextualisation] as part of a wider crossover between literature and visual art (Vassenden 2004, 134). Malvik, for his part, has pointed out the formal significance of media culture, aptly expressed with the concept of the 'Google professor', taken from Faldbakken's own essay 'A hypnagogic vision of the artist as bureaucrat' (2005).

MACHT UND REBEL AS A LITERARY DYSTOPIA

However, more traditional literary techniques and forms can also be found here. For example, the book boasts a relatively traditional plot that creates both excitement and intensity and, in spite of a dull climax³, establishes a reasonably conventional narrative structure. Moreover, the novel falls into a dystopian genre of literature that, according to Sarah Ljungquist, emerged during the 20th century at the expense of a utopian view that can be traced back to Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). More specifically, the novel belongs to a form of dystopia exemplified by the classic dystopias (Orwell's *1984*, Huxley's *Brave New World* and Zamyatin's *We*) that can be termed – using Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini's terminology – 'critical dystopia'.

A remark from Rebel, one of the novel's main characters, confirms the impression of the book as a literary dystopia. For him, post-war Scandinavian society is a bad place: 'Det bar rett til det repressive toleransehjelvetet jeg har vasset rundt i hele jævla livet.' [I was heading for the repressive tolerance hell I've been wallowing in all my damn life.] (Rasul 2004, 79) This is in line with the definition of dystopia presented by Lyman Tower Sargent who, in his essay 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited' (1994), emphasises where and how dystopia differs from related terms such as utopia and anti-utopia: 'Dystopia or negative utopia –

3. Cf. Vassenden: 'Lenge er den [romanen] god og ganske underholdende, men de siste tretti sidene ender i et "klimaks" som er mer ett-sted-må-da-denno-boken-slutte-aktig enn noe annet jeg har lest.' [It [the novel] is good and quite entertaining for a long while, but the last thirty pages end with a 'climax' that is more this-book-had-to-end-somewhere-ish than anything I've read.] (Vassenden 2004, 128)

a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived' (Sargent 1994, 9).⁴ In other words, a dystopia differs crucially from a utopia in portraying the bad place, while a utopia depicts the good place. However, that doesn't mean that there is an opposition between dystopia and utopia. For, as Morten Auklend emphasises, utopia is not just a place (à la More's Utopia). It is also a philosophical concept that refers not least to a hope (cf. Ernst Bloch) and a desire (cf. Ruth Levitas) for changing the present (see Auklend 2010, 44–76). Sargent's definitions in terms of locality are therefore inadequate. As both Moylan and Auklend point out, a dystopia is not just a textual depiction of a bad place. Rather it is a text that attends to philosophical concepts of utopia. In other words, a dystopia is a text that examines the possibilities for changing a bad place for the better, by confronting the reader with a utopian perspective. A characteristic feature of dystopia is that it somehow conveys a utopia by allowing for glimpses of it or by problematising it. The dystopia is thus a genre that, by virtue of necessarily having the bad place as its setting, makes it possible to examine utopian concepts in literature.⁵

Like most essential definitions, Sargent's definition of dystopia is not able to capture all the aspects of a genre that has experienced such a blossoming in Norway during the last two decades that it undoubtedly represents a significant trend in our contemporary literature. In the following I will therefore try to cast further light on the novel's connections to the dystopian genre by considering three main genre conventions: 1) the composition of place as a fictional universe, 2) the fictional universe's resistance and narrative structure and 3) the allegorical function of the fictional universe.

4. He proposes almost identical definitions of utopia and anti-utopia. In the case of utopia the crucial word 'worse' is replaced by 'better': 'Eutopia or positive utopia – a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived' (ibid). He defines anti-utopia as follows: 'Anti-utopia – a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or some particular eutopia.' (ibid)

5. This means that the real opposition is not between the utopian and the dystopian, but between the utopian and the anti-utopian, since the anti-utopian implies a criticism and rejection of the utopian. This difference, which scholarship has not always taken into account, should therefore be apparent: The anti-utopian is darker and bleaker than the dystopian precisely because it implies a criticism or rejection of the utopian, i.e. the utopian initiative that the dystopia conveys.

COMPOSITION OF PLACE AS A FICTIONAL UNIVERSE

Utopias and dystopias have in common that they represent a form of fiction where the depiction of fictional universes, i.e. non-existent places (cf. Sargent's 'non-existent society') stimulates our imagination. Usually it is a future society where the action takes place at a later historical time than the society that the text originates from and that the fiction, to a greater or lesser extent, relates or refers back to. These fictional universes are by no means disconnected from our (the author's and the reader's) own reality, but, on the contrary, are intended to illustrate in different ways and to different extents (criticisms of) our own society. They achieve this either through the traditional utopia's typical depiction of a better world than the existing one, or through the typical dystopian depiction of a worse place than the existing one, often serving as a warning about what can happen if society continues developing in the present direction without our attempting to improve things. The science fiction theoretician Darko Suvin sums up this fictional universe's otherness in relation to the reality that the text originates from and relates to with the phrase 'this-wordly other world' (Suvin 1979, 42). So the fictional universe, whether utopian or dystopian, is neither transcendental (in a religious sense) nor mythical, but relates to the present one by representing something new and strange.

According to Suvin, such fictional universes are established and created primarily through science fiction techniques like 'estrangement' and 'novum' (innovation). An obvious difference between traditional utopias and modern dystopias is that, while literary utopias in the More tradition take the form of a journey in which one travels from a realistically depicted world to an unknown one (both in time and space), in modern dystopias such thematic transitions are less common, and the associations to travel literature less apparent. In the latter we usually allowed entry into the fictional (bad) universe directly. As Moylan points out: 'With dystopia, the text usually begins directly in the bad new world, and yet even without a dislocating move to an elsewhere' (Moylan 2000, 148).⁶ Also, traditional utopias usually feature a systematic mapping of the (limited) enclave and a

6. In other words, in a dystopia we are often given direct access to the nightmarish society in medias res. Cf. also Sarah Ljungquist's comment regarding Zamyatin's *We*: 'Det mest utmärkande [...] är att man här, i motsats till vad som brukar vara fallet i den litterära utopi där ramberättelsen ofta utgör en sluss mellan världarna, som läsare kastas direkt in i en mardrömslik värld och ett lika mardrömslikt skeende.' [The most distinctive difference [...] is that here, as opposed to what is usually the case in the literary utopia, where the frame narrative often constitutes a gap between the worlds, the reader is thrown directly into a nightmarish world and an equally nightmarish series of events.] (Ljungquist 2001, 63)

more or less detailed introduction to social structures, history, peoples, languages, etc. In modern dystopias, such elements of content tend to have less focus.

Another central term relating to the production of fictional narrative is Fredric Jameson's concept of 'world reduction'. World reduction is a compositional principle, a principle for creating fiction, based on abstraction and simplification, which breaks with all realism.⁷ This principle permeates literature at many levels, but is perhaps most apparent in the way characters are drawn and the way the (ideological) forces that constitute and sustain society are presented. The latter mechanisms are crucial in such texts since they have a bearing on the turbulent relationship between on the one hand the utopian wishes of the individual or group to change the present and on the other the collective's defence of the status quo. The theme of resistance is also formally expressed in many dystopias – and also affects the question of genre; to what extent the text appears as a utopia, a dystopia or an anti-utopia.

In *Macht und Rebel* the fictional aspect is toned down. We are plunged into a dystopian universe which hardly seems alien or to represent a novum. On the contrary, the universe presented seems quite close to our late-modern Scandinavian society. This is emphasised by the fact that the action takes place no further into the future than 2004.⁸ The effect of the Jamesonian world reduction principle is all the stronger. World reduction entails that tendencies in our society are not *mirrored*, but *magnified* and *enlarged* through extrapolation.⁹ We find this reflected both in the way characters are drawn and in the descriptions of social ideologies. Both are marked by simplification and exaggeration; we are presented neither with complex psychological portraits nor with profound or sophisticated social analysis. As stated by Vassenden: 'Alle romanpersonene er flate som papirark; de er stort sett konsept- eller idéfigurer som hver iscenesetter ett (eller flere) prosjekter'. [All the characters in the novel are as flat as sheets of paper; they are mostly conceptual figures that each are responsible for staging one or more projects] (Vassenden 2004, 126). Significantly, the novel's two protagonists have names that reveal their main individual characteristics, also reflected in the novel's title;

7. Cf. the essay 'World Reduction in LeGuin' (1975) where world reduction is referred to as 'a principle of systematic exclusion, a kind of surgical excision of empirical reality, something like a process of ontological attenuation in which the sheer teeming multiplicity of what exists, of what we call reality, is deliberately thinned and weeded out through an operation of radical abstraction and simplification which I henceforth will term *world reduction*' (Jameson 2005, 271).

8. See the representation of Cato's 'pulekurve' [fucking graph] (Rasul 2004, 252).

9. Cf. Ljungquist: 'Världen i dessa dystopier är en värld som delvis liknar författarens samtida verklighet, men där alla proportioner förskjutits och uppförstorats.' [The world in these dystopias is a world that partly resembles the author's contemporary reality, but where all proportions are dislocated and magnified.] (Ljungquist 2001, 63)

Macht (German for power, might) and Rebel. As the name suggests, Rebel is a personification of the rebellious and subversive potential that the novel examines and that, to use Vassenden's phrase, is about showing how 'den altomfavnende, destruktive surheten kan brukes' [comprehensive, destructive grumpiness can be used] and transformed to an 'aggresjon med et visst [...] opprørsk potensiale [sic]' [aggression with a certain rebellious potential]:

Den totalsure Rebel, som forsøker å eksistere på et lavest mulig nivå, er motstrebende en del av et subkulturelt, anti-korporativt foretak som i anti-korporativitetens fremme selger kopier av merkevarer og organiserer illegale fester og demonstrasjoner. Rebel har imidlertid kommet til et punkt der ubehaget overfor subkulturen har vokst seg sterkere enn ubehaget overfor markedskrefte og hovedstrømmen, og der målet for aggresjonen er subkulturen selv.

[The totally grumpy Rebel, who tries to exist on a lowest possible level, is reluctantly part of a sub-cultural, anti-corporative enterprise which in the cause of anti-corporatism sells copies of trademark products and organises illegal parties and demonstrations. However, Rebel has reached a point where his discomfort in relation to this sub-culture has grown stronger than his discomfort in relation to market forces and the mainstream, and where the target of his aggression is the sub-culture itself.] [op cit: 128]

Rebel's grumpiness, his discomfort, hatred, boredom and his misanthropy are closely connected to his environment. Right from the start, the Scandinavian welfare society comes across as a bad place, as a dystopia.¹⁰ Indeed, Rebel's moaning

10. Cf. Lasse Horne Kjældgaard's concept of 'velferdsdystopisme' [welfare dystopism] in reference to the last of three distinct phases in the development of the Danish welfare society and its manifestation in literature: from a formative phase in the period 1950–1958 that coincides with the *welfare modernism* that is particularly associated with Villy Sørensen's work, through a formative phase in the period 1958–1968 that is particularly reflected in the writing of Anders Bodelsen, to a crisis phase in the period 1968–1973 that results in the *welfare dystopism* which in Henrik Stangerup's writing 'angår velfærdssaten som overmoden vækst – eller som misvækst.' [concerns the welfare state as an overripe growth – or a deformation.] (Kjældgaard 2009, 40) This seems to be a fruitful concept, although his understanding of 'dystopism' tends towards what I would call anti-utopism, given that the modern welfare state is a society where visions of the future are absent or suppressed in favour of safeguarding and preserving: 'Ordet "velfærd" har ikke længere nogen visionær, fremadrettet betydning. Alle politiske partier er enige om, at velfærden skal *bevares* – den er en "værdi" vi skal "værne" om, og som ikke behøver legitimering ud fra et videre, humanistisk mål.' [The word 'welfare' no longer has any visionary, forward-looking meaning. All political parties are agreed that welfare must be *preserved* – it is a 'value' that must be 'protected' and that requires no justification in relation to a further humanistic goal.] (op cit: 42)

means that the novel rivals the previous one, *The Coca Cola Company*, as far as its resigned, anti-utopian tone is concerned. The ‘social diagnosis’ the text gives an insight into is primarily characterised by Rebel’s deeply misanthropic view of the world.¹¹ This diagnosis is very simplified, in the sense that it, as Malvik points out, is primarily centred on two problematical, ideological issues: *the logic of capitalist tolerance* and *the problem of originality*.

On the one hand, society is characterised by what Herbert Marcuse calls repressive tolerance, i.e. the logic that means that there is no room for subversion – that all subversive activity is accepted and tolerated and therefore leads to nothing more than reproducing society’s values and norms, so that resistance in reality simply confirms what it is seeking to criticise and undermine. The effect of this logic is anti-utopian.¹² On several occasions Rebel expresses his hatred of his environment. But logic puts strong limitations on his insatiable need for rebellion and subversion. He is especially aggressive towards the sub-cultural and anti-corporative enterprise PUSH, lead by Frank Leidenstam (also called ‘Feiten’ [Fatso]) that he reluctantly belongs to. The reason is precisely that resistance activities directed against big, multinational concerns always end up confirming the very capitalist system it set out to fight against. In other words, Rebel perceives the problem that Macht formulates fully: ‘Kritisk teori fungerer alltid bekreftende på objektet for kritikk. Akkurat som det alternative alltid ender opp med å bekrefte det etablerte i siste runde. Det etablerte bekrefter det alternative i første runde, og det alternative bekrefter det etablerte i siste. Sånn er det.’ [Critical theory always has a validating effect on the object of criticism. Just as alternative culture always ends up confirming the establishment in the final analysis. That’s the way it is.] (Rasul 2004, 103)

11. In the book society is seen consistently through the eyes of the two protagonists. This means that in terms of narrative perspective is not possible to deduce an attitude or a norm which might express another message. For Malvik, this reflects the problematic role of the reader in the novel.

12. Cf. Vassenden’s explanation of this logic, which in his opinion is the second of only two things that these books actually have to say: ‘For det andre hevder de at det er meningsløst, i en overutviklet sivilisasjon som vårt nordeuropeiske sosialdemokrati, å sloss mot den repressive toleransens mange altomfattende mekanismer, ved for eksempel å “provosere” eller bedrive “motstandsarbeid”, det være seg gjennom politisk aktivisme eller kunst – og følgelig at eneste gjenværende kritiske strategi er resignasjon og passivitet.’ [Secondly they claim that it is meaningless in an over-developed society like our northern-European social democracy to fight against the comprehensive mechanisms of repressive tolerance, for example by ‘provoking’ or doing ‘resistance work’, whether in the form of political activism or art – and thus that the only remaining critical strategy is resignation and passivity.] (Vassenden 2004, 124)

On the other hand, Rebel's insight into this logic means that he is confronted by what Malvik (and Ane Farsethås before him) calls the problem of originality. This is evident not least in a passage where Rebel connects his pessimism to late-modern society, more specifically to a Scandinavia where 'alt fungerer og i en tid da alle – hver student, hver taper, hver junkie, hver lønnsarbeider, hvert statsmenne-ske, og hver... MUSIKER – tenker likt, er like subversive og like oppfinnsomme, like *on the edge*, hvilket vil si like DRITKJEDELIGE alle sammen.' [everything functions and a time where everybody – every student, every loser, every junkie, every wage-earner, every citizen and every ... MUSICIAN – thinks the same way, is equally subversive and equally innovative, equally on the edge, which is to say equally BLOODY BORING.] (Rasul 2004, 11). This also includes what Vassenden has called 'hyperrefleksivitetens problem' [the problem of hyper-reflexivity] (Vassenden 2004, 137): 'bevisstheten om hvor uoriginalt det er å sutre over originalitetens problem.' [the awareness of how unoriginal it is to moan about the problem of originality.] (Malvik 2014, 105) In other words, as a 'offer for samfunnets toleranselogikk' [victim of society's tolerance logic] Rebel finds himself at the beginning of the novel in a major identity crisis, expressed in his passive hatred of everything and everyone (ibid). More specifically, his identity problems, according to Vassenden, are a symptom of something greater than the individual: 'den hvite mannens ubehag over å uunngåelig være mainstream, altså identitetsløs.' [the white man's discomfort at inevitably being mainstream, and thus without identity.] (Vassenden 2004, 125)

RESISTANCE IN THE FICTIONAL UNIVERSE AND NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Eventually Rebel succeeds in mobilising energies that break with his anti-utopian misanthropy and passivity. His hatred leads to an awakening of active, i.e. utopian impulses, and Rebel's challenge to himself, which according to Malvik consists of 'å tilfredsstille eget intensitetsbegjær' [satisfying his desire for intensity] (Malvik 2014: 109), is to find strategies that are provocative and radical enough to be able to withstand the logic of repressive tolerance and solve the problem of originality. Although the novel finally reaffirms that it is a problem, Rebel's attempts are consistent with the utopian impulses that characterise a dystopia. With its point of departure in a dystopian (i.e. non-existent and bad) society, *Macht und Rebel* is a text that examines the basis for notions of utopia. This is reflected not only in the way social themes are dealt with in the work, but also in its narrative structure.

Rebel develops a strategy for transgression based on Nazism and paedophilia. On the one hand he starts reading Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, on the other he enters into an

extremely sexually experimental and uninhibited relationship with a 14-year-old girl, Thong. However, he is not able to really find an outlet for his resistance activity until he meets Macht. Only then does he break out of his resignation, his passivity and his negativity. As Vassenden points out, Macht represents the power of money:

Macht er en ‘meget begavet’ og streetsmart økonom som jobber for en større informasjonsbedrift som selger subversive trender og undergrunnsfenomener til store kapitalforetak. Macht er rett og slett en på alle måter vellykket trendforsker, som kommersielt utnytter ulike kritiske antikommersielle krefter. Ved å bruke hyperrealismen som brekkstang, vrenger og utnytter han den kritikken han henter i undergrunnen[.]

[Macht is ‘very gifted’ and streetwise economist who works for a large information company that sells subversive trends and underground phenomenon to big businesses. Macht is simply a very successful trend analyst who commercially exploits critical anti-commercial forces. Using hyperrealism as a lever, he distorts and exploits the criticism he finds in underground movements[.] [Vassenden 2004, 129]

In other words, Macht’s activities as CCCCPU (comtemporary counter-culture commercial pick-upper) for the communication and advertising company NODDY consist of transforming the subversive criticism he finds in the underground movements into capitalist enterprises. Thus critical and anti-commercial forces are made to appear as mainstream. Macht is eventually tasked with clearing the name of the multinational company T.S.I.V.A.G. (Thompson, Smithson and Immhauser Values Alimited Googol) that has been (rightly) accused of anti-Semitism. To this end he needs Rebel’s help. The solution is to systematise Rebel’s activism. Together they plan an ambitious campaign to exonerate T.S.I.V.A.G. with the aid of Nazism and paedophilia and ensure that Rebel finds an outlet for his hatred of PUSH and Feiten. The plan is to dethrone Feiten from his position in the radical and liberal underground movement, while exonerating T.S.I.V.A.G. at the expense of its competitor PAYPLUG. Malvik summarises the campaign like this:

Sammen lurer de Leiderstam og PUSH til å gjennomføre et omfattende angrep mot kontorbygget til PAYPLUG, som er T.S.I.V.A.G.s hovedkonkurrent. Uten demonstrantenes vitende har Macht og Rebel krydret aksjonen med nazistiske og pedofile innslag. Hele opptrinnet dokumenteres av en reklamefotograf fra en tilgrensende bygning og av diverse overvåkingskameraer. Enkelte bilder fra den

skreddersydde aksjonen brukes umiddelbart i den holdningskappende reklamekampanjen til T.S.I.V.A.G., mens andre deler av bildematerialet distribueres direkte på Internett som volds- og overgrepspornografi til pedofile mottakere.

[Together they trick Leiderstam and PUSH into mounting an attack on the offices of PAYPLUG, T.S.I.V.A.G.'s main competitor. Unbeknown to the demonstrators, Macht and Rebel have spiced up the campaign with Nazi and paedophile elements. The whole incident is documented from a neighbouring building by an advertising photographer and by various surveillance cameras. Some of the pictures from the tailor-made campaign are immediately put to use in T.S.I.V.A.G.'s advertising campaign to raise political awareness, while other parts of the image material are distributed directly on the Internet as violent child pornography for paedophile recipients.]¹³ [Malvik 2014, 95]

The campaign is based on a particular strategy that sheds (further) light on both on the two protagonists' status as conceptual figures and on the social themes of the novel. The combination of their two names (using the German conjunction 'und') in the book's title gives strong associations to the Nazi's Nacht und Nebel directive. It is precisely this ideological strategy that Macht and Rebel adapt and base their magnificent campaign on, as Malvik indicates: 'Der hvor nazistene fikk menneskene til å forsvinne, er Macht og Rebels taktikk å få meningen til å forsvinne. Ved å renvaske et uetisk multinasjonalt selskap ved hjelp av en antikapitalistisk aksjonsgruppe skal de gjennomføre en 'deportasjon av (ideologisk) mening''. [While the Nazis made people disappear, Macht and Rebel's tactic is to make opinions disappear. By exonerating an unethical multinational company with the help of an anti-capitalist action group, they will achieve the 'deportation of an (ideological) conviction'] (op cit: 103). Macht is the ideologist-in-chief¹⁴ behind a plan that aims to carry out a 'bedriftsidentitetens Nacht und Nebelstrategi' [Nacht und Nebel strategy directed at company identity] (op cit: 110):

13. Cf also: 'PUSH tror de deltar i et opprør, men det de egentlig gjør, er å reklamere for T.S.I.V.A.G., samtidig som de signerer sin egen sorti fra den internasjonale undergrunnsarenaen ved å assosieres med nazisme og pedofili.' [PUSH think they are taking part in a revolt, but what they are actually doing is advertising for T.S.I.V.A.G. and simultaneously sealing their own departure from the international underground scene by being associated with Nazism and paedophilia.] (Malvik 2014, 121)

14. Cf. Malvik: 'Det er Macht som oppsøker Rebel, som foreslår kompaniskapet, og som er arkitekten bak den operasjonen de etter hvert gjennomfører.' [It is Macht who seeks out Rebel, who suggests a partnership, and who is the architect behind the operation they eventually carry out.] (Malvik 2014, 121–122)

[D]et eneste som er å gjøre, er å vrenge innsiden av T.S.I.V.A.G. ut [...] altså... (Macht kikker ned på talene til Rebel)... for eksempel... prøv å forestill deg en Hitler-tale som blir jødenes nasjonalsang, liksom... [...] og så (Macht skjønner at det må inn med teskje) ... og så må du forestille deg at T.S.I.V.A.G. er den Hitler-talen, og konsumentene er den jødiske populasjon [...] Det vi må gjøre er å hvitvaske T.S.I.V.A.G. ved å vrenge mening fra innsiden ut ... uten å skifte innpakning, skjønner du [...] Vi må ... vi må deportere folks ideer og forestillinger om hva T.S.I.V.A.G. er. Det folk kjenner T.S.I.V.A.G. som, må forsvinne i nattens mulm og mørke og folk må bli stående igjen uten den ringeste anelse om hvor meningen tok veien ...

[So the only thing to do is to turn T.S.I.V.A.G. inside out... (Macht glances at Rebel's speeches)... for example... try and imagine a Hitler speech that becomes the Jewish national anthem... [...] and then (Macht understands he has to spell it out)... and then you must try and imagine that T.S.I.V.A.G. is that Hitler speech, and the consumers are the Jewish population [...] What we have to do is whitewash T.S.I.V.A.G. by turning meaning inside out...without changing the wrapper, you understand [...] We have to ... we have to deport people's ideas about what T.S.I.V.A.G. is. What T.S.I.V.A.G. means to people has to disappear at dead of night, leaving people without the slightest idea where the meaning went...] [Rasul 2004, 183]

This strategy is not only important for the action of the novel. It also influences the narrative structure – the intensity of the story, its plot and climax, and, like Rebel's activism, it is an expression of a utopian initiative. First and foremost, it illustrates a central element in the narrative structure of dystopia: the conflict that Raffaella Baccolini has pointed out between dystopian order and utopian resistance, between the 'the narrative of the hegemonic order' and 'the counter-narrative of resistance' (Moylan 2000, 148). The strategy takes the form of such a counter-narrative where the novel itself *produces* the resistance and the strategy it describes.

According to Malvik, this strategy is projected in the context of digital media culture. This means that the novel both 'beskriver og produserer [...] et sett manipulerende medieoperasjoner som er karakteristisk for den digitalteknologiske mediekulturens subjektivitetsproduksjon' [describes and produces [...] a set of manipulative media operations that are characteristic of the way digital media culture produces subjectivity] (Malvik 2014, 125). In this way, there arises a form of 'medial ondskap' [medial evil] (ibid) in the two protagonists' creation of 'et nettverk (eller en økologi) av sosiale, konseptuelle og teknologiske relasjoner' [a network (or ecol-

ogy) of social, conceptual and technological relations](op cit: 124) that they are able to control and manipulate, but that remains concealed from the other players.¹⁵

Thus the *Nacht und Nebel* strategy takes the form of a counter-narrative arising from a conflict in the dystopia's narrative structure between dystopian order and utopian resistance, although it could be argued in the final analysis that it has the effect of validating the status quo. This conflict sheds further light on the novel as a literary dystopia, since the counter-narrative demonstrates all three features of the variant of dystopia that Baccolini and Moylan call 'critical dystopia' and that emerged in Anglo-American literature around 1990: the alternation between utopian and anti-utopian impulses, 'genre blurring' and 'self-reflexivity'.¹⁶ In his book *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (2000), Moylan emphasises just such a conflict or alternation between the utopian and the anti-utopian as a central feature of the narrative structure of a dystopia. His charting of such alternations in the context of the dominating *tendency* and *outcome* of texts provides a further specification of the genre.¹⁷ In *Macht und Rebel* this is illustrated in the thematic alternations between misanthropy (grumpiness) and activism (Nazism, paedophilia), but first and foremost in the conflict in the narrative structure between order and radical resistance, a conflict where utopian resistance work – the campaign – is held at bay by its anti-utopian effect: the realisation that subversion is hopeless and pointless.

According to Baccolini and Moylan, another important feature of the narrative structure of critical dystopia is 'an intensification of the practice of genre blurring'

15. Malvik gives two examples of such medial evil: the blackboxing phenomenon and the use of Goodwin's law (See op cit: 121 and 118).

16. 'In our own work we read critical dystopias as texts that maintain a utopian impulse [...] within the work.' (Baccolini and Moylan 2003, 7) Cf also: 'Another device that opens up these texts is an intensification of genre blurring [...] the critical dystopias resist genre purity in favour of an impure or hybrid text' (ibid.). And: 'the recent dystopian texts are more self-reflexively critical as they retrieve the progressive possibilities inherent in dystopian narrative' (op cit: 8).

17. A dystopia can either 'be seen as *utopian* in tendency if it in its portrayal of the 'bad place' it suggests (even if indirectly) or at least stimulates the potential for an effective challenge and possibly change by virtue of human efforts'. Or it can 'be deemed *anti-utopian* if it fails (or chooses not) to challenge the ideological and epistemological limits of the actually existing society.' (Moylan 2000, 156) According to Moylan, every dystopia will position itself within a continuum between the utopian and the anti-utopian. 'Although all dystopian texts offer a detailed and pessimistic presentation of the very worst of social alternatives, some affiliate with a utopian tendency as they maintain a horizon of hope (or at least invite readings to do), while others only appear to be dystopian allies of Utopia as they retain an anti-utopian disposition that forecloses all transformative possibility, and yet others negotiate a more strategically antinomic continuum.' (ibid.) Moylan traces this continuum between the utopian and the anti-utopian in a schematic outline (see op cit: 157) that includes both textual attitude and outcome. While dystopian texts with utopian tendency often exhibit a *militant* attitude and have an *open* outcome, dystopian texts that are mainly anti-utopian tend to have a *resigned* attitude and a *closed* outcome.

(Baccolini and Moylan 2003, 7). This description fits *Macht und Rebel* well, since the conflation of several text forms and the use of digital media culture results in a ‘hybrid textuality’ that makes the book an ‘impure’ novel, in the sense that it cannot only be characterised as conceptual art, as its reception so far has more or less been taken for granted, but is an alloy consisting of a mixture of conceptual art and conventional literary devices (suspense-based plot, etc.)

The last characteristic of critical dystopia is that the above-mentioned conflict noticed by Moylan between ‘the narrative of hegemonic order’ and ‘the counter-narrative of resistance’ is expressed as a struggle over control of language. As Moylan points out: ‘language is a weapon for the reigning dystopic power structure’, while at the same time ‘the counter-narrative is often accomplished precisely by way of language’ (op cit: 149). For him this is an expression of critical dystopia’s self-reflexivity, in as much as the story exhibits a ‘self-reflexive awareness of the power of language’, linked to its ‘own conditions of production and reception’ (op cit: 150). In *Macht und Rebel* this is manifested in two ways: in the novel’s own insight into the Nacht und Nebel strategy and in the fact that the two protagonists possess a linguistic competence which is decisive for the outcome of the campaign. More specifically, the novel’s self-reflexive awareness about the Nacht und Nebel phenomenon is expressed in linguistic reflection about how *allegory* works.

THE ALLEGORICAL FUNCTION OF THE FICTIONAL UNIVERSE

There is a consensus among theoreticians of the genre that the fictional universe of a dystopia reflects an image of the reality the work springs from. However, this is not something that is explicit in the individual work. It springs rather from a textual code that the reader has to crack. This code is the basis for the widespread view that the primary function of this sort of literature is to propose (social) criticism of our own society.¹⁸ So a central convention of the genre is that dystopias traditionally function as

18. Auklend illustrates this view by referring to a statement from M. Keith Booker’s *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature. Fiction as Social Criticism*: ‘I wish to underscore the role of dystopian fiction as social criticism. In particular, [...] the treatment of imaginary societies in the best dystopian fiction is always highly relevant more or less directly to specific ‘realworld’ societies and issues.’ (Auklend 2010, 81) It is precisely this notion, that the genre is to be read as social criticism, that constitutes the genre’s ‘kanskje mest sentrale fordom’ [most central prejudice]. Auklend’s criticism of Booker’s standpoint goes like this: ‘I denne type lesning anskueliggjør og kritiserer romanene sine respektive samfunn [...]. Resultatet blir en didaktisk orientert eksegesis, der forfatterens politiske motivasjoner utlegges fra tekstenes figurlige nivå. Booker deduserer seg fra tekst til historisk kontekst og tilbake’. [According to this sort of reading, the novels criticise their respective societies [...]. The result is a didactically-oriented exegesis where the author’s political motivations are construed from the figurative level. Booker deduces from text to historical context and back again] (op cit: 81–82).

social criticism. This view is predicated on an analogical or a metaphorical relation between the fictional universe and the society the text springs from. However, as Auklend points out, there is reason to question this. Estrangement and *novum*, as well as the element of world reduction, are devices that mean that there is no one-to-one relationship between text and reality, but rather a relationship based on distortion, magnification and extrapolation. In other words, the relationship between the fictional universe and referential reality is not based on metaphor, but rather takes the form of an *allegory* – an allegorical structure where the fictional universe can be understood, through world reduction and extrapolation, as a distorted image of referential reality.

Auklend sees the status of the allegory as crucial. His starting point is that allegory ‘består av to nivåer, et bokstavelig (romanens *topos*, de fiktive samfunnene, “*space as text*”) og et figurlig (samfunns- og ideologikritikk).’ [consists of two levels, one literal (the *topos* of the novel, fictitious societies, ‘*space as text*’) and one figurative (social and ideological criticism).] (Auklend 2010: 77) But for him, although the text may be perfectly meaningful at both levels, it is important to break with the traditional emphasis on the figurative level, that is to say with the *allegoresis*: ‘den litterære kritikken som vil dekode og “oversette” teksten’ [the literary criticism that seeks to decode and ‘translate’ the text] by ‘å suspendere den som en i realiteten politisk motivert struktur.’ [suspending it as what in reality is a politically motivated structure.] (ibid) The problem with the *allegoresis*, according to Auklend, is that all too often it involves closing off the text’s potential for meaning.¹⁹ Therefore he rejects the priority usually given to the figurative level, which he thinks compromises the literal levels of the text, i.e. the levels that create ‘tvetydighet’ [ambiguity] and that contribute ‘alt annet enn anskueliggjøringer’ [anything but clarification] (ibid).

Thus the dystopia is not primarily an expression of social criticism, but rather a text offering insight into *figurations* of a form of social criticism. The methodological consequences of this are that ideological criticism needs to be supplemented with linguistic criticism (op cit: 82), more specifically with ‘en metaproblematikk, en egen metafiktiv kartlegging av figurasjonen av *forholdet* mellom tekst og samfunn’ [a problematisation at meta-level, a meta-fictive mapping of the figuration of *the relationship* between text and society] (op cit: 91). Thus the alle-

19. In other words, ‘faren ved allegoresen er at den entydiggjør, anskueliggjør og totaliserer dystopien, for dermed å redusere det som burde undersøkes: selve grunnlaget for å lese figurlig.’ [the danger with the *allegoresis* is that it simplifies, elucidates and totalises the dystopia, thus reducing what it ought to be examining: the basis for reading figuratively.] (op cit: 96) As Auklend himself summarises it: ‘Oppfatningen av allegorien som en henvisning til noe “reelt”, “historisk” eller “konkret”, som en dulgt tale som må oversettes for at en “sannere” betydning skal fremtre, er dermed konfrontert.’ [The conception of the allegory as a reference to something ‘real’, ‘historical’ or ‘concrete’, like a veiled speech that must be translated for a ‘truer’ meaning to become apparent, is thus confronted.] (op cit: 105)

gorical level involves ‘en intensivering av en fortolkningsproblematikk’ [an intensification of problems concerning interpretation] (op cit: 87).

On the basis of the social interface, i.e. ‘den erfaringsmessige relasjonen mellom teksten og leseren’ [the experiential connection between text and reader] (Malvik 2014, 96), Malvik shows how the allegorical function in *Macht und Rebel* illustrates just this. For him, the text is an ‘ond roman’ [evil novel], due to ‘en allegorisk impuls’ [an allegorical impulse] that invites the reader ‘til å investere i en kritisk-retorisk figur som den samtidig problematiserer.’ [to invest in a critical-rhetorical figure who, at the same time, makes problems.] (ibid) Drawing on Paul de Man’s theory of allegory, Malvik problematises the novel’s allegorical function, pointing out how the novel prescribes an ‘aporetisk posisjon for sin leser.’ [aporetic position for the reader.] (op cit: 101) *Macht und Rebel* is namely problematic both on the figurative and the literal level. On the one hand, a reading on the literal level, consisting of the strategies (Nazism and paedophilia) that the two protagonists base their resistance work on, will be both reductive and problematic. Such a reading, focusing as it does on shocking and provocative content, must necessarily accentuate the morally reprehensible, and this repellent aspect of the book means that the figurative level escapes the reader’s gaze. On the other hand, the figurative level in which the reader is invited to a ‘institusjons- og/eller kapitalismekritisk fortolkning’ [anti-institutional/anti-capitalist interpretation] in line with Marcuse’s repressive tolerance, is equally problematic because such a reading involves an acceptance of the extreme strategies of the protagonists (op cit: 100). Acceptance will not only make the reader complicit in these outrages, it will also implicate her in ‘toleranselogikken som romanen hevdes å kritisere.’ [the logic of tolerance that the novel is claimed to criticise.] (op cit: 101)

There is therefore reason to claim that the novel ‘manipulerer lesningen mot en kritisk-teoretisk figur, som den samtidig undergraver på et bokstavelig nivå’ [manipulates the reading towards a critical-theoretical metaphor, which at the same time is undermined on the literal level] (op cit: 109)²⁰:

Teksten peker ved flere anledninger på denne retoriske mekanismen, hvilket ‘instruerer’ leseren til å lese figurlig, samtidig som det problematiske ved en slik lesning aksentueres. Ved å undersøke denne mekanismen kan romanen

20. Cf. Malvik: ‘På den ene siden manipuleres leseren til å forstå romanen i overført betydning som en kritisk-teoretisk allegori. På den andre siden gjøres denne lesningen problematisk fordi det innebærer en form for overbærenhet med, eller hvitvasking av, romanens antisosiale rekvisitter.’ [On the one hand the reader is manipulated to understand the novel figuratively as a critical-theoretical allegory. On the other, this reading is rendered problematic because it involves a form of indulgence with, or whitewashing of, the antisocial props of the novel.] (op cit: 102)

leses som en fortelling om sin egen retorisitet, det vil si som en fortelling om dens egen produksjon av et manipulerende sosialt grensesnitt.

[On several occasions the text points to this rhetorical mechanism, which 'instructs' the reader to read metaphorically, while at the same time accentuating the problematical aspect of such a reading. An examination of this mechanism shows that the novel can be read as a story about its own rhetoricity, that is, a story about its own production of a manipulative social interface.] [ibid]

In Malvik's view this means that the reader is trapped in an impossible or evil allegorical game. This is underlined by the novel's own self-reflexive portrayal of the *Nacht und Nebel* strategy. As Malvik points out, the novel's epigraph, which contains a description of the notorious Nazi strategy, must be understood as a self-reflexive comment to the book's own allegorical manoeuvre.²¹ In this way the novel exposes its own rhetorical strategy, which consists of manipulating the reader 'til å 'deportere' meningsinnholdet i en rekke dypt problematiske beskrivelser.' [to 'deport' meaning in a series of deeply problematical descriptions.] (op cit: 103)²² The fact that the book's narrative voice at no time corrects the attitudes of the protagonists is, according to Malvik, further proof of the evil nature of the text and its manipulation of the reader.

From a genre perspective, this means that the utopian element has a very tough time. This impression is reinforced by the fact that the protagonists' utopian initiative has no

21. Cf. the epigraph: 'Efficient and enduring terrorization can be achieved only either by capital punishment or by measures to keep the relatives of the criminal and the population in the dark as to fate of the criminal. This aim is achieved by transferring the criminal to Germany... The prisoners are, in future, to be transported to Germany secretly, and further treatment of the offenders will take place here; these measures will have a deterrent effect because:

A. The prisoners will vanish without a trace.

B. No information may be given as to their whereabouts of their fate.

(Field Marshall Wilhelm Keitel in a communication on the *Nacht und Nebel*-decree, issued December 7, 1941)' (Rasul 2004, 5) As Malvik points out, the motto thus functions as a self-reflective marker – for the novel's thematisation of 'sin egen retoriske strategi, altså [av] seg selv som allegori.' [its own rhetorical strategy, i.e. of itself as allegory.] (op cit: 103)

22. Malvik writes that the discourse of the novel 'forteller' [...] om den *Nacht und Nebel*-operasjon som den selv utfører overfor leseren' ['tells' [...] about the *Nacht und Nebel* operation it perpetrates on the reader] by playing 'det figurlige og det bokstavelige nivået ut mot hverandre på en måte som gjør at leseren, uansett hvilken strategi hun velger, befinner seg i den (ideologiske) natt og tåke hvor enhver lesning er en feillesning.' [the figurative and the literal levels off against each other so that the reader, whatever strategy she chooses, finds herself in an 'ideological' darkness and fog where every reading is a misreading.] (op cit: 113)

significant effect on the state of things, but rather confirms the status quo. In Malvik's interpretation, *Macht und Rebel* is a closed text that, rather than being consistent with critical dystopia, rejects the utopian element and ends up being anti-utopian. In my view, however, there is an aspect of the text that escapes Malvik's attention and that nevertheless points in the direction of a utopian element and critical dystopia: in the intensification of the interpretation problem that follows from the novel's allegorical design there is a utopian initiative. This seems to have a didactic effect in which the reader is taught to grapple with such impossible rhetorical mechanisms, perhaps by directing her attention to other motifs or themes. At least it gives some sort of insight.

MACHT UND REBEL AS A STORY OF HONOUR

Malvik too is interested in other aspects of the text than the allegorical language game that illustrates de Man's deconstructive point about the free play of signifiers. But where Malvik is interested in the information technology and media culture of the 2000s, there is, in my view, reason to see the novel's rhetorical mechanism and establishment of social relations in a different light: in the context of honour. In my opinion, the novel can be seen as a story about honour, in which particular notions and interpretations of honour shed light both on the narrative structure (the plot and various elements of action), and on the behaviour of individuals and the many social relations. *Macht und Rebel* can thus be regarded as an expression of 'honour's revival'. This revitalisation provides a stability that counterbalances the book's allegorical language play by containing a descriptive portrayal which, although it involves a moral dilemma as regards reader positioning, cannot be reduced to a question of morality.

There is no doubt that the novel's main plot – Macht and Rebel's campaign – rests on a notion of honour. The whitewashing of T.S.I.V.A.G. is clearly a response to the threat of loss of honour, that is to say the loss of what Frank Henderson Stewart, in the context of bipartite theory, calls 'external honor', i.e. 'honor as reputation' (Stewart 1994, 19, 18).²³ When the company is accused of

23. Although Bowman is right in saying that we live in a post-honour society where the old Western honour culture and the tradition honour groups are undermined, that doesn't mean that collective concepts of honour have lost their significance in society. On the contrary, they still play an important role, and the novel shows how they are expressed in business at a global level, that is to say in structures that are much more inclusive than the traditional honour groups of nation, clan and family. However, through an equally global media culture and information technology the honour code can be changed – with the aid of strategies that, traditionally speaking, are without honour: Nazism and paedophilia. The Nacht und Nebel strategy consists of preserving the company's honour by associating it with dishonourable attitudes. This is a good illustration of the 'post-honour society' of our times, where anti-honour is what accrues honour.

anti-Semitism, its reputation is threatened, and in a ruthless commercial world such a loss of prestige cannot be tolerated. The whitewashing starts immediately as Macht is tasked by the company's head of marketing, Thomas Ruth, with 'å selge T.S.I.V.A.G. som et *sosialt ansvarlig firma*.' ['selling T.S.I.V.A.G. as a *socially responsible firm*.'] (Rasul 2004, 179) As Ruth points out to Macht: 'Det har seg slik at *The International Society of Jews* har gått inn for et søksmål mot T.S.I.V.A.G. for utstrakt diskriminering av det jødiske folk.' [The situation is that *The International Society of Jews* has filed a civil action against T.S.I.V.A.G. for extensive discrimination of the Jewish people.] (op cit: 179) The indications are that the accusation is well founded.²⁴ Neither the company nor the campaigners shrink from the morally dubious in their attempt to maintain the company's reputation within what might be called the collective, global honour culture of the business world. It is not so much a question of honour in the internal sense – the moral standard and quality of the company – rather the opposite. There is a willingness to compromise on internal standards – and thus with what honour researcher Alexander Welsh understands as honour, namely honour as a moral imperative (Welsh 2008).

The company is subjected to the Nacht und Nebel strategy. The outcome indicates that the rescue operation is successful. T.S.I.V.A.G.'s name is cleared, thanks to a strategy's deportation of meaning. By inverting the meaning of the company name (from 'Thompson, Smithson and Immhauser Values Alimited Googol' to 'Teenage Spicks Initiating Vulgar Anti-Semitism and Gookslaughter') things are turned inside out. This transformation involves a deconstruction of Stewart's binary model of honour. When the company's internal honour, its moral standard and quality, is made consistent with its external honour, i.e. its outward reputation, it stands in danger of disappearing and losing its meaning. The cost of this displacement of meaning doesn't seem to worry anyone in the company. On the contrary, such a deportation of ethics and morals is seen as advantageous as long as external honour is ensured through the logic of repressive tolerance. For even immorality is tolerated. From the company's point of view, this is a win-win situation: it emerges strengthened in its competition with PAYPLUG, while its jettisoning of moral and ethical standards means the anti-Semitism can continue as before. The fact that the novel ends with a scene where company's employees entertain each other with xenophobic jokes not only confirms the legitimacy of the accusations of anti-Semitism, but also implies that such attitudes are accepted both internally and externally.

24. See the basis of the lawsuit in nine points in chapter 5 (op cit: 99–101).

At the same time, the campaign's deconstruction of the binary concept of honour can be understood as an illustration of Bowman's view that we live in a post-honour society. This is his term for the weakening and deterioration of Western honour culture, including here the characteristic tendency of our times to find reputation resting not on honourable behaviour and actions in the traditional sense, but on the opposite: on what is traditionally seen as anti-honour, i.e. actions and behaviour associated with embarrassment, shame and bad morals. This changed notion of honour is the logical result of what the novel portrays as the main problem of modern, Scandinavian social democracy: repressive tolerance.

Macht und Rebel is also to a large extent a story about (establishing) communities that are clearly honour groups, according to Stewart's definition.²⁵ Not least, we are given insight into the activities and organisational forms of the leftist action group PUSH. As an underground movement, it exemplifies Bowman's statement that it is in communities like this that we find the remnants of the old, traditional honour culture in Western post-honour societies.²⁶ This community appears to be virtually a military unit with many of the characteristics of a traditional honour group. In the text it is also referred to as a clan: 'Feiten-klanen' [the Fatso clan] (Rasul 2004, 323). The group's structure, for example, is very hierarchical, with Feiten at the top as demi-god and indisputable leader, through an intermediate level consisting of the physically and intellectually superior Remmy Bleckner, the academically educated Sören Martinsen and the not quite competent (but nonetheless important) hacker Cato, down to the many foot soldiers – like Rebel – at the bottom of the ladder. The community is held together by a code of honour that is expressed in a number of ways, not least in the slogan Feiten bases his leadership on: 'TRUST AND RESPECT'.²⁷ The organisational structure and the slogan indicate that honour is involved both horizontally (between equals) and vertically (between levels).²⁸

25. Cf. the opening chapter p. 19.

26. 'Today, cultural honor survives only in degraded form, in places where the official socializing process is weakest, as among urban gangs, and the hip-hop culture' (Bowman 2006, 7).

27. The word '(self)respect' is according to Alexander Welsh a modern equivalent to the more archaic word 'honour' (see also the opening chapter p. 21). The slogan turns up, for example, in Feiten's orders to Cato (Rasul 2004, 55), and a sense of honour and the importance of abiding by an honour code are expressed, for example, in the characterisation of Sören Martinsen as 'en *sucker* for anerkjennelse og status' [a *sucker* for acknowledgement and status] (op cit: 53). Both individuals and the enterprise as a whole are to a large extent motivated by an obsession with prestige. As the text states: 'Det 'alternative' og 'bevisste' miljøet har selvfølgelig – som alle miljøer – beinhard kodeks på hvor 'alternativ' og 'bevisst' man kan være'. [The 'alternative' and the 'politically aware' scene has, of course – like all scenes – a hard-line code for how 'alternative' and 'aware' you have to be] (op cit: 111).

28. Cf. the opening chapter p. 19.

The campaign represents Rebel's final break with PUSH. As a reluctant member of the group, he acts in direct conflict with the behaviour that the slogan demands and that he is expected to abide by. However, for Rebel the break is absolutely necessary for the project of dethroning PUSH and Feiten's position in the underground movement. The break is a perfect illustration of the mechanisms that Robert L. Oprisko points out in his chapter 'Rebellion and Revolution' in the book *Honor: A Phenomenology* when he discusses the dynamic that arises between the rebel and the established value system given the former's demand for acceptance for his own, new code of honour (Oprisko, 2012, 133–145). Rebel is virtually a personification of the rebellious attitude Oprisko points out in the context of honour: 'Rebels directly challenge the leadership of the status quo because their absolute defiance against the value system of the group requires the development of a competitive value system that the rebel personifies and defends to the end' (op cit: 137).

As far as honour is concerned, the campaign turns the positions of those implicated upside down. Rebel himself emerges strengthened from it, while PUSH end in ignominy. Feiten is humiliated when a film of him sexually abusing two young girls is broadcast live on the Net, while the rest of PUSH is violently attacked by an immigrant gang that Rebel has mobilised and is forced into a cowardly retreat when the police arrive. Both Feiten and PUSH are left stripped of all honour. Feiten's humiliation and shame is complete since the broadcast of the incident means a public loss of face. T.S.I.V.A.G.'s exoneration, predicated as we saw on the logic of repressive tolerance and the inversion of the meaning of the company name, consists in making the company respectable, even after its public re-emergence as Teenage Spicks Initiating Vulgar Anti-Semitism and Gookslaughter, i.e. as a community that makes Nazism and paedophilia acceptable.

This fellowship too can be seen as an honour group of its own – on a par with PUSH. It consists of an immigrant gang (Gull-er-Sultan, Mendoza, Apollo and Jorge) with origins all over the world (Afghanistan, Ecuador, Brazil and Surinam, respectively) and with an intact honour culture. Not only is it an easy task for Rebel to persuade these problem children to disrupt and attack PUSH. He also manages to make a well functioning Nazi community out of the gang, with himself as indisputable ideologue and leader. Inspired by Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, Rebel's attitude turns from passivism to activism. What he says early in the novel about his problems shows clearly that this change is connected to the question of honour, primarily internal honour. While passivism was the result of an absence of pride, self-respect and a lack of enemies in an identity-threatening existence with no outlet for honour, activism is triggered by a potential for enmity, resulting

in an identity-building existence for Rebel within an honour community founded on pride and self-respect:

Jeg har ingen stolthet til å holde meg oppe. Det er det som er problemet. Jeg har ingen stolthet eller ære til å holde meg oppegående. Den kokainhvite middelklassekroppen min er marinert i problemet som heter: 'Problem med å ikke ha fiender.' Alle overbeviste mennesker må ha fiender.

[I have no pride to support me. That's the problem. I have no pride or honour to keep me a float. This cocaine-white, middleclass body of mine is marinated in a problem called: 'The problem of not having enemies.' Everyone with convictions must have enemies.] [Rasul 2004, 76]

Their fellowship is constituted when the gang allow themselves to be tattooed with Nazi symbols in a scene which at the same time sheds an interesting light on Nazism and honour. Rebel's re-actualisation of Nazism is strongly influenced by his awareness of how an honour group rises and falls.²⁹ This is illustrated when he argues to the rest of the gang that since Nazism has ended up in complete dishonour, it still has a critical potential and a latent potential for honour³⁰:

Dere er [som mørkhudete innvandrere] integrert og godtatt som faen. Dere får hjelp hvor enn dere snur dere. Hvis dere virkelig vil bli mislikt, så kan dere bli nazister sammen med meg. Jeg vet ikke hvor godt dere kjenner den vestlige spiriten, men nazisme godtas heldigvis ikke under noen omstendigheter. Ikke ennå. Jeg lover dere[.]

29. The basis for regarding the German National Socialism of the 1920s and 30s as an honour group resides in their desire to avenge the country for the treatment it received in the settlement after the 1st World War. German honour was to be restored, which involved discipline and submission to a strong leader who would wage war to achieve his goals. Stewart also point out the connection between honour and Nazism. 'Even after World War 1, when the significance of honor among speakers of European languages was much diminished, both the nazis and (to a much lesser extent) the Communists still tried to adapt the notion to their own ideologies.' (Stewart 1994, 33) The war meant the end of not only Nazi fellowship as a honour group, but – according to Bowman – the whole of Western honour culture.

30. The novel makes use of this insight both thematically (Rebel's Nazi sympathies), rhetorically (the crucial significance of the Nacht und Nebel strategy for the project) and emblematically (cf. the Nazi props and symbols on the cover and the depiction of the tattooing scene).

[You [as dark-skinned immigrants] are so integrated and so damn accepted. You get help wherever you turn. If you really want to be disliked, you can join me and become Nazis. I don't know how familiar you are with the spirit of the West, but Nazism is fortunately not acceptable under any circumstances. Not yet. I promise you [.]] [Rasul 2004, 263]

Particularly Gull-er Sultan underlines the close connection between re-actualised Nazism and honour. The Afghan tattoos a Waffen-SS symbol in the middle of his chest, and the slogan 'Unsere Ehre heisst Freue' (Our honour is loyalty) on his back just above the waist (op cit: 268). His motivation for this choice reflects a re-actualisation of Nazism's concept of honour and his own origins in an intact, non-Western honour culture:

Æære sier at fellesskap ar mer viktig enn mai, ikke sant. Jai ar lojal mot mine. Mine til sammen ar mer verd enn mai. Jai vil ha stolthet tilbake. Ingen har stolthet i dette land. Alle ar hore. Dette Vesten ar det sted for den feige og pyse. Fellesskap ar ikke har, ikke sant, for alle ar feig. Æære er makt, ikke sant. Damer liker æære.

[[In broken Norwegian:] Honour says that fellowship is more important than me, right? I'm loyal to my people. My people together are worth more than me. I want my pride back. Nobody has pride in this country. Everyone is a whore. The West is a place for cowards and wimps. There's no fellowship here, right, because everyone's a coward. Honour is power, right. Chicks like honour.] [ibid]

This concept of honour doesn't stem directly from the Nazism of the 2nd World War and the cult of the Arian race³¹, but is connected to a form of Eastern honour culture with an emphasis on masculinity and fellowship (the clan, the family) rather than on the individual. Thus it concerns what the novel refers to as 'sammenrørte æresbegreper' [mixed-up honour concepts] and the need for 'et minste felles multiplum for å få rasene til å interagere.' [a lowest common denominator to get the races to interact.] (op cit: 212)

In other words, Rebel and the gang constitute a form of traditional and masculine honour culture that seems close to Bowman's view of honour as a result of the notion of or the need for retaliation and vengeance.³² This makes honour particu-

31. For Rebel, the opposite in the case: It is precisely the white race, the mainstream person, he has it in for.

32. Cf. the opening chapter p. 16.

larly important in a military context – in connection with war and warfare strategies, such as those Macht and Rebel plan and carry out in their campaign.³³ At the same time, this traditional honour culture appears as an assault on the notion of honour that Stewart bases his book *Honor* on, namely the concept of honour as a *right*.³⁴ Rebel's dissatisfaction with life under Scandinavian social democracy seems to be connected to the widespread concept of honour that emphasises rights and equality. It is his dissatisfaction with this concept of honour that is actually the cause of his activism:

‘Jeg NEKTER å “gjøre meg opp en mening” eller “tenke selvstendig” eller “stå opp for en sak”. Jeg er så jævlig møkk lei ytringsfrihetskulturen. Jeg trygler om å bli kneblet og diktert, men er den [sic] noen her borte i den siviliserte verden som tør å ta på seg jobben med å kue og tvinge meg? Nei da.’

‘Klart ikke,’ sa Macht pedagogisk, ‘din *freedom of speech* trumfer alt. Du slipper ikke unna den, vet du.’

‘*Freedom of speech*? Hæ? *Freedom of kitsch* burde det hett. Jeg vil bare at folk skal holde kjeft, men må takke meg til at alle er dømt til å være fri og frittalende og frittvelgende og selvkonstituerende jævla kitschmaskiner. Hvorfor kan ikke bare alle holde kjeften sin. Inkludert meg selv? Man trenger *virkelig* ikke nok en meningsproduserende sjel som sitter og plager folk med mer kitsch om menneskerett og verdighet eller hva det måtte være, nå. Logikken er denne: Siden ingen ser ut til å ha tenkt å begynne å diktere meg, blir jeg nødt til å diktere dem’, sa Rebel.

‘Klart, klart,’ sa Macht.

‘I tillegg til å tvinge Feiten i kne, er jeg ute etter å erklære krig mot meg selv’, sa Rebel. ‘Krig mot min egen rase, min egen legning, min egen kultur. Mitt største ønske er å klare å ta fra det hvite, hetero mainstream-mennesket retten til å MENE ting. Hvordan? Ved å få det til å innse at det *allerede* har annullert sin egen meningsberettigelse. Hvordan det klarte det? Ved å overutvikle toleranseløkkiken og avviksfetisjen sin. Det er på tide for mainstream-mennesket å ta konsekvensen av at det har snytt seg selv for *menneskeretten til å være fremmedgjort*. Hva var det frihetsforkjemperne var ute etter? Det her? Et hav av individualister med rett til å ytre seg?’

33. It is worth noticing that Macht has tattooed WORLD WAR I on one lower arm and WORLD WAR II on the other (in Gothic types). (See for example Rasul 2004, 89)

34. Cf. the opening chapter p. 21.

['I REFUSE to "form an opinion" or "think for myself" or "stand up for a cause". I'm so fucking tired of the culture of freedom of speech. I beg to be gagged and dictated to, but is there anybody in the civilised world who dares take responsibility for cowing and forcing me? Oh no.'

'Of course not,' said Macht pedagogically, 'your *freedom of speech* trumps everything. There's no escape, you know.'

'*Freedom of speech*? What? *Freedom of kitsch*, it ought to be called. I just want people to shut up, but instead I have to accept that everybody is condemned to be free and free-speaking and free-choosing and self-constituted fucking kitsch machines. Why can't everybody just shut up. Including me? The *last* thing we need is yet another opinionated soul to sit and irritate people with more kitsch about human rights and dignity or whatever. The logic is this: Since nobody seems to be planning to start dictating to me, I'll just have to start dictating to them,' said Rebel.

'Right, right,' said Macht.

'In addition to forcing Feiten into submission, I want to declare war on myself,' said Rebel. 'War on my own race, my own orientation, my own culture. My greatest wish is to deprive your white, hetero mainstream people of the right to have an OPINION. How? By making them realise that they've *already* annulled their right to an opinion. How did they manage that? By over-developing their tolerance logic and their deviation fetish. It's time mainstream people reap the consequences of having cheated themselves out of *the right to be alienated*. What were the freedom fighters trying to achieve? That? A mass of individualists with the right to voice their opinion?'] [Rasul 2004, 260–261]

Bowman's concept of Western egalitarian society as representing an undermining of honour culture seems therefore to have acquired an explanation. Rebel's dissatisfaction with ideas of rights and equality can be understood as an expression of the undermining of traditional honour culture. Rebel wants to combat this undermining through his activism and revitalise a traditional honour culture based on a strong leader, an attentive fellowship, ethnic diversity and erotic liberalism.

Their opposition to the Western, egalitarian, social-democratic concept of honour is perhaps most clearly expressed in the two protagonists' paedophile tendencies – in their sexual intercourse with the two young girls, the sisters Thong and Thong jr. There can be no doubt that Macht and Rebel's actions are a violation of the two girls' right to respect, and represent an infringement of the UN convention on racial discrimination (1965), the UN convention against the discrimination of

women (1979), the UN convention on torture (1984) and the UN convention on children's rights (1989). Neither are their actions compatible with traditional Western honour culture (the principle of chivalry) nor with Eastern honour culture, although both these are vertically structured in Stewart's sense, i.e. patriarchal and sexualised. This is reflected in the two men's dominance of the two little girls, as if they were possessions.³⁵ It is clear that sexual intercourse with the little girls represents a moral transgression for Rebel too. A whole chapter is devoted to his embarrassment. In the context of honour this must be regarded as an expression of the dark side of honour, the feeling of shame, a feeling that threatens both self-respect and one's own identity:

Alt er flaut. Alt. [...] Jeg tenker tilbake på natten, og DER får jeg et bilde i hodet av meg selv stående over Thong i Nasdaq's dritende-bikkje-positur og puler, og DER ligger jeg og masserer min egen skrotum under haka hennes som en jævla porn-rapist, og DER dasker jeg skinkene hennes i ivrig 90-talls Rocco-stil [...]. Jeg er flau over hvordan Thong pulte som et incestoffer, og over hvor godt jeg hadde det, og hvor ung hun er. Og nå blir jeg flau over hvor samvittighetsfull jeg er, og over at jeg bryr meg så mye om ting, og at jeg bryr meg så lite om ting på samme tid.

[It's all embarrassing. All of it. [...] I remember that night, and THERE I get an image in my head of me standing over Thong in Nasdaq's shitting-dog position, fucking her, and THERE I am lying massaging my own scrotum under her chin like some fucking porn rapist, and THERE I am slapping her buttocks in 90s Rocco style [...] I'm embarrassed by how Thong fucked like an incest victim, and over how much I enjoyed it, and how young she is. And now I'm embarrassed by how principled I am and how I care so much about things, and how I care so little about them at the same time.] [Rasul 2004, 169]

In this perspective their paedophile practice appears humiliating and hard-won – also for the protagonists themselves. However, this insight into Rebel's morality,

35. In parts of Eastern honour culture – the Arab and Islamic – the woman is the man's possession and both the woman's and man's honour is dependent on her sexuality. Cf. Bowman: 'But in honor cultures, a woman's honor normally belongs to her husband or father, and the dishonor of any sexual contact outside marriage, whether consensual or otherwise, falls upon him exactly alike, since it shows him up before the world as a man incapable of either controlling or protecting her.' (Bowman 2006, 18) In Rasul's novel it is evident that Macht and Rebel 'own' and control their girlfriends – to the extent that they can make them perform acts – sex with Feiten – that would normally have brought both them and the girls dishonour.

which only occurs here in the novel, is an expression of a contemptible weakness which he quickly conquers – as if to underline Bowman's point about morality and honour not being connected. Rebel rids himself of his shame with cool intellectualism: 'Og for å resonnere litt så har det seg slik at hvis alt er flaut, er det ingen grunn til å opprettholde skam i livet. Det er det jeg har merket i det siste. Jeg eier faen ikke skam i livet lenger.' [Logically speaking, if it's the case that everything is embarrassing, then there's no reason to maintain a sense of shame in life. I've noticed that recently. I have no fucking sense of shame anymore.] (op cit: 171). The absence of a sense of shame is crucial for the campaign against PUSH and Feiten. It is based on a strategy which, while giving the two protagonists honour and power, also puts them in a far from honourable light from a traditional perspective. Not only do they choose a cowardly ambush in which PUSH and Feiten are caught in a trap, they also allow their underage girlfriends to have sexual intercourse with others, so that they are stripped of honour. The novel demonstrates emphatically that the honour accruing to T.S.I.V.A.G and the two protagonists after the campaign is predicated on anti-honour, i.e. actions that traditionally are dishonourable, and that such honour is concerned with outer aspects like reputation and recognition rather than inner aspects like ethics and morality.

AN EVIL AND UNREADABLE NOVEL?

The novel *Macht und Rebel* can be seen as both a literary dystopia and a story about honour. It seems to assume that in Scandinavian social democracy there is a connection between dystopian misanthropy and a post-honour society, i.e. a society without an honour culture. From this springs the need that the novel seems to identify for a revitalising of an honour culture – as a force to counteract the repressive tolerance that pervades society. The novel's theme of 'honour's revival' is closely connected to use of the central conventions of critical dystopia and can be regarded as a utopian initiative. In line with this the book portrays a traditional honour culture influenced by both Eastern (Arabic and Islamic) and Western impulses, but primarily linked to Nazism and paedophilia – in an attempt to criticise the logic of repressive tolerance.

These are hard times for utopian initiatives, and it is easy to fall into the trap set for the reader – either by allowing oneself to be provoked or by accepting the devices it uses – thereby understanding the novel as both evil and unreadable. However, within the novel there is a utopian initiative too – the insight into a linguistic figuration which finds its parallel in the view of the novel as a story of honour. The question is whether perhaps its portrayal of mixed-up notions of honour

and its emphasis on external honour should also – and perhaps primarily – be read as a descriptive portrayal of one of the most pressing social problems of our time: the cultural encounter between a Scandinavian welfare society and intact honour cultures. Although the book equates criticism and acceptance in a way that renders both standpoints untenable, it also provides *insight* into an issue that clearly has moral and normative aspects, but that also is *descriptive*: in the depiction of how an (imagined) encounter between cultures can turn out – even if it does so paradoxically. This perspective is compatible neither with rejecting the book on moral grounds nor with accepting it in accordance with the logic of repressive tolerance. Rather it is a question of underlining the insight and understanding that the book has to offer, consciously or unconsciously – which, of course, is not the same as condemning or accepting it. The novel is evil, but not only evil. And although it is a difficult read, it is hardly unreadable.

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11

Honor Codes in Fantasy Literature

CECILIE TAKLE

ABSTRACT This article portrays the coherence of ethics and the dichotomy honour/shame, and she shows how the fantastic in literature is highly relevant in exploring ethics in literature. Takle's argument is supported by examples from the Norwegian trilogy *The Raven Rings* (2013–2015) by Siri Pettersen and the *Shamer Chronicle* (2000–2003) by Lene Kaaberbøl. Takle also demonstrates why the fantasy genre may play an important educational role for the individual and for democracy.

KEY WORDS Honour's revival | fantasy | shame | honour

PREFACE

Neither shame nor honor can exist in a vacuum. Even though both concepts can be said to be a form of emotion or affection (Andersen 2016, 20, and Oatley and Jenkins 1996, 90), and the ability to experience this is something we are born with, the various triggers of these types of emotion are strictly bound to culture.¹ For instance, in some cultures, taking a life is something that grants a person or a family honor, if only the motive behind the action is noble enough, while in other cultures there is absolutely no tolerance for the exact same action, which will lead to imprisonment, or other kinds of isolation within the culture. To explore a culture's ethical norms, it is interesting to investigate which actions and values will lead to honor to either an individual or a group of individuals, such as a family. Likewise,

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1. The American philosopher and researcher Martha Nussbaum is among those who claim that emotions and affections are a product of social constructions rather than animalistic impulses (2001, 1), and I will shortly return to these theories in order to comment on the implications Nussbaum's thoughts have for literature, and specifically for fantasy literature. Another researcher who has addressed the relationship between shame and culture is the Norwegian theologian Trygve Wyller in *Skam: Perspektiver på skam, ære og skamløshet i det moderne*. Oslo: Fagbokforlaget. 10,11. From 2001

it is interesting to view what sort of actions or statements that will bring shame upon an individual or a family.

Traditionally, honor was something that was attached to an individual's or family's name, or reputation, and thus *external*, something that could be somewhat quantified, by the way others would refer to a person or family; your sur- or last name could be connected with much or little honorability, or it could be connected with shame (Stewart 1994, 18). This view on honor was, of course, highly valid in traditional Norse societies.² Today, on the other hand, honor is, in many cultures, something that largely is attached to a person's integrity: honor has been subjectified, or internalized.³ This internalization, in my opinion, also makes it relevant to comment on the relations between *shame* and *guilt*, in an ethical perspective; what is the difference between these two terms, and how do they relate to the concept honor?

One can study honor and ethics in many different ways, but my approach will be a literate one⁴, hence I will investigate codes of honor within literary works, more precisely in Scandinavian fantasy literature for children and young adults.⁵ The answer to the question of why it is at all relevant to research honor codes in literature is the same as that of the superior question in all literary research: *Why do we read?* I realize, of course, that this question is too complex to answer with a sentence or two, but I will try to illuminate some wise thoughts of men and women who have commented on the matter before me. For instance, I will point to the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum's ideas about the relations between ethics and literature, in addition to that of ethics and emotions.

2. See for instance chapter seven in Andersen, Per Thomas. 2016. *Fortelling og følelse. En studie i affektiv narratologi*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

3. Friederich Maurer, as cited by Frank Henderson Stewart in 1994, 34. Skårderud, Finn. 2001. "Skammens stemmer – om taushet, veltalenhet og raseri i behandlingsrommet", *Tidsskrift for Norsk Lægeforening*, (13/2001), 1613–7.

4. Friederich Maurer, as cited by Frank Henderson Stewart in 1994, 34. Skårderud, Finn. 2001. "Skammens stemmer – om taushet, veltalenhet og raseri i behandlingsrommet", *Tidsskrift for Norsk Lægeforening*, (13/2001), 1613–7.

5. I will give examples from the Danish series *The Shamer Chronicle* by Lene Kaaberbøl, and from the series *The Raven Rings* by the Norwegian author Siri Pettersen. The reason I've particularly chosen Scandinavian fantasy literature, is mainly because I, in the work with my dissertation, needed to narrow down the fantasy literature to a couple of works, and "Scandinavian works" seemed like a logical line to draw, as one can often find traces of traditional Norse culture, and hence honor codes, performing as a backdrop in these types of fantasy literature. I will not address this specifically in this article, but will include these topics in my dissertation, where I will compare the honor codes of the traditional, Norse cultures with the honor codes in these modern fantasy works.

From a general view on the relations between ethics and literature, I will narrow my gaze and particularly address fantasy literature in an ethical perspective. This I will do for several reasons, which I will get back to shortly. My project is, in short, to portray the coherence of ethics and the dichotomy honor/shame, and to illustrate how the fantastic in literature is highly relevant in exploring ethics in literature, by using examples from the Norwegian trilogy *The Raven Rings* by Siri Pettersen and the *Shamer Chronicle* by Lene Kaaberbøl.

THE DICHOTOMY SHAME AND HONOR AS SUBCATEGORIES OF ETHICS

What is honor? What is shame? How do these two concepts relate to each other? How do these two concepts relate to ethics, or ethical reflection? Also, how do the concepts shame and guilt differ from each other in the way they reflect ethical values?

It is, of course, difficult to define honor and shame sturdily, because these concepts can have many different faces. Nonetheless, I shall try to portray here what honor and shame *can* be, and to illustrate in which ways they can mirror a culture's ethical fundament. From here, I will move on to commenting on how ethics is funded in literature. Let me also stress that honor can be explored as a part of various other dichotomies⁶, for instance in opposition to the concepts *dishonor* or *disgrace*, and is thus not locked to oppose *shame* and *guilt*. I have chosen to explore the relationship between *honor* on the one side and *shame* and *guilt* on the other as these concepts have a more illustrious role in the fantasy series I have chosen to work with, especially in *The Shamer Chronicle* by Kaaberbøl.

Honor, to start with that, can be many different things. The definition of – and view upon – the concept has changed drastically throughout history, and varies considerably from culture to culture, even today. Or maybe I should say “especially today”, as it is easier than ever to learn about – and count these various honor cultures and how they co-exist side by side within nations or cities through the media or on the Internet. The term is often somewhat associated with words like *respect*, *prestige*, *glory*, *credit*, *reputation*, *praise* etc., and the

6. Of course, honor can very well be explored as an autonomous concept, and not as part of a dichotomy at all. However, I find that approaching such affective concepts as an imagined part of a dichotomic structure, opposing other concepts, can be a useful tool for the mind to grasp the primary concepts. This approach can be very fruitful when exploring honor in opposition to shame and guilt, as the latter two have bodily manifestations, while honor to a larger extent can be regarded as a cultural concept, and manifested as for instance *reputation*, it is not sensed in someone's body in the way shame and guilt is. Therefore, viewing honor as a part of a dichotomy, may contribute to contextualizing an abstract concept.

term could contain all of these associated words, or it could be something in-between. One way of understanding honor, is, as initially noted, as dividable into respectively external and internal honor (Stewart 1994, 34–42). External honor could for instance be explained with something like “the way others regard you, measured against some moral standard (cultural)”, and thus more oriented towards for instance *reputation* on the list of associated words. Internal honor, as I understand it, has, then, to do with the way you feel about yourself and the choices you make when confronted with ethical dilemmas, and thus closer to the concept *integrity* (Stewart 1994, 51). The concept honor can, in other words, appear as both something cultural (external), and something personal (internal), and I will attempt to illustrate this differentiation when giving examples from the chosen fantasy series.

Within the general concept of honor (i.e. not specifically divided into respectively external– and internal honor), lies an implicit ranking system of the people affiliated with the honor culture in question: some have honor, and some have less of it or none at all. This makes the various honor cultures the fundament of inequality. Martha Nussbaum claims that societies with so-called strong honor cultures, and thus a negative view on slighting of honor “will have many occasions for anger that an equality focused culture [...] will not have” (Nussbaum 2001, 157). Societies or cultures that highly value honor have inherent foundations for conflicts, which ultimately culminate in the question of what people (or characters) are and are not willing to do to have or to not lose honor, which I will illuminate with examples from the fantasy series shortly.⁷ But first I will proceed to the concepts shame and guilt.

Shame, like honor, can be understood as many different things, for instance as an affect, according to the Norwegian psychotherapist Marie Farstad (Farstad 2016, 27–28). But since it also has a bodily manifestation, i.e. that one can recognize it in the body language of others, in blushed cheeks or a bent neck and evasive eyes, and also sense it in your own body, it must be something more than that. Farstad says in her book *Skammens spor: avtrykk i identitet og relasjoner* (“Traces of Shame: imprints in identity and relations”, my translation) from 2011 that *emotions* is a collective term for affections, feelings, and also sensations and moods. She describes affections like short-term, intense “biologically based emotional reactions”, while *feelings*, she says, are bodily experienced in the heart- and stomach region, and are sensed as deeper than affections, although they are not as intense (Farstad 2011, 31, my translation).

7. I will also explain how I understand the concept “fantasy literature”, which is much debated.

Shame, then, can be both an affect *and* a feeling as it can arise as acute (affection) or be experienced more as a long-term, and hence destructive form of shame, somewhat attached to a person's identity (Farstad 2011, 31). One can find illustrating examples of both acute shame and long-term shame in the characters of the two series I have chosen to exemplify the subject of ethics in literature. So, for now, and as a matter of form, I will refer to shame as an emotion, as to include both manifestations of shame described here. I will shortly return to how various emotions of shame can work as ethical "valeurs" in a society, but first a note on how the concepts shame and guilt differ from each other.

Guilt, as opposed to shame, is very concrete, and often directly connected to something you have or have not *done* or *said*. Both of them are moral markers, but shame is more strongly connected to *who* or *what you are*, and hence directly related to the self. Therefore, Farstad says, the feeling of shame is somewhat more deeply, and more painfully, experienced than the feeling of guilt (Farstad 2011, 34). In short: It is easier to apologize or make up for something you have said or done (guilt) than it is to change who you are as a person (shame).

How is it that shame and guilt have ethical functions? Both the experiencing of shame and the feeling of guilt are, or at least can be, highly uncomfortable, or even painful, both physically and psychologically. Since it is very little adaptive behavior to expose oneself to pain and the absence of comfort, both shame and guilt will, to some extent, contribute to regulating people's behavior and the choices they make. There are, of course, people with deviant behavior in the matter of experiencing shame or guilt, due to for instance lack of empathy, or the fact that they are unaccountable, cognitively challenged or for some other reason do not experience the emotions shame and guilt the same way others do.

Let me here stress that it is not, then, a goal in itself that a person should go through life without feeling guilty or ashamed, and the lack of the ability to feel shame or guilt is considered to be a deviation, caused by various factors, such as physical or psychological neglect, abuse or other traumas inflicted upon a child in its primary development of the self in its early years (Farstad 2011, 44). On the contrary, people *should* be exposed to feeling guilty or shameful in tolerable amounts, as to develop a healthy type of shame – empathy – which will contribute to regulating people's behavior and to develop an awareness for others and for themselves. The opposite of a healthy type of shame – the fundament for empathy or consciousness – is a destructive shame, deeply attached to the self, and hence inhibitory for the person in question (Farstad 2011, 69–ff).

When a child is neglected, abused or in any other way traumatized in a matter which prevents a (so-called) normal development of the healthy kind of shame

and guilt, the result may, according to Farstad, be a shameless person (Farstad 2011, 44). Needless to say, a shameless person is more likely to act on selfish impulses that could potentially cause harm to others or to himself/herself than a very conscious person who has been exposed to a healthy amount of shame and guilt. A very safe way to be exposed to shame and guilt is, of course, by experiencing it through others, through portrayals of the mentioned emotions. One way of exploring these emotions from a comfortable distance is through literature, which brings me to my next theme; the relations between ethics and literature.

ETHICS IN LITERATURE

Ethics is, according to Martha Nussbaum, so much more than merely reflecting upon the question “What is right and wrong?” in a given setting. One should, as she often claims, rather follow the Aristotelian line of thought and pose the question “How can I live a good life?” This question implies that one should reflect upon what it means to be “good”, and this, no doubt, could not be answered in a vacuum-like state; one has to look to social structures, such as culture, which performs as a type of frame around all ethical questions, and such a social structure can be described in literature, and also in fiction literature. Ethical dilemmas, for instance the mentioned question “how can I live a good life?” can be portrayed, or staged, if you will, in stories. The ethical dilemmas can be just as real when portrayed in fantasy literature as in realistic literature: we can still *learn* something and be educated in ethics, even if there are elements of the supernatural or fantastic, such as magical creatures or lack of gravity, in the story. One needs only to look to religious stories, such as for instance biblical or Vedic ones, to verify this assertion. One cannot disregard in the whole the existentialistic wisdom that lies within such stories, merely because they sometimes contain some elements of what we would describe as supernatural or fantastic, something we cannot comprehend. Such stories allow for the reader to contemplate human dilemmas through pictures, or allegories, from a comfortable distance, and they often inspire people and make them want to become better persons.

The arts, including literature, Martha Nussbaum claims, plays an important role in educating us to become functional and conscious citizens of the world, because it allows for us to develop the ability of empathy for others, and an understanding for the people surrounding us.⁸ Reading narratives, she claims, develops our abil-

8. Martha Nussbaum dedicates a whole chapter to this specific thematic which she calls “The Narrative Imagination” in her book *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* from 1997.

ity for empathy and compassion for others as it allows for us to experiment with “positional thinking”, by which she means “the ability to see the world from another creature’s viewpoint”, and this ability is “a great help toward forming sympathetic emotions” (Nussbaum 2010, 36). She quotes Markus Aurelius in saying that collecting knowledge is not sufficient to become a good citizen of the world, one must also cultivate one’s own ability of empathy, so as to be capable of comprehending “the motives and choices of people different from ourselves, seeing them not as forbiddingly alien and other, but as sharing many problems and possibilities with us” (Nussbaum 1997, 85).

Also, Nussbaum claims that the act of reading is not itself sufficient; one has to choose critically when presenting stories to children, as not all stories present healthy values (from a humanistic point of view, where ideals such as equality for all have a strong position). Some stories clearly divide people into certain groups and pass on to children that “the world will be set right when some ugly and disgusting witch or monster is killed” (Nussbaum 2010, 35), which is an unfortunate contribution to the impression one can often get from reading simplistic stories for children; the idea of that the world easily can be divided into rigid polarizations like good/evil, without the necessary precaution of nuancing this even slightly for the readers/listeners. Placing people in categories based on for instance appearances, social-economical background, level of physical functioning, gender, ethnicity etc. reduces them to a fraction of a group identity rather than regarding them as individuals, which very much contributes to stereotyping.

Nussbaum even goes as far as arguing that financial cuts in the humanities departments in all levels of the education systems are directly endangering our democracy because a healthy democracy is dependent of the citizens’ ability for empathy to include and attend to others within the society. By ignoring the importance of the humanities’ role in educating citizens by cutting back on finances, merely because it is not directly profitable in a short time perspective, we endanger healthy democracy, and also various aspects of fundamental principles behind welfare systems (Nussbaum 2010).⁹ Literature gives us the opportunity not only to see how circumstances shape the lives of the people around us, but also to see “that circumstances shape not only people’s possibilities for action, but also their aspirations and desires, hopes and fears”, which are all important when making choices as active participants and citizens in a society (Nussbaum 1997, 88).

9. Nussbaum emphatically addresses this issue throughout the entire book *Not for profit: Why democracy needs the humanities* from 2010.

ETHICS AND THE FANTASTIC IN LITERATURE

What is it about fantasy literature that makes it interesting in relation to ethics, and thus the subcategories “honor”, “shame” and “guilt”? To answer this question, we must first look at what signifies fantasy literature. The term fantasy literature is a relatively disputed one, and it is difficult to find a functioning definition that delineates without excluding too much. Among the most central theorists who have tried to define what fantasy literature is, and is not, are Tzvetan Todorov and Rosemary Jackson. Todorov claims that fantasy is a genre (1975), while Jackson claims it is a mode, and not a genre (1981).¹⁰ I here choose to use a relatively wide definition of the term, and point to Åsfrid Svensens delineation: “literature where significant details strongly conflict with regular norms of outer probability” (Svensen 1991, 12, my translation). By this she means, as I understand her definition, for instance repeal of metaphysical laws, such as that of gravity, or the ability to travel through space and time by for instance teleporting. This opens up for extreme situations, where ethics is a pressing matter. A classic example of this is when Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (1937) by J.R.R. Tolkien discovers the immense power the ring has over him as soon as he puts it on: Should he put it on to become invisible, even if wearing the ring makes him greedy, selfish, and even paranoid?

As mentioned in the preface, there are several reasons for working specifically with fantasy literature when analyzing honor codes in literature. Here are some reasons the fantastic is relevant in this matter:

1. It is my opinion that it is important to conduct research of the ethical values, for instance represented by codes of honor and shame, in fantasy literature because we know that many children, youths and young adults read this type of literature, and we should always be concerned with which ideologies and values young readers are exposed to. If Martha Nussbaum is right when she says that reading literature and experiencing other kinds of art can help educate good world citizens (Nussbaum 2010, 36–37)¹¹, one should assume a critical position to these works of art, as to array a set of criteria for the quality of the

10. Todorov discusses fantastic literature as a *genre* in his work *The Fantastic. A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* from 1975 (Originally published in French under the title *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* in 1970) and Jackson accounts for her view on fantastic literature as a *mode* in her work *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* from 1981, see particularly chapter two, “The Fantastic as a Mode”.

11. See also the rest of chapter three in this book, “Educating Citizens: The Moral (and Anti-Moral) Emotions” for more on the subject.

ethical values presented through the works in question; If a work of art can affect the person who experiences it in a positive way, he or she could also be affected in a negative way.¹²

2. I find that the elements of the fantastic, the supernatural, if you will, in fantasy literature open up a whole new dimension to the investigation of ethical values because the characters and the plot are not limited by metaphysical laws in the same way as in realistic literature. The elements of magic in the story allow for groundbreaking dilemmas to play an important role in the plot, for instance when gravity ceases or when the possibility of becoming invisible is introduced: the characters, and the readers, are exposed to extremity of different kinds, and extreme situations open up for extreme ethical dilemmas.

I will try to address, if not all of these aspects of fantasy literature, so at least some of them in the following.

HONOR CODES IN THE RAVEN RINGS

The Raven Rings is a fantasy trilogy by the Norwegian author Siri Pettersen, and is often referred to as “Nordic fantasy”, as the author plays on various motives from old Norse mythology, and since some of the characters live in a world with hierarchic structures, clothing and equipment similar to the ones in old Nordic societies in the Middle Ages. The first book in the series, *Odin’s Child* was released in 2013, and the sequel, *The Rot*, followed in 2014, while the third book, *The Might*, was launched in 2015. In this trilogy, we meet Hirka, who has some sort of magical travelling blood, making her able to travel between various worlds, through magical portals. The three books take place in three different worlds; In Ymslanda, in our own world, the way we know it, and in the city of Ginnungad in Dreysil, where the Umpiri live. In all these worlds, the matter of power, and how to gain it or to not lose any of it, is a pressing issue, and also the question of how

12. I do not here mean to say that readers should only be exposed to simple ethical plots and flat, moralistic characters, or that one should reduce books to ethical projects that can be either “good for the reader” or “bad for the reader” to be exposed to. I merely mean to point out that young and unexperienced readers may require assistance from either some of the characters in the book or by the narrator’s voice to provide the story with balance in the presentations of good and evil, ingredients essential to the plot in many fantasy series for children and young adults. Such guidance, in the form of for instance a narrator’s voice, which can arrange various ethical reflections for the readers to explore, is necessary to carry out the project Nussbaum describes as educating good citizens.

far one is willing to go to gain power, or to not lose it, plays an important part. The books in this series have not been translated to English yet, so I will have to use my own translations for the time being, and will present both the original quote, in Norwegian, and in my own translation to English.

The reason these books are so special, at least for this particular project, *After Honor*, is the very clear foundation of important, existentialistic questions about honor and shame within the story. The series portrays what it is like to be genuinely ashamed of whom and what you are, but also the things you have and have not done. And all through the story, the characters, particularly the main character, Hirka, continuously, though often implicitly, keep asking questions about what honor is, what it is worth, and what it costs, i.e. what people and creatures in various worlds are willing to do to have it, either for themselves, or for a whole family.

Also, the series is of current interest when preoccupied with honor, because Hirka, as mentioned, travels between worlds, which allows the reader to have insight in honor codes in different worlds. The reader can, together with Hirka, be critical towards the various ideals regarding honor, and can compare the various codes, always asking “is this a good or valid honor ideal?” and “does this code or ideal get the characters closer to living a good life or being a good person?” In addition to that, the perspective in the series varies throughout the story: Sometimes the reader follows Hirka, sometimes it is Hirka’s friend Rime (who, even if they are friends, tends to view things drastically different from Hirka), and sometimes it is Hirka’s nemesis, the powerful council member, Urd’s perspective that is portrayed. The constant changing of perspectives allows for the readers to have the ethical dilemmas, including those related to honor, illuminated by – precisely – different perspectives, and can choose for themselves what is right and wrong, and hence where their sympathy should lie.¹³

Honor is, as formerly mentioned, a recurring theme throughout the whole trilogy, but the third book, *The Might*, stands out when it comes to the weight of this thematic. In this book, the main character, Hirka, has travelled to yet another world through a magical portal, and finds herself amidst a people called Umpiri. She, herself descends from these creatures on her father’s side, but having grown up in a different world, in Ymslanda, their rules and ways of living confuse and astound her. It soon becomes very clear that she does not share their view on honor, and what acting honorable means. Already in the book’s second chapter, when Hirka first arrives in Nifel through the portal, she gets criticized by Skerri,

13. The fact that several of the characters in the series change their view on honor and shame, and hence their ethical values, could also be addressed, but I will not present a deeper understanding of this matter here.

one the Umpiris, for showing lack of honor and self-respect as she introduces herself only as “Hirka”, using just her given name:

“Hirka? That’s how you introduce yourself?” The displeasure was not to be mistaken. [...] “Not anymore. Now you are Hirka, daughter of Graal, son of Raun of the house of Modrasme. And you’ve got a lot to learn.”

“Hirka? Det er sånn du presenterer deg?” Misnøyen var ikke til å ta feil av. [...] “Ikke nå lenger. Nå er du Hirka, datter av Graal, sønn av Raun av Modrasmes hus. Og du har mye å lære” (Pettersen 2015, 21).

Hirka here learns that there’s clearly a gap between people in the world in which she has arrived, and this gap is underlined by the way you present yourself, i.e. which family you belong to, or do not belong to. In the book’s third chapter, Skerri strictly forbids her to talk to “the fallen ones” in their escort, a group of people with a pariah-like status, marked with a grey drop on their forehead, declaring that they are “houseless”, meaning that they are outcasts, and not of an important or powerful family, even if they may have some sort of humble *housing*, in the literal sense of the word. These fallen ones often work as servants, with somewhat of a slave status, with the “highborn” families, and are often treated very badly. You do not have to be born “fallen” to receive the drop on the forehead; one can also be *declared* fallen, *sentenced* to a life as an outcast as a consequence of breaking the law or insulting someone highborn from the “first families”, meaning something like that they have blood of the first of their kind. This system plays an important part in Hirkas rebellion at the end of the story, as she uses this class distinction, setting the fallen ones up against their suppressors, although Hirka herself does not acknowledge this ranking of people. When she first arrives in Dreysil through the portal, she is unaware of this hierarchy which she is now highly ranked in, and when she meets new people, her impulse is to greet them in the same way the greet her:

The two women looked at Hirka. They slightly bent a knee in a sort of greeting. Hirka had a feeling she should do the same. She bent her knee and felt a hand grabbing her by the neck. Skerri had a firm grasp on her, and shoved her in front of herself towards a tent.

De to kvinnene så på Hirka. De sviktet en anelse i det ene kneet i en slags hilsen. Hun fikk en følelse av at hun burde gjøre det samme. Hun bøyde kneet og

kjente en neve ta tak i nakken. Skerri hadde grep om henne, og skyflet henne foran seg mot et telt (Pettersen 2015, 36).

Hirka does not understand at that moment, what she has done, but as soon as she is alone with Skerri, she learns that being highborn includes not showing respect by curtseying to anyone from a “lower” house, and under no circumstances whatsoever should she curtsey for any of the fallen ones: “If you ever try to kneel for anyone below your house again, I will break your knees.” “Om du prøver å knele for noen under ditt hus igjen, så kommer jeg til å knuse knærne dine.” (Ibid.).

Skerri’s threat gives a clear impression of the severity of not respecting the ranking of the houses. In addition to rules of who to greet and to curtsey for, and not, the Umpiri have many other rules of conducting to either show or receive respect, regarding to where in the caste-like system they belong. For instance, you should never turn your back on someone from a house higher ranked than your own, but walk backwards from them when a conversation has ended, and not turn around again until you are out of sight (Pettersen 2015, 85). And, of course, keeping track of everyone’s family, their names and their relationships goes without saying, this is very important to the Umpiri.

Another highly important matter within Umpiri culture regarding honor and shame is that one never ever shows signs of weakness, such as getting tired, hurt or feeling cold, which is all frowned upon and ridiculed by the other members of the culture. Hirka learns all of this together with the reader already on the journey when the Umpiri in her escort lead her from the magical portal to Ginnungad, where her family lives. She suggests that maybe it would be better to put up the camp someplace else than on an open plain, where they might get attacked by wild animals. Skerri’s response to this is: “Are you saying we wouldn’t survive an attack?” / “Sier du at vi ikke ville overlevd et angrep?”, and she is apparently insulted by Hirka’s suggestion (Pettersen 2015, 35).

On the question if it might not be a good idea to bring horses along on the journey, Skerri first looks at Hirka and asks what they would need horses for, and then gets offended when Hirka suggests that they could be used for riding and carrying the luggage. Skerri flashes her fangs at Hirka and asks: “Do I look like someone who needs to be carried?” / “Ser jeg ut som jeg trenger å bæres?” (Pettersen 2015, 23). Let it be said, that this journey is through a landscape as good as deserted, through ice and snow, with no habitation and people to see them if they were to ride horses instead of travelling on foot. We here see that the honor codes of the Umpiri go beyond what can easily be categorized as external honor; what can be observed by others. The mere *thought* of the possibility of someone observing

Skerri and the rest of the travelling company on horseback, is enough to have them walking through ice and snow instead, extending the journey by several days – what would people say if it came out that they rode on other creatures! Internal honor also plays an important part of the Umpiri’s honor codes.

Furthermore, the Umpiri are willing to go out of their way to keep up their appearances as completely invulnerable by not wearing clothes, in the traditional sense. That is, they wear certain garments, mainly consisting of various types of leather strings and metal, but not at all to keep warm or give them protection towards the freezing weather. The garments are primarily used to underline muscle tones, so as to display their bodies in the most flattering way, muscle-wise. So, it is not that the Umpiri is in any way bashful, and need or want these garments to cover up; they would not at all mind parading around naked as the day they were born, if that would have been the most flattering way to present themselves. But, as mentioned, these strings and occasional flaps here and there has an underlining effect, more than a covering one. It also states that the Umpiri do not *need* anything, not even clothes to keep warm.

Here is how Hirka describes Skerri at their first meeting:

She walked with a straight and strong naturalness. As if nothing would ever be able to touch her. A cloak fluttered behind her, so weightless it appeared to be more for decoration than for warmth. Her waist was strapped in leather. The boots reached her knees. But her thighs and arms were naked.

Hun gikk med en rak og sterk selvfølgelighet. Som om ingen noensinne ville kunne røre ved henne. En kappe flagret bak henne, så vektløs at den syntes å være mer til pynt enn til varme. Livet hennes var reimet inn i lær. Støvlene nådde knærne. Men lårene og armene var nakne (Pettersen 2015, 20).

As noted, this way of strapping themselves in leather and flaps is the Umpiri’s way to send out a clear signal about not needing anything, not even clothes, but it also has another function to convey a message to their surroundings: Wearing next to nothing means that you do not have any places to hide weapons, i.e. you do not *need* a knife or a gun, or anything else to defend yourself and to fight. Wearing nothing, can, then, say quite a lot, and the reader recognizes this “show of force” by the Umpiri as an action exalting external honor.

SHAME AS A WEAPON: THE SHAMER CHRONICLES BY LENE KAABERBØL

The Shamer Chronicles is another series of books by a Scandinavian author, and consists of four books: *The Shamer's Daughter* (2000), *The Shamer's Signet* (2001), *The Serpent Gift* (2001) and *The Shamer's War* (2003).¹⁴ The first book has also been adapted to film, but I will not focus on the film or on adaptation theory here.

The story in this series is about Dina, who has inherited her mother's supernatural ability to force other people to feel ashamed of their wrong-doings, simply by looking into their eyes. This gift (even though Dina thinks of it more as a curse when the reader first meets her), is used as a part of the fictional universe's judicial system. When someone is indicted with a crime, and deny the charge, the Shamer can be summoned to look into the eyes of the defendant, to search his or her consciousness, so to say, after feelings of shame. But the judicial system is challenged when Dina meets a man who is guilty as charged in a murder case, but who, in fact, shows no shame or remorse of any kind. A lesson the reader can learn from this, is that the most dangerous people are those without shame, since they have nothing to lose in a society where honor is an ideal. In the following quote, the antagonist, Drakan, has grabbed a hold of Dina's mother and looks her straight in the eyes, in front of the whole village, where he is now a prince, after having killed his relatives who had the rightful claim to the throne:

There was a rustling whisper through the Arsenal yard. Even I, who had seen him do it before, doubted for a moment. Could it really be correct, what I thought about what he had done? It seemed completely inconceivable that a man could kill three people and look straight into my mother's eyes without blinking.

Der gik et sus gennem hele Arsenalgården. Selv jeg, som havde set ham gøre det før, blev et øjeblik i tvivl. Kunne det virkelig være rigtigt, de ting jeg troede om ham? Det virkede helt ufatteligt at en mand kunne slå tre menneske i hjel og bagefter se min mor i øjnene uden at blinke (Kaaberbøl 2000, 199).

Drakan has killed his own father and his wife, and their mutual son, Drakan's half-brother, and then tried to frame it all on his other half-brother, young Nicodemus, by using the Shamers in his service. But neither Dina nor her mother can find shame for these murders in Nicodemus' eyes, even though he carries with him plenty other things he is shameful for. When the two Shamers refuse to play a part in framing Nic-

14. These are the publishing dates with the Danish publishing house, and the series was published in English with the publisher Henry Holt and Company in respectively 2006, two in 2007 and 2008.

odemus for the murders of his family members, they, of course, become Drakan's enemies, and he tries to have them too killed, as they can ruin his agenda and prove that Nicodemus is innocent. We here see an entire community based on the feeling of shame as a fundamental pillar in a society's judicial system, and we also see how fragile this system is when we learn that some of the characters are unable to feel ashamed of their wrong-doings, who are shameless, in other words. The fact that Drakan also has the ability to overpower lethal injuries with the healing powers of dragon blood, and thus is close to immortal, makes him an even larger threat to the society.

Only a few of the characters in the series have this particular gift of forcing people to confront themselves with their sins and shameful moments of different kinds, merely by gazing into their eyes, and this is considered to be a very rare gift, although some, of course, call it "witchcraft" and not a superpower. But this element of "the fantastic", or the supernatural, within the series facilitates for the reader to explore this specific ethical marker that shame is in extreme situations. The reader is confronted with ideas of what shame is and the function it has to regulate citizens' behavior, both in the series, but also in the real world, even if the elements of the fantastic, i.e. the supernatural gift that the Shamers possess, portrays the concept of shaming in a more extreme version than in real life.

We here see the fantastic, or supernatural, as a literary device, and the direct effect of this is that it opens up for the reader to ponder on the impacts of shame and its role in society, and maybe also its role in modern judicial systems. Of course, this is merely speculation, but maybe the reader will also reflect upon the feeling of shame and what would make this emotion/affect occur in their own life if forced to look into the eyes of a Shamer. The result is, nevertheless, of the fantastic as a literary device, ethical reflections, but these are being conducted from a "safe" distance, as the reader does not have to experience the sensation of shame himself/herself, to reflect upon it.

The concept of shaming as a weapon in the series also raises questions such as "what does it feel like to be either full of shame or plainly shameless?", "what is it like to look into the eyes of a Shamer, what would she see in mine?" or "what does it feel like to be innocent, but to not be believed?" These questions are examples of empathic training all, as the reader, consciously or subconsciously, tries to identify himself/herself with the characters and the ethical part of the plot in the story, and hence reflecting upon ethical problems related to empathy, such as the ones Martha Nussbaum claims to be an essential element in a healthy democracy: the will and ability to explore the experience of another (Nussbaum, 2010, 36–37).¹⁵

15. Nussbaum addresses empathy and its importance in several of her works, for instance in the book *Not for profit: why democracy needs the humanities* from 2010 which I have referred to several places in this text.

POSTFACE

I have here attempted to portray the coherence of the dichotomy shame/honor and ethics in literature, and to emphasize the role fantasy literature can play in such education of the readers that Nussbaum describes as highly necessary for empathic citizens and healthy democracies. Using examples from contemporary Scandinavian fantasy series, I have also attempted to depict the use of *the fantastic*, and how this literary tool can be used to accentuate ethical dilemmas to the readers, through the extremities made possible by the repeal of metaphysical laws.

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12

To Age With Honour

Charlotte Strandgaard's Welfare State Poetry of Ageing in No Man's Land

PETER SIMONSEN

ABSTRACT This article provides a reading of Charlotte Strandgaard's collection of poetry, *No Man's Land* (2015), as a piece of Danish welfare state poetry. This collection of poetry articulates certain anxieties associated with maintaining one's honour as an elderly woman in the contemporary welfare state that embraces economic values of speed, efficiency, growth and (re)productivity. In the welfare state the elderly are kept out of traditional functions. In a utilitarian sense, they feel useless, and it becomes difficult to 'age with honour' in the sense of maintaining their sense of dignity as an effect of maintaining their personal autonomy.

KEY WORDS values | old age | autonomy/subjectivity | honour | welfare state

The welfare states and welfare societies that emerged in many western nations in the course of the twentieth century and especially since World War 2 have all had as one of their central goals to secure the well-being of the elderly citizen through state financed or subsidized health care, various services and pensions. As a consequence, especially in the Scandinavian countries, more elderly people live longer and better, more dignified and socially secure lives than ever before in history. While this has been called a 'triumph of civilization' (Petersen 2008), in one sense, insofar as many are able to live 'lifelong lives' (Simonsen 2014) of self-realization, continued personal development and are free to engage in stimulating and meaningful interpersonal relations, to begin new lives and careers in the third age, in another sense it confronts us with some of our worst fears of disease, disability, social exclusion and 'social death' (Sudnow 1967).

Indeed, many literary writers are skeptical of the extent to which the welfare state has lived up to its own goals of securing the good, dignified life into deep old age through substituting and compensating for the care functions carried out by the family in traditional societies through processes of ‘defamiliarization’ (Esping-Andersen 1990). To the extent that we inhabit and can look forward to inhabiting a ‘senile modernity’ – a societal epoch which will be defined by the fact that more and more people will be older and live with an increasing amount of illnesses in what has been called the ‘remission society’ (Frank 1995) – we can look forward to inhabiting a society where we are all patients in recovery, being kept alive much longer than any previous societal forms have known, both through the health system and by virtue of the ways in which our lifestyles and life courses are regulated in ways that make us healthier and less ill during the life course. That optimize us biopolitically and make us capable of remaining autonomous, productive subjects almost all the way to the end. The welfare state keeps the elderly alive, but despite rising mandatory retirement age that reflects increasing life expectancy even as it produces new forms of inequality, it keeps them out of traditional functions where they could help and be helped in the local community or family and thus renders them, in a utilitarian sense, useless (Bakken 2014). This makes it difficult for many to feel that they can ‘age with honour’ in the sense of maintaining their sense of dignity as an effect of maintaining their personal autonomy.

By the phrase ‘to age with honour’ I mean living as aged, frail and more or less dependent person without feeling useless and superfluous the way many elderly individuals in modern societies have felt as their age-acquired skills and knowledge has been rendered obsolete with increasing speed (De Beauvoir 1970) and they have been left to pursue their own life goals not necessarily with others’ needs and ‘the common good’ in mind (Lasch 1979). Indeed, a major life goal for elderly in western consumer societies has become that of avoiding ageing in the sense of bodily, molecular and cellular decay in order to stay young as long as possible through healthy lifestyle, plastic surgery, etc. (Bauman 2007). In a world where you are expected to act and look young even though you are old, and where there are few if any things you can do or say to make yourself useful and needed, ageing with honour can indeed be increasingly difficult if not outright impossible and as such a negative source of anxiety and stress, both actually experienced and anticipated.

Literary works of art are increasingly forcing us to confront and to think about these paradoxes and to attune our emotional registers towards life in senile modernity. As this essay aims to show through a close reading of a single, singular work,

literary works provide ways for us to imagine and model new forms of subjectivity both for ourselves and for those we care about. This article 1) introduces Danish writer Charlotte Strandgaard as a quintessential welfare state author, 2) identifies early but persistent themes of motherhood and bodily autonomy and stylistic traits of repetition and everyday diction, and 3) provides a reading of her 2015 collection of poetry, *No Man's Land*, as a piece of welfare state poetry (Simonsen 2015) that articulates certain anxieties associated with maintaining one's honour as an elderly woman in the contemporary welfare state that embraces economic values of speed, efficiency, growth and (re)productivity.

CHARLOTTE STRANDGAARD AS AUTHOR OF THE WELFARE STATE

Charlotte Strandgaard (born 1943) is a writer who has carried her youthful lifestyle and values into old age but at the same time searches for something that will make her feel useful as a member of the modern technologized, mediatized and 'defamiliarized' society; something that will bestow upon her a sense of honour ('honour' here seems an archaic term that she does not use herself but that nonetheless is an appropriate appellation given the position at which I suggest she arrives at the end of *No Man's Land*). Strandgaard's work and career has in many ways been doing what literature has typically done in the Danish welfare state in terms of interacting with reading audiences to offer both criticism of the given and ideas for renewal, ideas for doing things and organizing social life in other, new and perhaps better ways (Mai 2013). And she has found numerous readers from her debut in 1965 to the present in her many texts, films, plays, and public appearances.

Strandgaard's work exemplifies literature's three main functions as welfare literature: it criticizes conditions for the weak and socially excluded in the welfare state by giving voice and being to the powerless and voiceless. It reports on and documents new, potential life forms, ideas and social rituals and discourses as they emerge in the welfare state. And it suggests other ways of living, thinking and feeling in the welfare state, other ways of pursuing social formations. Her work has followed a certain trajectory that makes her exemplary as author of the welfare state and cultural activist, but has also made it difficult for Danish literary critics and historians to understand and appreciate what she has been up to (yet see Mai and Borup 1999, 91–108). We have no problems categorizing and studying the poetry from the 1960s as experimental literary art (more in section 2 below). Her work from 1969, *Indimellem holder de af hinanden* (Now and then they care for one another) was recently republished to great critical acclaim, yet having pub-

lished this groundbreaking work (the first so-called ‘punktroman’ – a fragmentary novel the reader must work to re-construct the flow and meaning of) in Danish literature, she abandoned this line of focused aesthetic work and in the 1970s began to experiment with mixing a more socially critical and personally confessional poetry and social commentary in ways not appreciated by critics with a more narrow understanding of ‘the literary’.

In *Gade op og gade ned* (1973) (*Up and Down the Street*), for instance, she presents a series of short prose witness accounts of female alcoholics and drug addicts who tell their story in a treatment facility where they are being rehabilitated. They talk about life as addict as woman and mother in very frank and revealing ways. They talk about problems with buying alcohol, where to hide it at home, how the kids suffer, the sex life, etc. in the form of nitty gritty social realistic reportage. Each such factual prose account is seamlessly concluded by a short free verse poem that interprets and sums up the given woman’s life situation enabling us as readers to better enter such a subjectivity.

In the 1980s and onwards Strandgaard started to write e.g. educational books for nurses and families in crises as well as self-help books for the aged children of really old parents along with a series of social realist novels dealing with the social problems not solved by and sometimes even produced by the welfare state. These novels have a deep social-critical bent and as such by many academic critics automatically judged of dubious status to the extent that they tend towards the programmatic and too explicit. Yet to understand and appreciate Strandgaard we must employ a concept of ‘literature’ that is open and inclusive of many text genres and media forms as well as rituals and activities, and we must be interested in studying the relations between ‘literature’ and ‘the social’ as mediated through acts of reading and interaction with the work that has as premise more than detached aesthetic pleasure and includes an urgent sense of attachment and identification with characters, topics, ideas, milieu and moods and subsequent ‘use’ of the literary text through an engagement with it, an application of it to concrete life experiences, actual and immediate as well as imagined and projected (Felski 2008).

Strandgaard’s work is in other words exemplary as ‘welfare state literature’. Such literature always runs the risk of becoming too opinionated, too engaged, and in that process in danger of losing its aesthetic/artistic value and becoming too transitive, too intent perhaps on solving things, on dissolving its artistry in the interest of usability, utility, usefulness as a means of e.g. forging or suggesting social transformation. However, we’re not dealing with a fixed and finite difference of kind between the transitive and intransitive, but with differences of degree contingent not least on the reader’s inclination or manner of meeting the given

work. Even at the height of literature's alleged abandonment of art for the greater good of the socialist revolution during the 1970s she acknowledged the complexity of the matter. In a 1977 interview on literature's social function she was asked: 'Do you believe it is the task of the author to show how the suppressed can liberate themselves from their yoke? Or do you believe it is enough for the author to portray the situation of the suppressed?' (Berg and Haavardsholm 1977, 113). Her response was that she has mainly done the latter even if she and others feel the attraction of the former; yet when *others* appear to think they've got it all figured, she says, it always sounds wrong and she admits to being put off when someone claims superior insight and instead prefers and wants to promote independent thinking in her literary activities (113–114). In 1979 she characteristically closes a book of socially critical and *engagé* poems, *Braendte børn* (Scorched children), by recommending a new orthography, a new way of rendering reality without capital letters to tell the history of those without history: children, women, disabled and other oppressed groups and races. She characteristically recommends this in the form of a question which is certainly rhetorical in that she thinks we should agree, but remains a question pointing ahead to a desire for transformation: 'Skal vi ikke begynde med den nye retskrivning?' 'Why don't we begin the new orthography?' (Strandgaard 1979, 118).

STRANDGAARD'S WELFARE THEME AND STYLE

In a sense part of what's most distinct about Strandgaard's work, the tone and attitude that comes out in her work, seems to capture the tone and attitude of the welfare state. Because the welfare state was never all that 'poetic' or 'passionate' or 'suggestive' – never really suitable for poetic sensibility – but rather more prosaic, square, precise, planned and structured in an everyday manner. This also poses a challenge to traditional notions of honour and how to achieve honour in a modern welfare state. The welfare state's prosaic, and in a sense boring because planned rational reality is the reality and the tone and form of Strandgaard's most distinct work from the 1960s (dealing mostly with promises and paradoxes) and 70s (dealing with problems with social institutions, work conditions, unemployment, general sense of crisis). Her poetics is an everyday poetics, her voice is a prosaic, pedestrian and highly structured and planned voice that works through grammatical patterns of repetition and symmetry suggestive of the central planning and social engineering of the welfare state – and the proposed egalitarian orthography would seem to be in the spirit of the welfare state as a utopian desire for fully realized equality.

Having to choose between staying at home to take care of one's children and working out of the house to earn a wage is the subject of a poem from Strandgaard's second collection, *Afstande* (Distances) from 1966, and a central motif that unifies Strandgaard's work:

..... konklusionen var faktisk at man
 måtte gøre sit valg og så resignere over
 for de mange muligheder man måtte sige
 nej til. Altså valgte man udeerhverv måtte
 man gøre sig klart at andre kom til at på-
 virke og passe ens børn og børnene ville
 holde af andre end en selv.
 Valgte man børnene måtte man finde
 sig i at være henvist til børneværelset
 i mange år af sit liv. Den sagde mig så
 meget fordi jeg aldrig har gjort mig det
 klart før

[..... actually the conclusion was that one
 had to make a choice and then resign to the fact
 of the many possibilities one had to
 say no to. So if one chose to work away from home
 one had to realise that others would af-
 fect and take care of one's children and the children
 would care for others than one self.
 If one chose the children one had to accept
 to be confined to the nursery
 for many years of one's life. It told me so
 much because I have never been
 clear about it before]]

(Strandgaard 1966, np)

This prosaically phrased self-negotiation parses an everyday epiphany on behalf of this woman caught in a deep and unresolvable ambivalence. Irrespective of the choice made it seems to be clearly implied that there would be no sense of honour to be gained; the question of honour is in other words not raised. Note how the emotionally detached impersonal use of third person 'man'/'one' to articulate the paradox in a neutral, flat manner is made personal and subjective by the introduction of the first person perspective ('mig'/'me') in the end when 'the conclusion' finally registers with and this preeminent welfare state choice is brought home to her. The heavy use of punctuation in first and last line indicates that we're witnessing an epiphany that punctuates ordinary routine for this individual and that it's up

to the reader to keep thinking about how to handle this paradox. No big emotional outbursts find articulation, no apostrophe!, the emotion is rather marked as absent, but as such, certainly there. Aesthetically, the point of the poem is made by the breaking of the word ‘af-fect’ ‘på-virke’ across line end, calling attention to the word it makes us reflect on who and what affects and influences our children and perhaps suggests that there’s something wrong, something broken or ruptured, in the idea of someone else af-fecting one’s children?

Strandgaard debuted under the tutelage of the poet Vagn Steen as experimental lyric poet with great potential with the collection, *Katalog* (1965), (Catalogue), published by the famous Arena press. Consider her very first poem in her first collection, a real signature piece:

En enmandsseng
til to
ingen
tandbørste
og så problemet
med at finde sit
tøj igen

[A single bed
for two
no
toothbrush
and then the problem
with finding your
clothes again]

(*Strandgaard 1965, np*)

This poem is about autonomy, freedom and a life lived without ‘real’ problems in the sense of psychological-existential problems of the kind poetry was expected to deal with in 1960s Danish Modernism defined by e.g. Klaus Rifbjerg and Villy Sørensen and academically processed by Torben Brostrøm and others (Mai 2016). These writers and critics were attuned to existential problems of loss of coherence and meaning in the modern world and with feeling alienated from God and Nature and split from an authentic self. And they felt that this modern alienation and breakdown could be dealt with and healed through poetic metaphor and symbol, often in a form that was difficult for the ‘ordinary reader’. The modernists in other words tended to want to deal with existential and psychological questions which everyday life in the welfare state was simply too easy and socially secure to render pertinent (Kjældgaard 2011). Indeed, life lived and observed on the surface in the

welfare state had rendered that kind of soul-searching poetic sensibility something of an anachronism. Strandgaard's poetic universe is 'post honour' in the traditional sense and may illustrate James Bowman's sense that 'Honor can be made compatible with a great many seemingly antithetical ideas, but it can never be compatible with any serious degree of egalitarianism' of the kind that informs the Scandinavian welfare states and societies (Bowman 2006, 312). As I will suggest later, however, Bowman's idea that for honour to obtain again (he means 'bravery in men, chastity in women, loyalty and courtesy in both sexes' (313)) 'there would have to be a purging of the sense of egalitarian shame we have grown used to feeling at our natural sense of the honor of achievement' (312–313) is undermined by Strandgaard's latest poetry collection, which identifies a special honour in supporting an egalitarian support for the weakest in society.

Strandgaard's poetry in the 1960s is a concrete, minimalist poetry bereft of metaphor and 'depth' and instead focused on the present, the real, material surfaces of life. It is a poetry that wants to explore new life situations and opportunities, especially for young women. On the one hand, as here, she embraces a new independence and sensual promiscuity and carelessness. On the other hand, she tackles the everyday emotional consequences of being emancipated in the materialist, capitalist welfare state and feeling forced into but also eager to join the labour market that both constrains and enables her freedom even while she wants to live up to certain norms of motherhood that are hard to reconcile with working away from the home. The question of honour seems manifestly absent and to belong to the pre-modern world.

NO MAN'S LAND AS WELFARE STATE POETRY ABOUT OLD AGE AND HONOUR

The poetic voice and style of the welfare state that Strandgaard developed in the 1960s is recaptured in the new poems published in *No Man's Land*. Only this time it is not the new life forms of young liberated women and mothers that are being poetically parsed. This time it's the new life forms and styles of the +70 grandmothers of the aged welfare state whose lives are being dealt with. 'No man's land' is both the grey, liminal zone between the living and the dead that old age can be experienced as where the elderly take up the position and value of 'bare life' (Agamben 2008): alive but with no voice and no actual rights, without anyone caring whether they live or die, and – literally – a female, feminine land of certain bodily and emotional experiences that males are denied access to. The main question behind the collection is of what use the increasingly elderly people on retirement can be in the contemporary welfare state exposed to neoliberal

retrenchment, cutbacks, and reforms? What's the use of the elderly in our present senile modernity? Is there or can there be any honour in old age in the welfare state or is the welfare state an example of our 'post-honor society' (Bowman 2006).

In a stunning poem Strandgaard alludes to her 1965 signature piece through the repetition of the two persons in a single bed motif, but much has changed:

ELSKER OG VEN

Jeg har en elsker og ven. I over fyrre år, med pauser, har vi kneppet overalt i Danmark. Vi er gode til det. Hans pik passer, som hånd i handske, i min skede.

Vi ligger i min seng
Vi knepper aldrig mere på gulvet
Vi er udmattede og tilfredse
Vi snakker om velfærdsstaten

Vi kender hinanden
Vi holder fast i hinanden
Vi har kun min seng for tiden
Vi skal være forsigtige for ikke at falde ud af min enmandsseng

Vi skal snart op
Vi skal have tøj på
Vi skal drikke en kop te sammen
Vi drikker ikke alkohol mere

Lige før forløsningen falder han på gulvet. Med megen møjje får vi hevet ham op. Jeg får selv krampe i venstre ben, lige før orgasmen. Vi flytter rundt på mine ben. Og så lykkes det endelig. Han mumler, at alderdommen ikke vinder ved nærmere bekendtskab.

[LOVER AND FRIEND

I have a lover and friend. For more than forty years, on and off, we have fucked everywhere in Denmark. We are good at it. His cock suits my vagina, like a hand in a glove.

We lie in my bed
We never fuck on the floor any longer
We are exhausted and content
We talk about the welfare state

We know one another

We hold on to one another
 We only have my bed for the time being
 We have to be careful not to fall from my single bed

We have to get up soon
 We have to get dressed
 We have to have a cup of the together
 We never drink alcohol any longer

Just before deliverance he falls onto the floor. With much fuss we get him back again. I myself get cramps in my left leg again, just before the orgasm. We move my legs around. And then we succeed finally. He mumbles that old age does not improve upon closer inspection.]

(*Strandgaard 2015, 21*)

Most readers will be shocked by the frank and explicit imagery and tone of voice of this poem. Carnal copulation after a ‘certain age’ is not something the culture at large is at ease with choosing to believe in the stereotype of an asexual old age (Gott and Hincliff 2003). Shock, as Rita Felski puts it in *Uses of Literature*, is ‘symbolically central to contemporary literary studies’ (105) – certain kinds of transgressive taboo-breaking literature wants to shock us and change our ways of seeing and thinking about certain aspects of life. Literary texts such as this poem alter our emotional and cognitive grammars as they point us to new aspects of intimacy and sociality. Rhetorically, the poem does this by hitting us with the very blunt statement that his cock fits her vagina like a hand in a glove – one of the most tired, worn (!), used and abused clichés is here given a new life and significance.

The pronoun ‘we’ is emphasized. This is very much a we-poem, the pronoun is put in the initial place in every line in the three mid-stanzas: there is a very strong sense of togetherness, of union, coupling and copulation in this poem. It is a poem about basic trust and solidarity, about being both lover and friend and holding on to one another in a relation based in deep familiarity and ritual. While the poem eschews ‘poetic language’ and pretty metaphor, it still produces poetic meaning, e.g. through the use of line breaks to articulate its point, especially towards the end in the sexual climax, ‘Og så lykkes det / endelig’ (‘And then we succeed / finally’). The minimal suspense created by breaking the line and moving ‘endelig’ to a new line embodies the strain of achieving orgasm +70.

In terms of lying in bed and talking about the welfare state, one wonders what they are talking about? One gets the sense that Strandgaard is no longer as critical of the welfare state as she was in the 1970s, she leaves it open and we may even

sense an endeared tone here that recognizes, nostalgically and under the sign of something that has perhaps passed, that the welfare state has enabled their copulation, set them free to enjoy life in old age and inaugurated the norms they now embody: that it's ok to enjoy the good life also on retirement without a guilty conscience. Whether to read or translate 'tilfredse' as content or satisfied is a question that points us to this central word in the poem: 'satisfied' could restrict the meaning to post coital sexual gratification of a new kind compared to the earlier single bed poem. This couple knows where they left the clothes. If we read it as 'content' this broadens out the semantic field and signifies their entire life situation, summed up by their sexuality but also applying more generally: content because socially, materially secure (not existentially secure, though, old age is still not something that improves upon closer inspection)?

The couple in this poem is both satisfied and content, in part, because they don't have to fear the destiny of the post-productive and post-reproductive people in other, so-called traditional and primitive societies that practice (or have often been understood to practice) gerontocide: killing the elderly when they become a burden. In five short factual poems in *No Man's Land* such societies' ritualistic gerontocides are described in terse detail. The aged are thrown off cliffs, left on mountain tops, hanged, stabbed, etc. Implicitly the book thus compares such societies defined by a shortage of resources and forced lack of compassion with the present affluent welfare society defined by surplus and an ideology of solidarity that supports (with more or less success) and means to support (at least during election time) the weak and those in need. Yet the satisfied couple might also be talking about the dissolution of this society and its ideas of human worth and dignity which is indeed under pressure in society in general with potentially severe consequences for the elderly in dependent need of care (Bakken 2014).

The poems in *No Man's Land* are still anxious about the future use value of the old and fragile citizens in a world after the welfare state and want to think about being old as more than being able to have an active sex life and being able to enjoy life and feel 'content' about doing so. Elderly Strandgaard faces the same dilemma that she was faced with in the 1960s between being free and uninhibited (forgetting where she left her clothes before jumping into a single bed with a stranger) and feeling obliged both to work for a wage and to stay at home to take care of her child being unable to do both at once. Elderly Strandgaard is free and uninhibited but is torn between, on the one hand, being afraid of being killed off as useless either literally or symbolically by being treated as already dead and, on the other hand, struggling to find a use for herself in a world where she feels like a relic.

This is a struggle for honour in a ‘post-honour’ society; that is, for a new understanding of honour and what it might mean to age with honour.

The collection opens with a poem where the speaker asks why she never asked her mother about the good things about old age before considering two possible answers, either that what’s good about old age is blindness and deafness or that ‘Det er ikke så nemt at sætte ord på’ (‘It not so easy to find the proper words to describe’) (Strandgaard 2015, 9). Here the thematic field of the collection is outlined as a continued registering of the experience of bodily change and decline in old age and the difficult attempt to find the right words to attach to those experiences. One poem, ‘Gylden sommer’ (Golden Summer) indirectly registers her feelings of being useless through a blunder she makes when she mistakes an elderly man’s daughter for his granddaughter having forgotten men’s capacity to reproduce even in old age. In reply to her remark about how wonderful his grandchild is ‘Hans stemme er lav men rasende: “Det er min datter”’ (His voice is low but furious: ‘It’s my daughter’) to signal his own fear of ageing having been confirmed through this scene of being misrecognized and falsely categorized according to age. In the poem ‘Blod’ (Blood) we hear about the very different meanings of blood in a toilet for the 13-year-old (the relief of not being pregnant and the fear of pregnancy) and the 70-year-old (whose relief has to do with her deep fear of cancer indicated by excremental blood). All lines begin with the word ‘Jeg’ (‘I’) and suggests a fundamental continuity between the young and the aged at the level of language even as there are enormous differences in terms of the fears of reproduction versus illness. Or consider ‘Den strenge dommer’ (‘The harsh judge’) where the 70-year-old has gone swimming and looks at her daughter who has given birth three times and sees her own 70-year-old flat breasts no longer as a proud sign of having breast fed (as she did when she was her daughter’s age and flaunted them) but as a sign of bodily decline and something that makes her feel uneasy because she does not want to be judged by her looks even though that is exactly what she is doing. This life led in fear of illness and decline still has its positive moments of sexual gratification, as seen, but as mentioned (and in contrast to the image of male ageing in ‘Gylden sommer’) it seems to lack an ulterior purpose for living.

In the end, in the final and longest poem, ‘Magtesløs’ (Powerless) the collection carves out a use value for old, fragile women, and posits a reason for keeping them alive in society. This is a use value directed towards fellow women – stressed mothers of children with diagnoses – who suffer in the contemporary world where they have to be – but of course fail to be – both perfect workers, perfect mothers and perfect daughters to their childrens’ grandparents: roles they can’t live up to

and from which they suffer as a consequence. The poem describes the lives of the mothers of children with diagnoses and concludes with the speaker imagining herself +80 years old telling all these tired mothers across the whole world that they are united by their powerless love for their suffering children:

‘Vi er sammen i det her svære liv
Vi slår ikke vores børn ihjel,
selv om vi indimellem er nær ved det,
jeg håber, at ingen hader os for det,
for det har de ingen ret til’

Det er det, jeg skal fortælle
Det er det, der vil gøre mig troværdig
Ikke min tydelige alderdom
Ikke mit lange livs tilsyneladende visdom
Men den fælles magtesløse kærlighed

[‘We share this hard life
We don’t kill our children,
though we sometimes come near,
I hope that no one hates us for it
because they have no right to do so’

That is what I have to tell
That is what will give me credibility
Not my visible old age
Not my long life’s apparent wisdom
But the shared powerless love]

(Strandgaard 2015, 53)

How to treat and take proper care of children – especially physically and mentally disabled and/or abused children – is one of the central concerns of Strandgaard’s work from beginning to end. Here towards the end of the career she discovers an important social function or destination for one of the most fragile and socially exposed members of society, the old female poet, an utterly useless person by strict utilitarian criteria that would also find children with psychic diagnoses useless from the perspective of global capitalism. This function is carved out through the literary imagination: a force that connects, binds together through a shared ‘powerless love’ a group of stressed, fragile women. This connecting force is the force of credible storytelling, that is, literature. Literature is powerless, it can’t do a thing, and therein rests its real power, the power to move and connect the socially exposed and voiceless.

While honour in a traditional society might be something one gained and maintained as member of an elite through maintaining, often with violent means, one's own or one's collective's integrity against others' imposition, we might say that honour in the welfare state is something you gain and maintain by offering love and compassion to those in less fortunate situations without asking for anything in return. To call this honour is to counter conservative critics of the welfare state who find that its values are corruptive of such so-called noble values (Jensen 1998) and instead to point to the remaining presence of upholders and promoters of the kinds of values underpinning the welfare state in its traditional conception.

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Ageing and dignity¹*Stories of old age from the welfare state*

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ABSTRACT Uniform treatment of the elderly (those over 65) is neither worthy nor fair. This article examines how the elderly are depicted as well as treated in the short story 'Ingenting hendt' (2000) by Bjarne Breiteig and the novel *Så høyt var du elsket* (2011) by Nikolaj Frobenius. Bjørkøy presents what forms of honour are addressed in these literary texts, and what existential issues may arise when we grow old, retired and sick in the Norwegian welfare state.

KEY WORDS old age | dignity | respect | honour | welfare state

HONOUR UNDER THE WELFARE STATE?

Compared with, for example, the classic honour culture of the Norsemen, the modern Norwegian welfare state can appear as an anti-honour culture. Moreover, modern society's meetings between strong, classic honour cultures on one side and Western (secularised) welfare societies on the other seem to point to a winding down, or indeed a winding up, of honour culture. But do we really live in a culture where there are no important forms of honour? According to Frank Henderson Stewart, the concept of honour has in modern times become individualised (Stewart 1994). This undermines such traditional honour groups as the family, the clan and the nation, in addition to, as James Bowman points out, Western honour culture in general (2006). Put simply, we can say, as Peter F. Hjort has done, that the old, stable agrarian society offered security, its confines and expectations being predefined, while modern society offers freedom, the individual being able to a greater extent to make choices and thus liberate him/herself from traditions (Hjort 2010, 29). In his book *Honor. A History* from 2006, Bowman calls our late modern society a 'post-honor society'. However, as the American philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah emphasises, honour is not just a personal matter (Appiah 2010,

1. This article is translated by Richard Burgess.

61). Honour is rooted in society. Social interaction and interpersonal relations reveal the different forms of honour that are at play. Thus the tendency towards individualisation is partly counteracted by the concept and sense of honour. I will argue that it is the dominant norms and values in the community that determine whether a sense of honour is strengthened or weakened.

But has there really been a winding-up of honour culture in the Norwegian welfare state? We can perhaps rather say that there has been a development in the concept of honour. Appiah argues that ‘we live not after honor but with new forms of honor’ (Appiah 2010, 193). The factors that weaken or strengthen an individual’s honour will constantly be changing. But if we can speak of a winding-up of honour culture in Norwegian society, I would argue that an individual’s honour, in the form of respect, identity, integrity and dignity, is undermined or indeed eliminated when an individual reaches old age. Literature, however, can help bolster the respect, identity, integrity and dignity of the aged by drawing attention to this, thus securing them the honour they need, both for themselves and in order to be seen and treated in a dignified fashion.²

In her book *Om ære* [About honour] Unni Wikan writes: ‘Ære er et begrep som i alle samfunn er forbundet med noe positivt’ [Honour is a concept associated with something positive in all societies] (2008, 9). However, I associate the term *honour* primarily with noble or heroic deeds, as well as with power ‘fordi det er en elite eller de innflytelsesrike som setter standardene for hva som skal gjelde’ [because it is an elite or those with influence who set the agenda] (Wikan 2008, 9). The term honour is not unambiguously positive. The term, in my view, is more generally associated with such factors as class and status than with factors like respect and dignity. Honour and respect do not mean the same thing, but respect can help strengthen the honour one is assigned by others as well as one’s own sense of honour. I would argue that weakened respect gives weakened honour and that honour is about value in one’s own and in others’ eyes, about self-respect and social respect (Wikan 2008, 9). As such, the concept of honour is relevant and essential also in an anti-honour culture. For every individual it is important to be

2. Does the word dignity have a rather old-fashioned quality to it? And why is the word dignity often linked to old age? The word is not out of date, but it seems to occur most frequently in reference to or texts about the aged. The ageing individual gives the word dignity actuality as soon as the process of ageing leads to deviation from the norm, from what is accustomed and expected. The concept of dignity becomes visible and necessary as soon as dignity is threatened in some way. So dignity is a word that has particularly validity when referring to people with different sorts of psychological and physical disabilities. Dignity is thus a word that particularly crops up when we are focusing on people that in one way or another deviate from the so-called norm.

treated with dignity and at the same time feel dignified. Wikan emphasises that honour is a complicated concept – both historically and culturally there are paradoxes implicit in it (Wikan 2008, 9). It is, for example, a paradox that in old age, as the eldest in the family with the longest life experience, with knowledge and skills gathered through a long life, one can suddenly go from having a respected and honourable position in the family and in society to being excluded, seen as unable to contribute or participate. Another paradox is: How can the last phase of life, which necessarily involves decline, illness and death, be dignified? Some 2000 years ago, Cicero formulated this most obvious of paradoxes: ‘Everyone wants a long life, but no one wants to grow old’.

LIFE PHASE TRANSITIONS

Old age brings with it concrete physical and mental changes, and thus influences our quality of life and our relationships in different ways. Literature can show us which existential problems old age brings with it, and how it can feel to grow old in Norway’s welfare society. In this article I will explore how this is depicted in Bjarte Breiteig’s short story ‘Ingenting hendt’ [Nothing happened] from *Surrogater* (2000) and in Nikolaj Frobenius’s novel *Så høyt var du elsket* [You Were so Deeply Loved]³ (2011). How does honour play out, and in what changing forms, in the lives of the two fictional old men that Breiteig and Frobenius portray? How does their age and their ageing impact on the honour they are assigned and have to live with in the final phase of their lives? Frobenius’s novel depicts an ageing father from the perspective of his son, while in ‘Ingenting hendt’ it is the ageing person himself that is the main character.

‘Ingenting hendt’ starts with Leif, an employee at an ironworks, ending his last day at work by taking a shower. Leif is leaving behind the community of the workplace and starting his life as a pensioner. The insistent title ‘Ingenting hendt’ [Nothing happened] emphasises how this transition on the one hand is treated as a nothing, perhaps because it is necessary. On the other hand, his retirement means everything, because it is implied that it will have a far-reaching effect on Leif’s situation and quality of life. It is worth noticing that in the opening line of the short story Leif says ‘Jaja’ [Oh well] (Breiteig 2000, 25). Together with the title, this utterance emphasises an apparent indifference, or perhaps more precisely, a resignation about his situation. However, his ‘oh well’ and the title’s insistence that this

3. *For so you were loved* would have been a more opening and sufficient title to the translation, because of the allusion to the Bible.

final day at work is a nothing are belied by his reaction in the shower. Thus they underline that Leif cannot find the words to express, or is emotionally incapable of expressing, how difficult and upsetting his retirement is for him. This is also reflected in Leif's attempt to play down and avoid more farewells by showering before the others.

The story begins in *media res* with Leif entering the changing room. His helmet is covered with dried iron sludge, which Leif throws in the waste bucket (Breiteig 2000, 25). This apparently trivial action provides a parallel to Leif's situation – like the iron sludge, Leif's working life has now in a sense dried up. Like his helmet, he has symbolically ended up in the waste bucket. Leif has left the control room early tonight. 'I natt var det ikke engang nødvendig å stemple ut, hadde Taraldsen sagt. Bare den siste dusjen gjensto' [Tonight it wasn't even necessary to clock off, Taraldsen had said. The only thing that remained was the final shower] (Breiteig 2000, 25). The words 'even', 'only' and 'final' emphasise what a milestone his retirement represents, what a dramatic transition he faces, as if retirement from working life marks the end of life itself. And yet this transition is a nothing, because retirement is a necessity both for health-related and societal reasons.

Leif knows every nook and cranny, every routine, every sound: 'Gjennom vindusruten lød fabrikkstøyen bare som et mykt surr, men han kunne likevel skille ut de enkelte komponentene' [The factory noise through the window was just a soft hum, but even so he could distinguish the individual components] (2000, 26). This confirms how the ironworks in a sense is physically a part of Leif. He can sense and identify the smallest sound: 'Han visste hva det var alt sammen. Han kunne ha jobbet hvor som helst i hele anlegget' [He knew what it all was. He could have worked anywhere in the whole plant] (2000, 26). While Leif is taking in the sounds of the ironworks, his cigarette goes out between his fingers and he feels small twinges in his back. It is not just his cigarette that has trouble staying alight in this period. The metaphor of extinguishment recurs throughout the story and is significant, establishing a semantic field at both a micro and a macro level in the story. The twinges can be understood as a reaction to retirement, a physical expression of grief. However, we are told that 'en ny smerteri' [a new obsession with pain] is on the way (2000, 26). So he has also had pain before that has interfered with his work. He can no longer open and close valves, and for the last few months he has been left sitting in the control room or wandering aimlessly around watching the others (2000, 26). Pain has prevented him doing the work he knows so well. Thus his work contribution did not end on his last day of work – in practice it has been over for the last few months. The twinges, however, may be his

body's reaction to the retirement he has been dreading for so long. At the same time they can be an expression of the physical decline that the ageing process has inevitably brought upon him that prevents him from functioning as before. The pain may be psychosomatic, i.e. rooted in both physiology and psychology, and thus complex. It contributes to making Leif unfit for work, making retirement necessary, but retirement itself is perhaps also a factor in his experience of pain. It seems reasonable to interpret Leif's back pains as more than just physiological, given that Leif is a classic Breiteig character. He is uncommunicative, silent, lonely and thus vulnerable. His back pains are perhaps an expression of what he cannot express in words?

Leif receives an honourable send-off, he is given a watch and a long handshake by way of thanks. 'Leif hadde ikke følt noe da. Han var verken trist eller bitter' [Leif hadn't felt anything then. He was neither sad nor bitter] (2000, 27). The word 'then' reveals that Leif may have felt something before the retirement ceremony. If not, the reaction came afterwards, in the shower. His reaction is physical, a pain gathers in his back, 'som om en kniv skar frem og tilbake over ryggspylen nå, uten å komme igjennom' [like a knife cutting back and forth across his spine, without getting through] (2000, 27). In the Norwegian welfare society I would argue that honour is strongly associated with one's occupation and work contribution, perhaps especially for men. As age researcher Runar Bakken points out, the role of being 'the others' is often different for men and women: 'Kvinner opprettholder i større grad sin tilknytning til fellesskapet gjennom et ansvar for barn og barnebarn, mens menn – bortsett fra de mektige og de som er rike på eiendom, penger og kunnskap – ser ut til å miste alt idet de mister sin arbeidsevne. Menn blir i radikal forstand et objekt' [Women maintain their connection to a fellowship to a greater degree through their responsibility for children and grandchildren, while men – with the exception of those that are powerful or rich in property, money or knowledge – seem to lose *everything* when they lose their work capacity. Men become, in a radical sense, an object.] (Bakken 2014, 52). Breiteig's Leif illustrates this and shows that the concept of honour can be regarded as gendered. Unni Wikan expresses this simply: 'Menn har ære, kvinner har skam' [Men have honour, women have shame] (Wikan 2008, 9). The end of working life means the end of collegiality, of the structure and commitment that have been the foundation of Leif's existence and that have given his life content and thereby also dignity and an essential self-esteem. Thus Leif's story illustrates how belonging to a fellowship and making some sort of contribution is crucial to an individual's feeling of dignity, and is the form of honour that has most influence on self-esteem and self-confidence.

FROM DIGNITY TO HUMILIATION

Studies carried out in the 1970s by Donald Cowgill and Lowell Holmes show that the status and prestige of old people declines proportionally with the capitalist modernisation of society. In pre-modern society old age represented a golden age, since communities were more stable. The focus was on recreating, not changing society. Reaching a great age meant to a large extent that one had made wise life choices. The experience and knowledge of old people was therefore valuable for the survival of the community. In modern society, which undergoes continual development and change, the status and prestige of the old is diminished because their knowledge, their experiences and skills quickly become obsolete (Bakken 2014, 41). One could object here that the problem depends on which occupation one retires from. Perhaps retirement is least problematic for academics, since they feel secure at the top of their profession, and retirement gives them the freedom to immerse themselves further in their field. But the transition to retirement can trigger an existential crisis since identity, as well as the feeling of making a contribution, is first and foremost linked to work. Leif's boss confirms that Leif has played an important role: 'Det er trist å gi slipp på en som deg, hadde Taraldsen sagt. Det er vanskelig å finne arbeidsvillige folk nå for tiden [...] Du har sannelig stått på' [It's sad to let someone like you go, Taraldsen had said. It's difficult to find people willing to work these days [...] You certainly have worked hard] (2000, 26–27). Age researcher Cowgill concludes in a study from 1986 that old people had lower status in industrialised countries, where retirement and moving into nursing homes was seen as a social substitute for death. However, Cowgill points to a strengthening of family values as an appropriate means of counteracting this reversal of status and prestige (cf. Bakken 2014, 69). In modern society, the old can find existential meaning through other channels than work, for example, through relations with their children and grandchildren. However, it seems that Leif lacks any close relationships that might fill the function that work had. His situation demonstrates the gendered aspect of the honour code he is withdrawing from by retiring. The sense of identity and meaning that has given his life value and honour has been founded on a masculine collegiality. Domestic life offers an alternative environment that lacks what until now has given Leif's life meaning. With reference to Bakken's research, we may suppose that Leif would have had a different network and thereby a differently charged honour code to relate to had he been a woman. Leif lacks a relational apparatus that can take over the role that work has played.

Leif has a long working life behind him – we don't know how long, but long enough for him to be familiar with every sound and every task at the ironworks. The

work there is a natural part of his everyday life. As a pensioner he is withdrawing from what Michel Foucault (1996) calls ‘the order of things’. The fixed points in Leif’s everyday existence disappear. According to Bakken, this break with the order of things is a typical problem for the old in a number of ways – both mentally and physically, old people experience a disintegration of the familiar, a movement towards boundlessness (Bakken 2014, 27–29). Leif’s pain and his loss of work entitlement lead him to losing his grip on himself, on his everyday life, on the order that apparently keeps him afloat. His new existence as a pensioner requires him to build up a new daily routine. But Leif has no plan: ‘Og heretter var det bare stolen der hjemme. Sitte der og kjenne kniven. Det var det eneste som var igjen’ [And from now on there was nothing but the chair at home. To sit there and feel the knife. That was all that was left] (2000, 30). It seems that Leif only functions when working at the ironworks. There he knows what to do, he is purposeful, useful, active and part of a collegium. Outside the ironworks, on the other hand, he is dysfunctional, lonely and useless. But lately his back problems have prevented him contributing as before, a situation that seems to be quite as degrading as having to retire.

Leif has no illusions of having a good old age in store. He is left to ‘nothing but the chair’ (2000, 30). Bakken emphasises that old age ‘er en ikke-feiret overgang, som hver enkelt av oss er overlatt til oss selv å skulle fikse’ [is a non-celebratory transition which each of us is left to manage on our own] (2014, 207). Leif tries to manage by escaping from his collegium, showering before the others in order to avoid more farewells. After that the strategy seems to be to sit at home alone in a chair. Leif’s idea about having ‘nothing but the chair’ in store, since that is all he is good for, reveals that he sees retirement as little more than a waiting-room for death. Work was life. He has no strategy for creating a life as a pensioner. And until he becomes in need of care, the welfare state will leave him to his own devices, except for the financial support his pension represents.

In a book to be published in 2017 with the tentative title *Ageing Wisely*, Martha Nussbaum and Saul Levmore examine ‘the moral, legal, and economic dilemmas of old age’ which they believe have been neglected by philosophy. Here both Nussbaum and Levmore reject the notion that age leads to and represents renunciation. At the same time they argue in favour of a flexible pension age (Aviv 2016). Retirement from work can represent a relief, a liberation and reward for some, while for others, as for Leif, it can be experienced as a renunciation, a punishment and an end to everything that gives meaning and makes life worth living. Nussbaum, who was born in 1947, makes the point that if she herself were forced to retire, it would ‘affect me psychologically in a very deep way [...] I might just get depressed’ (Aviv 2016). Leif’s story illustrates the reaction that Nussbaum describes.

When Leif is on his way into the shower, a boy enters the changing room. He is a cleaner and a stranger to Leif. He asks if Leif is going to shower now, pointing out that shower time is not until five o'clock (2000, 27–28). Leif stands there with a little towel that doesn't even reach around his waist and can only say yes. His nakedness emphasises his vulnerability. The boy doesn't know who Leif is or that this is his last day at work, and the boy's lack of insight and understanding only increases the sense of humiliation and loneliness in the nothingness that marks the end of his working life. Memories of what, for Leif, were the good old days resurface and stand in contrast to the present silence of the changing room: 'Det var så stille der nå. Ingen prat eller latter som gjallet mellom veggene' [It was so quiet there now. No talk or laughter echoing off the walls.] (2000, 29). The collegiality between 'gutter som tåler en støyt' [lads who can take a thing or two] is gone, replaced by the chair that is waiting at home and by the cleaner who doesn't know it is Leif's last day and therefore shows no understanding for his need to shower now, earlier than usual.

The fact that Leif has spent the last few months sitting in the control room or aimlessly wandering around watching the others (cf. 2000, 26) represents a long drawn-out humiliation that escalates and reaches its climax in the shower on this last day at work. Leif suffers a fall: 'Han kjente bare et vagt sting gjennom rygg-raden idet kroppen traff flisegulvet' [He felt no more than a vague twinge through his spine as his body hit the tiled floor] (2000, 33). The unknown cleaner is startled and wants to call for help. But Leif doesn't want to be found like this. 'Må bare ligge her og komme meg litt, hvasket han' [I just need to lie here and recuperate a little, he whispered] (2000, 33). But the boy looks at his watch. 'Du må nok prøve å komme deg opp, sa han. Du kan jo ikke bare ligge her heller' [You'll have to try and get up, he said. You can't just lie here] (2000, 33). The words 'nok', 'jo', 'bare' and 'heller' reveal the boy's impatience and lack of insight into Leif's situation and accentuate his view of the old man as a nuisance who is preventing him getting his work done. Then Leif throws up: 'Han fikk akkurat vridd hodet til siden idet det kom veltende opp av ham, flere kraftige støt ut over flisene. For hver brekning var det som om noe revnet i ryggen' [He just managed to turn his head to one side as it came pouring out of him onto the tiles in several powerful convulsions. Each convulsion felt like something ripped in his back] (2000, 33). The boy steps forward and puts a supporting hand on Leif's forehead. Thus he shows concern, but still a lack of understanding when he calls for assistance and suggests that the incident was caused by Leif showering in water that was too hot for him (2000, 34). The reader takes a different view to the boy, because we know and understand more about Leif's situation – and why he needs to shower just now. To

the extent that the reader gains this insight, it is an example of how literature can stimulate reflection on ethical questions such as ‘How can I be a good person?’ Leif’s story and the boy cleaner’s management of the shower situation can help develop the reader’s ability to react with empathy and humanity in similar situations. As Nussbaum points out in her book *Poetic Justice*, literature can ‘be a bridge both to a vision of justice and to the social enactment of that vision’ (1995, 12). Moreover, literature can be part of a democratic project: ‘The poet in effect becomes the voice of silenced people, sending their speech out of himself as a kind of light for the democracy’ (Nussbaum [1997] 2003, 96).

The fall in the shower can be seen as a parallel to Leif’s metaphorical fall brought about by retirement. His disqualification from work due to age and health leads to a fall in dignity. Lying naked in the shower in his own vomit, under the eyes of a stranger, and having to be rescued on his last day at work, Leif’s humiliation is complete. The others will soon be coming to shower, ‘så måtte de vel til med avskjeden enda en gang’ [so they’d have to make their farewells all over again] (2000, 34). Retirement means the end of the dignity of (working) life. But the cleaner covers him with a towel, rings for help and shows a concern that lends a certain dignity to a humiliating situation. Leif had wanted to escape from the attention and circumstances that retirement entails, but ironically ends up experiencing a more emotional, humiliating and undignified departure than the one his age and retirement had already inflicted on him. Whether his colleagues will arrive before Leif is retrieved from the changing room, where he lies naked on the floor in his own vomit, is left open, but at the end Leif realises that ‘Det var bare å gi seg over’ [All he could do was surrender] (2000, 34).

The resignation expressed in the conclusion of the story mirrors the resigned ‘oh well’ of the story’s opening line, giving the impression that nothing is important, that nothing has happened. According to short story theorist Graham Good, a typical feature of the genre is that there is a forewarning of the ending in the opening. In our short story this forewarning is primarily to be found in Leif’s attitude: ‘The novella is a closed form whose end is latent in its beginning: there is usually some initial indication that the end is known, and this enhances the narrative art of holding in suspense what it is’ (Good 1994, 163). In spite of Leif’s initial and final resignation it is evident that his retirement means everything. Thus he acknowledges his hopeless situation and accepts help, which can be seen as positive, as a sign that he will both receive and accept help later also. At the end of the story, Leif is still lying in vomit and in pain on the shower floor. His physical position and situation illustrate and emphasise the undignified circumstances he finds himself in. But help is on the way, he is given attention and treated as an indi-

vidual with a right to assistance and care. However, if we widen our perspective from the shower scene, where Leif out of necessity both receives and accepts help, we may have the following objection: How much help will you get if all you have to offer in your engagement with retirement and old age is an ‘oh well’ and evasive resignation? The way we meet the challenge of old age depends on what Appiah in his book *The Ethics of Identity* calls ‘parameters’ and ‘limits’ (2005, 111). Leif seems poorly equipped, both verbally and emotionally, for the phase in life where old age becomes a ‘limit’ that distances him from his only ‘parameter’.

The genre of the short story offers only a slice of life and thus a limited insight into how things will go with Leif. Will the help he is given bring him no further than to his chair at home, or will his fall lead to him receiving recognition when he no longer takes part in working life and contributes to society? This is left open in the story. The novel *Så høyt var du elsket*, unlike Breiteig’s short story, depicts a longer time frame and a more gradual development. Thus it gives us more information. Breiteig’s short story focuses on the crucial moment when Leif enters a new existential phase, while his memories and thoughts present essential aspects of his background and his previous life. The retrospective elements widen and complement the focus on the present; they create what we might call ‘extended moments’. Breiteig’s short story can therefore be seen in the light of Mikhail Bakhtin’s term ‘threshold chronotope’, which is the chronotope (from *khronos* ‘time’ and *topos* ‘space’) of crisis and turning points (Bakhtin 1997, 157). Leif finds himself physically and mentally in a situation of existential transition, in a time frame where the present is represented in one crucial moment and where the room represents a central place in Leif’s working life, which turns out to have been his *life*. It is in the shower and the changing room that he has chatted with colleagues after a hard day throughout a long working life. The daily fellowship he has experienced in this room stands in contrast to his attempt to shower alone, an attempt that is first interrupted by a cleaner he doesn’t know and then thwarted by his back pains and vomiting. The threshold chronotope is the time frame that is most emotionally charged, which is accentuated by the humiliation Leif experiences in this moment.

Humiliation can be regarded as the antithesis of dignity. Although the humiliation of the situation increases under the gaze of the anonymous cleaner, the boy also shows respect by offering and calling for assistance. But how could Leif’s transition to retirement have been made more dignified? Is it Leif’s fault? Is it the individual alone who is responsible for creating a dignified retirement and old age? There are no easy answers to this. But Leif seems poorly equipped for old age, since his work has been his life, while towards the end it has also been too

hard, impairing his health. Leif embarks on his retirement both physically and mentally impaired.

HOW TO NON-PRIORITISE DIGNITY

‘Eldre er svært forskjellige fra hverandre. Det finnes ingen gruppe i befolkningen som er mer ulike enn nettopp eldre’ [Old people are very different from each other. There is no segment of the population that are more varied than the old], argues age researcher Linn-Heidi Lunde in a letter to the newspaper *Morgenbladet*. Here she criticises Runar Bakken for not putting more emphasis on ‘alderdommens mangfold og de store individuelle variasjonene i helse, funksjon, interesser, ønsker og behov’ [the diversity of old age and the great individual variations in health, function, interests, desires and needs], a perspective that Lunde stresses as being the most important (Lunde 2015). In an age when new generations of old people have better health and economy, as well as a higher level of education than ever before, this is increasingly apparent. Healthy old people make up the majority (cf. Lunde 2015). I would therefore argue that the monolithic treatment of the old, as well as what we might call the monolithic nursing home, is worthy neither of our old people nor of our welfare society. ‘Det vi trenger, er først og fremst nyanterte bilder og perspektiver på alderdom og hva det vil si å eldes i vår samtid’ [What we need first and foremost are nuanced descriptions of and perspectives on old age and what the process of ageing means in our time], says Lunde (2015). Literature can offer that, for, as the editors of the anthology *Syg litteratur* [Sick literature] point out in the preface: ‘Litteraturen tilbyder en erkendelse og oplevelse, som vi ikke kan indhente på andre måter’ [Literature offers a cognition and an experience that cannot be obtained elsewhere] (Mai et al. 2016, 9).

Så høyt var du elsket tells the story of the middle-aged documentary filmmaker Emil and his father, Viktor, a 84-year-old retired doctor who until now has lived up to the modern ideal of an active, energetic old age. The action of novel starts with Viktor experiencing his first stroke. After repeated strokes he goes into decline, becoming a contrast to his former self and requiring assistance and care from both his family and from society. The respected and good-looking doctor is reduced to being an old man in need of nursing, a situation conducive to neither the respect, the recognition or the admiration that Viktor is accustomed to.

Unlike in Breiteig’s short story ‘Ingenting hendt’, the ageing Viktor is a secondary main character, while the Emil is the primary main character from whose perspective the story is told. Thus Viktor’s story is filtered through and coloured by the son’s emotional experience of his father’s ageing and decline. And while we

meet Breiteig's Leif at the point when he is starting life as a pensioner, Viktor has been one for some time. Thus Leif and Viktor face very different challenges, but nonetheless both caused by ageing: Leif has to find out how to live a good life as a pensioner without routines and a steady job. Viktor has to tackle the transition from healthy, well functioning pensioner to a sick person requiring nursing.

After his strokes Viktor suffers from kidney failure, arthritis, paranoia and anxiety. His son tries to secure him a place in a nursing home, but the bureaucratic judgement is that Viktor is not sick enough. The novel opens with Emil being woken by a telephone call from the hospital. His father has been taken ill, mostly likely with a stroke (Frobenius 2011, 5–7). Having arrived at the hospital, Emil is in an emotional crisis as he waits for the doctor. An old man in a zimmer frame shows concern and strokes his cheek: “Ikke gråt, gutten min,” sa han trøstende. [...] “Er det doktor Jansen du venter på? [...] Jansen er en bra mann,” sa han og kreket seg nedover korridoren på de knoklete beina’ [‘Don’t cry, lad’, he comforted. [...] . ‘Is it Dr Jansen you’re waiting for? [...] Jansen’s a good man’, he said and staggered off down the corridor on his bony legs] (Frobenius 2011, 12–13). However, the doctor who turns up is the opposite of Dr Jansen – Erik Velland, an athletic, stocky and muscular young doctor barely thirty years of age who summarily presses Emil’s hand and talks in a dismissive tone of voice accompanied by clichés like [d]et er jo ikke uvanlig for en mann i hans alder’ [it’s not unusual for a man of his age]. Emil counters by asking ‘Hva har alderen hans med saken å gjøre?’ [What’s his age got to do with it?]. But the doctor looks down at his notes, saying that he cannot tell him anything until he has studied the brain scans ‘some time during the course of the day’ (Frobenius 2011, 16). Thus the doctor remains non-committal, correctly offering neither unfounded promises nor estimations. But at the same time the doctor ignores the relative’s need for information. His unaccommodating attitude frustrates Emil:

‘Noe kan du vel si,’ fortsatte Emil utålmodig. ‘Kommer dere til å operere?’

Legen strøk hendene gjennom det gylne håret, skjøv det vekk slik at øyebrynene som tidligere hadde skjult seg under hårluggen, nå kom tydeligere til syne. Disse mørke og uvanlig tett sammenvokste øyebrynene ga den unge legen et anstrøk av utvilsom maskulin autoritet, som Emil først ikke hadde lagt merke til. Et øyeblikk virket det som om legen ville bekrefte spørsmålet, eller muligens avkrefte det, men så kikket han som ved en innskytelse til siden, inn på rommet hvor Viktor lå utstrakt, som livløs, på sengen, og straks ombestemte han seg:

‘Som sagt: Vi vet ikke ennå,’ sa han, og nå hadde blikket hans fått noe kjølig og desinteressert over seg.

‘Er det ...,’ begynte Emil og kjente at stemmen skalv av opphisselse. ‘Er det livstruende?’

Et nedlatende lite smil, som den unge legen selv sikkert regnet for å være omsorgsfullt, trakk over leppene hans.

‘Ethvert hjerneslag er alvorlig, særlig i hans alder. Vi får bare vente og se. Dessverre er det ikke mer jeg kan si til deg nå. Jeg har andre pasienter ...,’ sa han og begynte å gå nedover korridoren.

‘Hei! Jeg er ikke ferdig. Jeg har flere spørsmål!’

Legen gikk uanfektet videre, treskoene klapret lett mot linoleumsdekket.

‘Han var også lege en gang!’ ropte Emil etter ham.

Den hvitkleddede snudde seg ikke.

‘Og dessuten elsker jeg den fyren!’

[‘Surely you can say something’ continued Emil impatiently. ‘Are you going to operate?’]

The doctor ran his fingers through his fair hair, pushing it aside so his eyebrows, previously hidden under his fringe, became clearly visible. His dark and unusually close-set eyebrows gave the young doctor an unmistakable touch of masculine authority that Emil had not noticed at first. For a moment it seemed that the doctor would answer affirmatively, or perhaps negatively, but then, as if by impulse, he glanced into the room where Viktor lay stretched out and apparently lifeless on the bed, and immediately changed his mind:

‘As I said: we don’t know yet,’ he said, and now his expression had acquired a cool indifference.

‘Is it ...’ Emil began, and felt his voice shake with agitation. ‘Is it life-threatening?’

An overbearing smile, which perhaps was intended to be consolatory, passed over the young doctor’s lips.

‘Every stroke is serious, particularly at his age. We’ll have to wait and see. I’m afraid there’s nothing more I can say to you now. I have other patients...’ he said and began walking off down the corridor.

‘Hoi! I’m not finished yet. I have more questions!’

The doctor continued down the corridor without responding, his wooden clogs clattering lightly on the linoleum floor.

‘He was a doctor too once!’ Emil shouted after him.

The white-clad figure didn’t turn.

‘And besides, I love him that man!’

(Frobenius 2011, 16–17).

Viktor's collapse becomes his son's crisis as well as his own. After the introductory chapter in which the main crisis is initiated, we are presented with background information that tells us more about who Viktor is, what sort of life he has lived and still lives, what a complex man he was and is – none of which the doctor Erik Velland shows any understanding of or respect for in his clichés about 'at his age' and his banalities about having other patients – an understandable reaction seen from the perspective of a doctor who must prioritise and relate rationally to every case, but still not a respectful way to deal with patients and relatives.

During his first night at the hospital, Viktor doesn't wake up and Emil is sent home in the early morning. But it occurs to him: 'Jeg gikk fra sykehuset før han våknet og forlot ham der, og det streifet meg ikke at han ikke ville like å våkne alene og ikke vite hvor han var. Hvorfor hadde han gjort det? Betraktet han allerede faren som død?' [I left the hospital before he woke and left him there, and it didn't occur to me that he wouldn't like waking up alone, not knowing where he was. Why had he done it? Did he regard his father as dead already?] (Frobenius 2011, 34). Emil shows and feels great solicitude, returning to the hospital at around twelve o'clock to sit and watch his sleeping father. It is Sunday. No doctors are on duty. Nobody knows anything. Nothing is happening. Emil wonders and waits, wanting and expecting something to happen. After all, his father is in hospital. 'De så på ham og smilte og ristet på hodet. Ingen visste noe som helst. Ingen plan var lagt. Alle ventet på resultatene. "Skal dere operere?" "Det er søndag," sa sykepleierne' [They looked at him, smiled and shook their heads. Nobody knew anything at all. There was no plan. Everybody was waiting for the results. 'Are you going to operate?' 'It's Sunday,' said the nurses] (Frobenius 2011, 37). On Sundays only the most prioritised and necessary tasks are done. By choosing Sunday, Frobenius underlines how Emil has to wait for something to happen to his non-prioritised old father. Emil sees this low priority as being related to his father's age. But it could also be interpreted positively – according to the hospital's assessment, waiting until Monday will have no negative consequences for his father's health.

THE DEMAND FOR ACTIVITY AND IMPROVEMENT

Throughout our lives we are accustomed to recovering from illness, to always being on the way somewhere, to always having the possibility of improvement. But when does that stop? When progression is what you are used to and expect, regression can be existentially difficult to tackle, even though everyone knows it is part

of the ageing process. What does regression do to a person? ‘Nå går jeg like bra som før’ [Now I’m walking as well as before] says Viktor happily when recovering from his stroke (Frobenius 2011, 71). One inevitably compares one’s present condition to what one could do before. But everyone reaches a point in life where one can no longer do everything one could before. As Runar Bakken points out, the existential space we relate to is defined by prejudices and barriers. As we mentioned before, Foucault calls this ‘the order of things’ (1996), referring to that which is so taken for granted that it first becomes apparent to us when we step out of one order and enter another. In old age it is particularly in relation to health that barriers are broken down: ‘Kroppens aldring innebærer en gradvis reise tilbake til det grenseløse’ [Physical ageing involves a gradual movement back to boundlessness] (Bakken 2014, 28). An old person gradually loses the ability to maintain the order of things. Bakken emphasises that this can apply both to the old person’s body and to his or her immediate environment (2014, 27), but it can more precisely be said to apply to *everything* concerning the physical, cognitive and social spheres.

Viktor starts by wanting to remain the way he was, but shifts to not caring, not wanting things at all: His son, who wants his father to get well, says ‘Du skal trene. Spise godt. Hvile’ [You must exercise. Eat well. Rest]. Viktor answers ‘Why?’, before adding:

‘Jeg vet ikke om jeg vil bli frisk. Jeg har ikke lyst til å være en frisk gamling som alle nikker og smiler til som om jeg var et barn. En gammel friskus. Det er motbydelig. Jeg er ingen dokke dere kan plukke opp og kikke på og slenge fra dere igjen. Ikke noe leketøy. Jeg vil ikke repareres. Rehabiliteres. Jeg vil ikke være sånn.’ ‘Du prater tull.’ ‘Der har du det igjen,’ spyttet Viktor. ‘Du snakker til meg som om jeg var en snørrunge. Som om mine synspunkter ikke kan ilegges noen særlig vekt.’

[I’m not sure I want to get well. I don’t want to be the healthy oldie that everyone nods and smiles to as if he were a child. The old trooper. It’s disgusting. I’m not a doll that you can pick up and look at and then throw away again. I’m not a toy. I don’t want to be repaired. Rehabilitated. I don’t want to be like that. ‘You’re talking nonsense.’ ‘There you go again,’ Viktor snarled. ‘You talk to me as if I were a brat. As if my points of view don’t deserve to be listened to.’

(Frobenius 2011, 126)

Viktor is in rebellion, he doesn't want to get well just so he won't be a nuisance to his son. He already feels awful and wants to choose his own way of being so: 'Det er så mange som vil bestemme hvilken måte jeg skal føle meg elendig på. Sykepleierne, legene, hjemmesykepleierne, deg' [Lots of people want to decide the way I should feel awful. The nurses, the doctors, the community nurses, you] (Frobenius 2011, 127). Viktor is home from hospital after a heart attack, and his rebellion comes when his son takes him for a week's stay at Godthaab rehabilitation centre in Bærum. At Godthaab, Viktor behaves quite unlike the responsible and healthy person that the novel has depicted as preceding the decrepit, ageing Viktor. He breaks all the rules at Godthaab: he smokes indoors, he gets drunk, he flirts inappropriately with the staff. The administrator's account of what happened doesn't sound like something Viktor would do, Emil thinks (2011, 125). But then Emil knows Viktor primarily as a father. Moreover, Viktor's behaviour can be interpreted as a rejection of society's and his family's attempt to make him what he was before, and also as a sign that Viktor has accepted his new situation and now sees life differently. Thus he doesn't see the point of rehabilitation, training and activities deemed by others to be healthy and sensible.

Breiteig's Leif, who is trying to avoid the ritual farewell that marks and emotionalises his transition to retirement, also shows signs of having accepted his situation, as he turns the shower up to the red and feels his skin being gradually numbed by the heat and a comfortable quivering spreading through his body. 'Det var som om dampen hyllet et slør omkring ham, en kokong som stadig ble spunnet tykkere. Det gjorde ikke lenger noe at det var over, at det var i ferd med å gli bort fra ham, det lille han hadde klamret seg til i alle disse årene. Det var helt greit' [It was as if the steam enveloped him in a veil, a cocoon that was being spun ever thicker. It didn't matter anymore that it was over, that it was about to slip away from him, the little he'd clung to through all these years. It was okay.] (Breiteig 2000, 32). At the moment when he seems to be accepting the situation, he falls. (2000, 33). Perhaps it is the heat, his back or his body. But it could also be the situation, or both, that cause him to fall. Self-reconciliation and acceptance can be satisfactory ways of dealing with retirement and ageing. Accepting a situation can help to make it more dignified. But even so, it is a complex upheaval and termination that each individual will tackle in their own way and that can never be unambiguously simple and dignified. Becoming a pensioner means that a large part of life is over forever. That can result in a feeling of both freedom and emptiness.

Emil calls rehabilitation institutions 'eldreomsorgens krem' [the cream of geriatric care], while he compares nursing homes with rancid butter. At Godthaab, his

father is ‘innlemmet i en privilegert, døsigg omsorg som ville rense ham – for et eller annet – og sende ham ut igjen i samfunnet som en veltilpasset eldre person’ [included in a privileged, drowsy care that aims to cleanse him – of something or other – and send him back into society as a well adjusted old person] (Frobenius 2011, 127). Viktor is confronted with the demand to get well again and the belief that activity always leads to something good. When we get old and seriously ill, we are especially confronted with three perspectives formulated by geriatrician Peter F. Hjort: *the eternity perspective* (‘I’ll never be well again’), *the dependence perspective* (‘I’ll be dependent on the help of others’) and *the outsider perspective* (‘I’ll be excluded from the wider (healthy) community’) (Hjort 2010, 24–25). Then activity can be a suitable remedial measure. However, a demand for activity can also be experienced as a personal infringement or a mistake (Bakken 2014, 130; Bakken 2015).

The demand for, or expectation of, activity touches on a central problem, predicated as it is on the notion that improvement is expected and desired, and thus that activity is positive. But when does it stop being so, and who is to decide? The question of who decides has implications for the old person’s degree of dignity. We all want to be self-reliant and independent, we want to decide over our lives. Indeed, it is something demanded by society. ‘Målet om å bo hjemme til tross for stor hjelpeløshet, er blitt et mantra i eldreomsorgen. Det er selvfølgelig sterke økonomiske incentiver til dette’ [The aim of living at home has become a mantra in geriatric care. Of course, there are strong economic incentives for this] says Ildri Kjørseth (2014, 29). Throughout the 1980s and 90s there was an increased emphasis on rehabilitation. The old and infirm were to be given training, even where the potential for improvement was small. So-called activity theory, developed during the 1960s, helped to consolidate this view (Tornstam 1994; Kjørseth 2014, 29). The claim of activity theorists that a good old age implies and presupposes activity has influenced attitudes to geriatric care, as well as old people’s attitudes to themselves (Kjørseth 2014, 29). But Viktor refuses to conform. After three days his son receives a call from the medical administrator. Viktor has been smoking, drinking, flirting and making sexual advances on several young female members of staff. Now he has gone home in a taxi. At home his son finds him together with a friend, drinking and enjoying some jazz. They drink a toast to old age and want to live, preferring to enjoy it as best they can rather than desperately counteract regression with training and a healthy lifestyle (Frobenius 2011, 129–133). This is their rebellion both against what the welfare state has to offer and against the son’s well meant, but perhaps also selfish, efforts and exertions.

SOCIETY'S NO-WIN PROJECTS

Viktor's name implies victory. Much of what Viktor has achieved in life, like his son, his work and his career, can be seen as victories. But in old age and infirmity there is not much left of the stereotypically victorious. For every victory there is generally a defeat for someone else. In fact, Viktor survives through the whole novel and in a sense is victorious every time Emil and the reader thinks his number has come up. The novel is thus an alternative contribution to the debate in general as well as to the critical article that Frobenius himself wrote in *Aftenposten* on 20th February 2006, before the novel was published, an article that is actually included in the novel (see Frobenius 2011, 156–159). However, in the novel the article has been somewhat revised. For example, the real father is 92 years of age in the newspaper article, not 84–85, as in the novel. The real article and the one in the novel illustrate the autobiographical background of the novel. In the novel, Frobenius portrays an old man who is still alive, still requiring dignity in his life situation and treatment. Thus the novel is an extension or a literary continuation of the article. Its agenda leaves an imprint on the novel, as in the scene where Emil hears an item on the radio and reflects over the position of old people in pre-modern as compared to modern society (see Frobenius 2011, 141–142). The novel obviously shows more sides of the issue than the article, and it shows us human vulnerability. In that way, it is an essential source of insight into and knowledge about the aged and their next of kin. However, the insistence of the novel makes it overly normative, moralising, explanatory and politicised. In some passages complex situations and issues are simplified, undermining the power of the novel. With a less visible agenda, the potential for cognitive engagement with the novel would have been greater.

‘Having honor means being entitled to respect’, Appiah claims (2010, 175). But being entitled to respect doesn't necessarily mean one will be treated, or feel one is treated, with respect. To discover whether a society has an honour problem, we must, according to Appiah, first find out whether and to what extent people in that society *believe* that the individual has the right to be treated with respect. The next step is to find out whether the right to respect is granted on the basis of a set of norms, i.e. a form of honour code. ‘An honor code says how people of certain identities can gain the right to respect, how they can lose it, and how having and losing honor changes the way they should be treated [...] Find a society with a code that assigns rights to respect of either kind, and you have found honor’, hevdet Appiah (2010, 175–176). There are many forms of respect, but one of the forms that has a bearing on honour is esteem. ‘One sort of respect that matters involves having a *positive regard* for someone because of their success in meeting

certain standards. We can term this *esteem*. We esteem people who are good at all kinds of things, from skydiving to poetry' (Appiah 2010, 175). But esteem is not necessarily linked to any form of success. Not being able to manage on one's own can undermine a person's self-esteem if it is experienced as degrading or as a loss of freedom. Both Leif and Viktor experience a loss of the esteem they previously achieved through their work.

Another form of respect that has a bearing on a person's honour is what Appiah calls 'recognition respect', the respect one achieves through recognition by virtue of one's position (Appiah 2010, 176). As a being well regarded doctor Viktor enjoyed a high level of respect and honour. For example, his son realises how well liked his father was as a doctor when they meet one of his former patients: 'Jeg vet ikke hva jeg skulle ha gjort uten deg, doktor Uvdal, [...] Jeg er deg evig takknemlig, rett og slett.' Damen tok enda et skritt nærmere Viktor, gikk opp på tå og kysset ham på kinnet' [I don't know what I would have done without you, Dr Uvdal, [...] I'm simply eternally grateful to you.] The woman took another step towards Viktor, stood on tiptoes and kissed him on the cheek] (Frobenius 2011, 105–106). The novel portrays Viktor in the past, drawing particularly on things relating to his career. Unlike Leif, who claims only to have his chair waiting for him when he retires, Viktor wrote teaching books and articles and had his own column in a Saturday paper when he ceased receiving patients (2011, 106). 'Han virket fornøyd med tilværelsen som pensjonist med hjemmekontor, kanskje var dette den beste perioden i livet hans' [He seemed happy with life as a pensioner with his own office at home, perhaps it was the best period of his life] (Frobenius 2011, 106–107). *Expressed* esteem may have been reduced when Viktor finished working as a practising doctor, but age itself has not necessarily had an impact on his esteem and honour. Viktor's case illustrates how this changes, at least in the eyes of public authorities, when Viktor becomes sick and in need of care. Then age becomes a significant variable. In a sense, it is strategically advantageous for this project that Viktor is a former doctor. His previous status makes it easier for his son, and for the novel, to point out the respect and treatment Viktor is entitled to as an individual. Moreover, his status as a doctor makes it easier to see the fall that Viktor experiences from when he retires to when the debilitating processes and illnesses of old age finally catch up with him. But Viktor's story underlines that it is first and foremost his illness and his need for care that determines his price tag. Thus society's structural organisation influences and governs the view of humanity that pertains within public enterprises like the health service.

Age is a crucial variable for whether society can or should invest in providing the best treatment. When Viktor becomes ill, his age becomes a problem – a no-win

project that society cannot prioritise. A home help, some rehabilitation and a short stay in care are all that can be expected. A longer stay in care is only granted when someone is dying. But can and should the welfare state provide long-term care for old people who could manage at home? From a social perspective, gathering well-functioning old people under a regime of good care could in theory be a success, opening for some constructive and creative challenges. But in reality it would just be a form of ghettoisation of the old and regarded as a loss of freedom and a regimentation, as well as a waste of resources on individuals who can manage in their own homes. There would always be problems finding one solution to the question of what the care should consist of, for whom it is intended and from what time. Differentiation would no doubt be required to facilitate flexible solutions.

Appiah underlines that gender is not irrelevant here, adding: ‘Class matters very often, too’ (2010, 62).⁴ Appiah points out also the ‘the tight connection between honor and birth’ (2010, 185). Everyone’s external honour will be influenced by who one is, irrespective of age. Gender and class, but also age and health are variables influencing an individual’s status, and therefore the honour and respect he or she is accorded. The class perspective links the concept of honour more strongly to status and reputation than to respect and dignity (cf. Welsh 2008, ix). Possible class differences therefore play a secondary role when we look at the honour concept as related to old people. However, as a man and as a doctor, Frobenius’s character Viktor does enjoy high social status and class.

Breiteig’s character Leif is also male, but compared with Viktor his profession as an ironworker counts for less in the honour stakes. However, ‘respect isn’t always connected to hierarchy’ (Appiah 2010, 185), as both Leif’s and Viktor’s stories show. The debilitation of old age affects the honour of every individual, both the honour accorded by others and the sense of honour one carries within oneself. An old person, especially a sick one, is placed outside his or her usual setting and role, and is gradually rendered inactive. As we see in Viktor’s case, the greatest impact is from the debilitation arising from age and infirmity. Neither class, gender nor health can compensate for the consequences of ageing. Increasing age is the crucial factor as honour and esteem are inevitably impaired and adjusted over time.

The title *Så høyt var du elsket* refers to the Gospel of John 3,16 which begins ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only son’. Viktor *is* still loved by his

4. In a book I am working on concerning the aged in contemporary Norwegian literature, I investigate possible gender differences. In the material both genders are represented, both among the authors and the fictional characters, but there is a slight majority of women (13 fictional women and 12 female authors against 11 fictional men and 10 male authors).

son. But the title reminds us of Viktor's vanity, of the fact that he will soon belong in the past and that he was 'loved' by society, in the sense of 'valued', while he was still a practising doctor and a resource for the community. The same applies to Leif. As pensioners they are in need of the services society has to offer without necessarily being able to give anything back – they are reduced to individuals it is not worth investing in. They have become a no-win project for society. According to Appiah, your value is determined by your contribution (Appiah 2010, 175). Viktor particularly goes from being the ideal old person to being overtaken by illness and exposed to ageism. However, there are limits to what the welfare state can help an old person with – and it depends, not least, on there being enough people willing to work in the field of geriatric care. As Bakken points out, there are limits to everything, including how much money society can spend on the aged. There are also limits to how much family and volunteers can contribute (Bakken 2014, 139). But what limits can we and should we set while at the same time ensuring the conditions for a dignified old age? And who can and should decide which limits and judgements are reasonable?

THE AFFORDANCE OF OLD AGE

Social inequality, class and gender are variables which particularly influence how old age is experienced and how it develops (Bakken 2014, 71). Viktor and Leif are of the same gender, but from two different classes, demonstrated first and foremost by their differing professions as a doctor and an ironworker. Our prejudices are partly confirmed in the classic stereotypes of the two literary works – Leif is simply a worker and finds no meaning or other identity beyond his work, which, although he himself characterises it as a crappy job (cf. Breiteig 2000, 29), is what he lives for. As a pensioner he becomes an outsider, in contrast to the energetic worker he once was. Like an ant Leif participates reliably and diligently in society, following orders and instructions. Viktor acquires a new role when he becomes ill. Where he was formerly active and conspicuous, he now becomes neither recognised nor reckoned with; he doesn't receive the treatment at least his son thinks he is entitled to and in need of. He is left to his own devices and under his son's supervision until he is so poorly that palliative care is all the health services can offer. The person Viktor becomes and the role he is given as a sick old man stands in stark contrast to the active and attractive doctor.

Nature runs its course and all organic life disintegrates sooner or later. If you don't die early, you will die of old age, and, regardless of what the welfare state or the family can offer in terms of public or private services, old age cannot only be

a positive experience (Bakken 2014, 137–139). The older we get, the greater the discrepancy between our actual age and our experience of it, a process that starts as early as in our thirties (Daatland & Solem 2011). In *La Vieillesse* (The Coming of Age, 1970) Simone de Beauvoir philosophises over the individual's fear of death. Bakken links this fear to the idea of what he calls 'the second childhood' (Bakken 2014, 67). Drawing on studies by Cowgill and Holmes from 1972, he argues that the status and prestige of old people declines concurrently with the modernisation of capitalist society. In a more stable pre-modern society, old age was at some point a golden age⁵ compared with old age in today's society, where it is all the more apparent how alienated and outdated an old person becomes when (s)he quits regular employment. In a society in constant change, the old person is no longer the fount of wisdom or experience in most fields as knowledge, experiences and skills become out of date. '[G]amle mennesker blir derfor velferdsstatens passive og tilsidesatte mottakere av sosial og økonomisk trygghet' [Thus old people become the welfare state's passive and neglected recipients of social and economic welfare] (Bakken 2014, 69; cf. Cowgill and Holmes 1972; Cowgill 1986). To relate this to actual figures from our own times, according to the Norwegian Senior Policy Barometer 2016, 59% of employees over 60 would like to carry on working after they are entitled to a pension. Some factors are especially important for those over 62 who want to continue working. These factors relate to benefits that are to a large extent lost as soon as one retires.

- That there is a good working environment (96%)
- That the work gives increased quality of life (92%).
- That the work is interesting (92%).
- That one has good colleagues (91%).
- That the job helps me feel useful for society (91%).

By comparison only 63% answered that a good salary would be decisive for whether they wanted to continue working.

In a study from 1986, Cowgill compares conditions for the old in pre-modern and industrialised countries, where retirement and ending up in a nursing home is regarded as a social substitute for death and ageism, i.e. age discrimination (cf. Cowgill 1986; Bakken 2014, 69). Viktor and Leif are affected by ageism in differ-

5. But only up to a certain point, of course. There are limits for everything, and in pre-modern times there were some tribal societies where it was common to kill old people, directly or indirectly, as soon as they could no longer contribute in any way but just became an extra mouth to feed. (see Bakken 2014, 34–35).

ent ways. Cowgill argues that age research can promote values that improve the status and role of older people, thus helping to reverse the destruction of social attitudes to the aged and their treatment brought about by modernisation. In same way, I would argue that literary texts can show us both a diversity of old people and a number of pressing issues associated with ageing. The awareness and exemplification that literature can create, can lead to an increase in the status and importance of old people and thus also in the dignity with which they are treated. By making old people visible and arousing sympathy for them, literature can maintain or re-establish some of the honour and dignity that is inevitably undermined when debilitation sets in. The empathy activated by exemplifying old people's vulnerability can foster understanding and respect for the aged. Martha Nussbaum has constantly argued that 'certain moral truths are best expressed in the form of a story' (cf. Aviv 2016). As solicitous and empathetic readers, we understand a human life as 'a complex narrative of human effort in a world full of obstacles' (Aviv 2016). In the words of Anne Marie Mai, literature is 'et virtuelt eksperimenterium, hvor læseren kan leve sig ind i sine egne og sine medmenneskers indre og ydre vilkår og omstændigheder – også dem man ikke på forhånd har nogen anelse om' [a virtual experimentarium where readers can identify with their own and their fellow human beings' inner and outward conditions and circumstances – including those one has no prior knowledge of] (Mai et al. 2016, 11). Literature invites identification, as well as confrontation with, the unknown and the alien. In this way it can increase our understanding and insight, equipping and preparing us in our personal relationships, but also in our social and political relations. However, good literature doesn't present easy answers and simple messages. As the Danish poet Klaus Høeck puts it, it is 'neither true nor false', it is the art of words (cf. Mai et al. 2016, 11). Thus literary texts can widen our horizons, present new and different perspectives.

According to Unni Langås, 'Tekster som tematiserer traumeskapende hendelser, har gjerne et reparerende perspektiv og kan gi ideer til sosiale og politiske handlemåter' [Texts that deal with traumatic experiences often have an ameliorative perspective and can provide ideas for social and political courses of action] (2015, 12). The transition to retirement, and other upheavals that inevitably occur on entry into the third and fourth ages (i.e. at around 65 and 80, respectively, cf. Hjort 2010, 17), can be traumatic experiences for the old person as well as for their next of kin. The word trauma comes from a Greek work meaning 'wound', and etymologically the word can refer to both a wounded body and a wounded mind. According to Collins English Dictionary, a trauma means 1. a powerful shock that may have long-lasting effects and/or 2. any bodily injury or wound. In a modern

context, Langås stresses that a traumatised person is primarily mentally wounded, although physiological and psychological wounds can of course be connected (Langås 2015, [19]). Physical debilitation due to ageing can, for example, cause a trauma if the experience of no longer being able to function, or master what one was previously able to master, is felt to be degrading. The trauma is heightened by the fact that the experience is irreversible. Under normal circumstances, most people become accustomed to constant development, becoming cleverer, safer, better, recovering from illness. It is therefore distressing to experience regression and debilitation instead – even though we all know that this process of winding down and termination is inevitable for all those who achieve an advanced age. Paradoxically, it is something we are supposed to be, and generally are, grateful for.

According to Dag Solstad, literature ages more quickly than other art forms (Hagen 2016, 22). It seems a reasonable assertion, and should be seen in the context of language being in constant development. Literary taste, too, undergoes constant change and influence, as does literary style, fashion and tendency. In this project and this article I have wanted to show how the ageing individual is understood, experienced, treated and portrayed in our society, taking portrayals of the aged in contemporary Norwegian literature as my starting point. However, in spite of the fact that Norwegian welfare society both exacerbates and ameliorates certain aspects of growing old, I would at the same time claim that issues and destinies depicted in our contemporary literature about the aged are not new, but universal and timeless. In her work *La Vieillesse*, Simone de Beauvoir claims that old people are not suitable as the heroes of novels: '[I]f an old man is dealt with in his subjective aspect he is not a good hero for a novel; he is finished, set, with no hope, no development to be looked for' (Beauvoir [1970] 1996, 210). This claim doesn't hold up, neither for today's old people nor the old people portrayed in contemporary literature – it is one-sided and oversimplified. The case is rather that the literature of ageing problematises existential issues that are of general interest, and that demonstrates that ageing doesn't render the human being any less of a human being.

But does the welfare state allow the old person to be fully a human being? I will finish this article by proposing that we don't live in a 'post-honour society'. Particularly in literature that portrays people in the final phase of life, we see how honour is socially rooted and how certain forms of honour cannot be eliminated if we are to experience the last phase of life as dignified and meaningful: the affordance of life in old age. What possibilities and limitations does old age present? In many contexts the individual is reliant on social services that can present both possibilities and limitations. But the ageing individual also has a responsibility.

Appiah points out, for example, how ‘circumstances that one might assume would be merely impediments may be transformed into a positive way of being’ (Appiah 2005, 112). Appiah uses the example of the deaf person who can choose that ‘deafness is not a limit but a parameter’. It is not about ‘trying to overcome a disability’, but rather ‘trying to live successful lives as the hard-of-hearing people that they are. A condition becomes an identity’ (Appiah 2005, 112). Here Appiah touches on a challenge that is relevant to both the ageing individual and the society he or she is part of: how to work continually to create dignified and meaningful experiences of old age.

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14

For honour's sake¹

On honour and gender in Nasim Karim's Izzat

JOHANNE WALLE JOMISKO DE FIGUEIREDO

ABSTRACT This article discusses the problems that arise in the encounter between an intact honour culture (Pakistani) and a weakened honour culture (Norwegian). In the novel *Izzat* (1996) honour performances are largely connected to the question of gender, and de Figueiredo examines particularly the conflict unfolding in the relationship between father and daughter.

KEY WORDS honour culture | conflict | gender | forced marriage

When a family migrates, a whole life is transported across oceans and borders. Whatever they may leave behind, they will always bring with them a set of values and an identity associated to some extent with their culture and origins. Confronted with a new country and a new citizenship, this set of values is not necessarily immediately jettisoned and replaced with another. The attachment to the culture of the old country often remains strong and is part of a person's cultural identity. This feeling of identity is not without its problems. The members of a migrant family often end up adapting to different degrees and at different speeds. Children and adolescents may not feel the same sense of belonging to the old country that adults and old people do and will therefore often identify with their new homeland more quickly and to a greater extent. At the same time, family affiliation and loyalty to parents and grandparents are important. The basis for conflict is particularly great when two very different cultures meet. What challenges do the younger generation encounter when their family's values collide with their own? What if the values in question threaten their freedom and wellbeing? In such cases, especially where loyalty and love are involved, there is a double conflict and a risk of being alienated and ostracised by the cultural communities of both their country of origin and their adopted country.

1. This article is translated by Richard Burgess.

In this article I will examine the issues that arise when an intact honour culture meets one that has become attenuated, taking as my point of departure Nasim Karim's novel *Izzat. For ærens skyld* [For honour's sake] from 1996. In this novel, conceptions of honour are closely connected to issues of gender and this double conflict unfolds especially in the relationship between a father and a daughter. In looking more closely at this double conflict, I will draw especially on the theories of James Bowman and Unni Wikan. On one hand, the conflict stems from the fact that an intact honour culture is a typically male domain where honour is restricted to men. On the other hand, it is precisely this male honour culture that the main character opposes when her affiliation to an attenuated honour culture like the Norwegian one, leads her to assert other norms and values. What is the outcome of this conflict? Could it be said that the novel holds a concept of honour that also includes women? Does a transformation of the concept of honour take place during the course of the novel? If so, in what way?

The two sources I draw on here, James Bowman and Unni Wikan, represent two rather divergent views of honour. Although their definitions and concepts overlap, their basic attitudes to the consequences of honour are quite different. It is necessary to establish these two attitudes before moving on to an analysis, because their different approaches to honour will also colour the present discussion. Unni Wikan is a Norwegian sociologist who has done much research on Islam, the Middle East and Arab cultures. On the basis of her discussions, which I will be quoting from in the following, an understanding of honour is important if we are to grasp the conflicts that arise when 'æressamfunnet møter velferdssamfunnets forståelse av grunnleggende menneskerettigheter' [the honour culture meets the welfare society's understanding of basic human rights] (as expressed on the back cover of *Om ære* [About Honour] 2008). So far this accords with Bowman's theory. He writes that it is crucial to understand the concept of honour in order to understand the conflicts Islamic cultures have with Western cultures, 'where honor has been disregarded or actively despised for three-quarters of a century' (from the back cover of *Honor*, 2006). But while Wikan is consistently critical to honour culture and its consequences for gender equality, welfare and democracy, Bowman wishes for a revitalised honour culture in the West. Bowman is an American writer employed at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, a Washington-based, conservative organisation that gives lectures and publishes texts exploring themes related to society and politics. Their slogan is 'Defending American Ideals' (EPPC, 2017). Bowman relates honour theory to topics like the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Second World War, the 9/11 terror attack and the war in Iraq. When he writes about Western culture, it is primarily American culture he is referring to.

His attitude to women is also different from Wikan's. Bowman associates women with pacifism, which he is highly critical of, and he believes one should be aware of the dangers of women having full participation in the political process (2006, 231). He also argues that modern society should allow for gender-based differentiation. Furthermore, he wants to see a revitalised honour culture where masculine honour incorporates primitive concepts of honour that today exist in subcultures like street gangs (2006, 323). Such attitudes are not shared by Wikan, who, in spite of showing a great appreciation of strong honour cultures, is critical of the patriarchal view of honour we find there. She writes that honour 'historisk sett er koblet med vold og overgrep' [is, historically speaking, linked to violence and abuse] (2008, 15), and there is little sign that she regards this as something requiring revitalisation in the West.

ABOUT THE NOVEL

Izzat. For ærens skyld was published in 1996.² Nasim Karim is a writer and lawyer, and, according to the text on the back cover, her intention with the book was not to focus on one individual case, but to describe the difficult reality that many experience. So rather than aiming to tell one woman's story, it tells several, thus throwing light on important social challenges like forced marriage. The book is a fictionalised account of the author's own experiences – Karim had her own forced marriage annulled in 1995 (Wikan 2008, 249).

In the novel we meet Noreen, who has fled from a forced marriage in Pakistan. A retrospective and thus omniscient first-person narrator reveals an adolescence consisting of cultural conflict, eating disorders, bullying and abuse. The narrative is retrospective and told chronologically, with proleptic touches, e.g. 'if I'd known, I would never have gone' (p. 5). Noreen grows up in Norway and the first half of the book is set there. The child welfare services intervene after the father starts beating her, and she ends up at a children's home. When at the age of seventeen she is reunited with her family, she travels to Pakistan with her father. This turns into a nightmare where suicide attempts and a romantic infatuation lead to her brother, and later her father, maltreating her and forcing her to marry. This happens without her friends, relative and acquaintances in Pakistan intervening. She manages to escape to Norway, thus severing her bonds to her family. The novel is a clear criticism of gender roles in a patriarchal Pakistani honour culture. While Noreen and her father represent opposing views regarding honour, the other char-

2. In my analysis I refer to second edition, published in 2009.

acters – Noreen’s mother, her younger sister Iram and her elder brother Amir – appear rather one-dimensional. Her mother and sister are the weepy and powerless women, while the brother stands as the defender of the traditional honour culture. As such he is a clear antagonist to the norm of the novel.

Karim makes no secret of the fact that she has a clear political and moral message. With its pathos-filled sentences and its in-depth descriptions of Noreen’s emotional life, the rhetoric of the novel can be quite intrusive: ‘Hvordan kan jeg trives med mitt liv, når ensomhetsfølelsen preger hver eneste dag?’ [How can I enjoy my life when every day is full of loneliness?] (p. 68) and ‘De kunne prøve å forstå, og det gjorde de, men de kunne aldri føle smerten’ [They could try to understand, and they did, but they could never feel the pain] (p. 65).

Pathos can have an important role to play in a work written to persuade. Martha Nussbaum writes in *Poetic Justice* that the novel as a genre gives insight into something fundamentally human, even if the main character’s life is quite different from the reader’s:

Novels [...] speak to an implicit reader who shares with the characters certain hopes, fears, and general human concerns, and who for that reason is able to form bonds of identification and sympathy with them, but who is also situated elsewhere and needs to be informed about the concrete situation of the characters (1995, 7).

The novel can be seen as a contribution to ethical literature, i.e. literature that has something to say about right and wrong. Nussbaum states further that ‘[...] novel-reading will not give us the whole story about social justice, but it can be a bridge both to a vision of justice and to the social enactment of that vision’ (1995, 12). An optimal reading of *Izzat* would thus lead to the readers, having gained insight into Noreen’s fate, wishing to improve the situation of women in the same predicament. With such an explicit message, the novel’s language and symbolism has a persuasive function rather than a literary one. Clear indications are given of where the sympathy lies and the reader is in no doubt about what Noreen feels. Sentences like ‘Jeg vil ikke leve som dette!’ [I don’t want to live like this!] (p.122) and ‘Jeg har aldri følt meg så liten og fornedret’ [I’ve never felt so denigrated] (p. 111) recur in the novel. Noreen’s parting challenge underlines this: ‘Det er ett spørsmål jeg vil stille til de familiene som har gjort – eller vil gjøre – noe slikt mot sine døtre, et spørsmål dere vanskelig kan komme utenom: HVA OVERLOT DERE OSS TIL?’ [There’s one question I’d like to ask the families that have done this – or are going to do this – to their daughters, a question you simply can’t evade:

WHAT DID YOU LEAVE FOR US? HUME KIS KE SAHAREH CHORAH THA? (p. 144). The challenge is directed at an imagined reader who has not understood how destructive honour culture can be for the woman. What is perhaps obvious for a Western reader (for example, that a forced marriage is experienced as insulting), is perhaps not so obvious for those Karim is trying to influence with her novel, and clear, pathos-based rhetoric can therefore be appropriate.

It is also worth discussing whether the book is in fact a novel. It depicts actual events, as Karim has openly admitted, and in many ways has more in common with a documentary or an autobiography. Calling it a novel protects the author, since the case is sensitive and personal, but the language, the narrator and the thematic realism are such that the book could just as well be read as a documentary. A documentary book is often a literary narrative about personal experiences. Autobiographies written by young people are often concerned with a particular event, the event that defines the book, with the person's upbringing and past used as a kind of explanatory backdrop for the event. Another example of the genre is Malala Yousafzai's memoir *I Am Malala: The Story of the Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban* (2013), which deals with her experiences in a country where the Taliban were gaining increasing control until she protested, nearly losing her life in the process. Here the defining event is the day she was shot on the school bus in 2012. For Karim, the defining event is her forced marriage and, not least, the fact that she manages to escape and have the marriage annulled in court. She gets to tell her story and can thereby help and inspire others in similar situations. Authors like Karim and Malala have a desire to tell their story and inspire others to fight for freedom of speech and women's rights. Using the genre label 'novel' doesn't make the intention any less obvious in this case. The book can also be read as a contribution to the political debate about the social position of Pakistani/Muslim women and it can provide an important voice in political discussions concerning immigration.

The reception of the novel has for the most part been concerned with the events it depicts; in other words, it has been political rather than literary in focus. The daily newspaper *Aftenposten* writes, for example: 'vi har å gjøre med et meget ungt menneske som ønsker å oppnå forandring. [...] Boken glir rett inn i den norske debatten om gjensidig respekt' [We are dealing with a very young person who wants to change things [...] The book is highly relevant to the current Norwegian debate about mutual respect] (Brekke 1996, 24). The reviewer of another daily, *Dagbladet*, writes that it is 'en av de viktigste bøkene som utgis denne våren. Den burde bli pensum i så vel skoler som hjem i Norge' [one of the most important published this spring. It ought to be required reading in both schools and homes in

Norway] (Eide 1996, 33). In other words, we are to learn from it. *Izzat* went straight to fifth place in daily newspaper VG's book ranking and sold well (Rehman et al. 1996, 48–49). The book led to Karim being awarded a prize for gender equality in Buskerud county in 1996. She writes openly about a subject that has been something of a taboo in Norwegian-Pakistani circles. The book also resulted in a fatwa being issued against her so that she had to go into hiding and live at a secret address. When the novel was published, forced marriage was still relatively new as an issue in Norwegian courts. In 1993 Norway became the first country in the world to outlaw forced marriage (Wikan 2008, 248). Wikan writes about the first court case concerning forced marriage in modern Norwegian history in which a Norwegian girl, 'Sima', was forced to marry in Pakistan but managed to escape to Norway (2008, 248). Through *Izzat*, Karim helped to throw light on forced marriage as a social problem. Unfortunately, according to Wikan, several politicians from the immigrant community denied any knowledge of forced marriage in Pakistan. She also claims that the problem was categorically denied at the highest level until recently (2008, 249). Although Karim's court case took place in the 1990s, and Wikan's book was published in 2008, forced marriage remains a problem that is often not discovered or not dealt with. There are many hidden statistics here. The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs reports that there are no reliable figures for how many people in Norway are subjected to forced marriages. In 2014 the Expert Team for the prevention of forced marriage and genital mutilation assisted in 93 cases in which forced marriage was carried out and 70 cases in which it was considered there was a danger of forced marriage (BUFDIR, 2016).

ABOUT CONCEPTIONS OF HONOUR AND GENDER

The American writer James Bowman defines honour as '[...] the good opinion of the people who matter to us, and who matter because we regard them as a society of equals who have the power to judge our behavior' (2006, 4). This society of equals can be called an honour group. But in an honour group like the one operating in *Izzat*, we find not equality, but hierarchy. The honour group consists primarily of men in the same family or the same caste. The role of the woman in the honour group is to protect or renounce the man's honour. Writer and professor Kvame A. Appiah emphasizes that an honour code doesn't have to apply equally to everyone: 'An honor code requires specific behaviour of people of certain identities: different identity, very often, different demands' (2010, 176). The honour code says something about who has honour, how it can be achieved and how it can be

lost. To understand how the novel relates to honour and gender, we need to define the honour code of the community and the individual. Noreen describes honour like this:

Æresbegrepet, 'izzat' på urdu, betyr enormt for menneskene i mitt miljø. I deres samfunn er du ingenting uten ære. Har du ære får du respekt, og jo mer ære du har, jo større omgangskrets og respekt får du. Uten ære blir du sett på som en fallen person uten moral, og du står uten respekt og venner. Dermed betyr tap av ære også tap av venner, familie og respekt (s. 7).

[The concept of honour, 'izzat' in Urdu, has enormous significance for people in my community. In their society, you are nothing without honour. If you have honour, you have respect, and the more honour you have, the greater your circle of friends and the more respect you have. Without honour you are regarded as a fallen person without morals, and you are left without respect and friends. Losing honour therefore means losing friends, family and respect (p. 7).

We can see from this that honour is not synonymous with respect, but respect can help strengthen honour. Neither is it the same as morality, but someone who has lost honour lacks morals in the eyes of others. It is also worth noticing that she writes 'their society', rather than 'our society'. She is alien to the concept of honour in a culture she otherwise identifies with. Later in the book she describes how girls from Pakistan are victims of honour culture. Here she calls Pakistan 'min del av verden' [my part of the world], which illustrates a sense of belonging. She also includes Iranians, Turks, Moroccans and Indians in the honour group. Although it is attitudes to women specifically in Pakistan the novel is critical of, affiliation to the group depends on gender attitudes rather than nationality: 'Det samme æresbegrepet, izzat, blir en trussel mot dem. Jentene gråter mens foreldrene sier "vi er nødt"' [The same concept of honour co, izzat, is a threat to them. The girls weep while the parents say 'we have no choice'] (s. 9).

Social anthropologist Unni Wikan's theory is the one that best defines the honour culture we encounter in the novel: 'Menn har ære, kvinner har skam [...] I noen samfunn anses kvinner endog å være uten ære. I kraft av sitt kjønn har de ingen selvstendig ære. Kvinner inngår i sine menns ære, de bærer i seg menns ære' [Men have honour, women have shame [...] In some societies women are even seen as being without honour. By virtue of their gender, they have no independent honour. Women are part of their menfolk's honour, they carry their menfolk's honour within them] (2008, 9). To understand the concept 'izzat', it is not enough to

simply translate it. To understand the logic of honour in many non-Western societies, we must, according to Wikan, employ two honour concepts, *namus* and *shirif* (Turkish, Persian and Kurdish): *Namus* is the honour you either have or don't have – it cannot be increased, only be lost or preserved. *Shirif* is the honour you might have more or less of and it is similar to social position, reputation or prestige (Wikan 2008, 12). *Izzat* is the same as *namus*. This can partly explain the father's motivation when he breaks with his own morals to preserve his honour – 'mister du *namus*, mister du alt' [If you lose honour, you lose everything] (2008, 12). But the father's honour is also connected to *shirif* – in Pakistan everything can be bought for money, he tells Noreen, and her father is wealthy. He also fears losing his wealth, since he has experienced poverty. However, he doesn't hesitate in giving Noreen financial support. For example, he tells the bank manager in the town where Noreen is living that 'Dersom Noreen trenger penger, må du gi henne det. Og dersom hun ikke har penger igjen på sin egen konto må du bare gi henne penger fra min. Penger må ikke få være noe problem for henne' [If Noreen should need money, you must give it to her. And if she doesn't have money in her own account, you must just give her money from mine. Money must not be a problem for her] (p. 77). He has honour to his credit in both senses of the word, but fear of dishonour is stronger than fear of a loss of reputation. Wikan argues that dishonour is central to an understanding of this society: 'Samfunn der æren står så sentralt at den overskygger livet [...] kan ikke forstås med mindre vanære legges til grunn som begrep. [...] et begrep om ærens absolutte bortfall: ingen ære' [Societies where honour has such a central position that it overshadows life [...] cannot be understood without giving the concept of dishonour a fundamental position [...] a concept of the absolute loss of honour: no honour] (2008, 12)

Izzat – the central honour concept of the novel – signifies a male, patriarchal honour culture that for Noreen exists in other parts of the world than Norway. It doesn't concern her, but 'the others'. However, gradually it dawns on her that her behaviour as a woman is crucial to this honour culture, that her father's honour depends on her own acquiescence to the male collective and the way she interacts with men. Wikan calls this 'sex honour'³ and argues that this sort of honour is 'selve aksen som livet sentrerer rundt' [the very axis around which life revolves] (2008, 17). James Bowman refers to David Pryce-Jones⁴, who argues that, in what he calls 'pre-Islamic' honour culture, shame and honour define the roles of women and men.

3. She has borrowed the term from the Danish-Syrian-Palestinian writer and politician Nasr Khader.

4. Pryce-Jones, David. 2002. *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

Honor for the female consists in modesty and faithfulness, the bearing of children [...]. Immodesty and faithfulness forfeits her honor and shames the men in the family in whose keeping this honor is vested. Men must put the lapse right at all costs, if need be killing the dishonored woman (2006, 27).

For Noreen the consequence of this honour culture is forced marriage. She is aware that forced marriage occurs in her culture, but has no idea that it will have any bearing on her. It is uncertain whether forced marriage has been her father's plan the whole time and whether that was the reason he chose to take her to Pakistan. It is hinted at already in the second chapter when her father angrily exclaims: 'Det er din skyld at vi er her. Hadde du ikke gjort som du gjorde, hadde jeg ikke behøvd å ta deg med til Pakistan' [It's your fault we're here. If you hadn't done what you did, I wouldn't have had to take you to Pakistan] (p. 19). The father's accusation, which seems to come from nowhere, implies that he knew the whole time that the trip to Pakistan would be fateful for Noreen. She also knows that her uncles expect her to marry, but it is when she tries to commit suicide for the third time that her father makes the journey and the process is initiated (p. 100). Her father first pressures her and then finally orders her: 'Du må gifte deg! Det er mitt siste ord' [You must marry. That is my last word] (p. 118). This followed by torture and violence. The wedding is a nightmare: '300 mennesker står og ser på et lik som bringes inn av sin far. Ingen gjør noe for å hjelpe meg, men alle vet at jeg blir tvunget til dette' [300 people stand watching a corpse being brought in by its father. No one does anything to help me, but everyone knows I'm being forced to do this. (p. 118). The description of the wedding is one of the most shocking in the book. Although honour killing doesn't occur in *Izzat*, it is likely that this would have been the consequence if Noreen had not finally acquiesced. Forced marriage is not murder, but the parallels are striking – in one sense her life is ended. There is no sign that there is anything she could have done to avoid the situation. Although she is chaste and avoids contact with men, she is not 'modest' – her behaviour is at odds with the honour code because she speaks her mind and is independent. She reflects over this herself: 'At jeg tenker annerledes enn pakistanske kvinner er tydelig. Jeg oppfører meg annerledes, tenker og sier ting som provoserer mennene her – og jeg må innrømme at jeg av og til gjør det med vilje, og liker det' [It is evident that I think differently to Pakistani women. I behave differently, I think and say things that provoke the men here – and I have to admit that I sometimes do it purposely, and enjoy it] (p. 82). She constantly stretches the boundaries, but first oversteps them when she falls in love with an American. What triggers the violence and rage is that she confides in her brother, Amir. Now

Noreen fully realises the cultural differences at play: ‘Jeg forelsket meg i en gutt jeg hadde vekslet to setninger med og sett på avstand noen ganger. Jeg ville aldri gått lenger enn det av hensyn til min fars ære. Likevel var det utilgivelig, og måtte møtes med en reaksjon’ [I fell in love with a boy I exchanged two words with and seen from a distance a few times. I would never have gone any further than that out of consideration for my father’s honour. Even so, it was unforgivable and had to be punished] (p. 103). Until then she had been used to making her own decisions, whether it was her repeated suicide attempts or the decision to contact the child welfare service.

Wikan argues that ‘vold, terror og æresdrap ikke skyldes islam, men bunner i forstokkede tradisjoner som holder mennesket fanget i en slags kollektiv vilje i enkelte samfunn, et ærens imperativ’ [violence, terror and honour killing are not due to Islam, but stem from hidebound traditions that in certain societies keep the individual trapped in a form of collective will, an imperative of honour] (2008, 19). It is important to emphasise that the honour culture *Izzat* provides insight into is not a religious phenomenon that can be linked to Islam or other religious beliefs. Religion doesn’t play a crucial role in the conflict. Noreen is a Muslim who prays to God right up until the day she is forced to marry and loses her faith. Bowman describes honour as a sort of cultural currency, rather than something religious: ‘Honor is the cultural currency in which the ordinary people of Pakistan, like those in other honor cultures, trade [...] Although religion has been tied up with it since the seventh century, it is not religious in origin’ (2006, 19). The honour code is the result of a strong honour culture. Wikan writes that ‘Æreskulturer har sin opprinnelse i samfunn der staten sto svakt og slekten eller klanen borget for medlemmenes velferd og trygghet’ [Honour cultures have their origin in societies where the state was weak and the family or clan guaranteed the welfare and security of its members] (2008, 266). On this basis she mentions several reasons why this honour culture can flourish when confronted with a modern welfare state: it gives power to men, it maintains control through fear, it legitimises violence and allows the interests of the collective to take priority over freedom of the individual. ‘Kontroll over kvinner er spesielt viktig fordi kvinner føder barn’ [Control of women is particularly important because women give birth to children] (2008, 267). It is no coincidence that Noreen is married to a relation, thus maintaining her father’s legacy within the honour group. Cultural conflict can also help us understand why her brother, who is, after all, well integrated, chooses to identify with such an honour culture rather than rebel against it. As Wikan points out: ‘I en situasjon der mange menn med innvandrerbakgrunn er marginalisert, avmaskulinisert [...] blir æreskulturen en kilde til identitet’ [In a situation where many men from immigrant

backgrounds are marginalised, demasculinised [...], honour culture becomes a source of identity] (2008, 267).

THE TYRANNY OF THE FACE

According to Wikan, forced marriage is connected to the politics of integration: 'Kontroll med ungdoms ekteskap intensiveres i mange grupperinger i vår tid, og foreldre er under sterkt press [...]. Ekteskap er blitt en migrasjonsstrategi, og tvangsekteskap føyer seg inn i denne formelen' [In many groups, control over young people's marriages has intensified in recent years, and parents are under a great deal of pressure [...] marriage has become a migration strategy, and forced marriages are part of this formula] (2008, 256). A deeper insight into the father's integration process might give greater understanding of the pressure he is under. He has lived in Norway for 20 years and has a good command of Norwegian. According to conversations Noreen overhears, some young people call him a 'pakkis' [Paki]. He also experiences that a colleague at work refuses to cooperate with him – and looks at him with hatred in his eyes (p. 22). Whatever the pressure that arises from being in an integration situation, forced marriage in this case is primarily the result of a fear of dishonour. The father's fear of condemnation by the family is expressed in his question: 'Hvordan skal jeg vise ansiktet mitt for familien min?' [How can I show my face for my family?] (s. 19). His fear is connected to the fact that Noreen, having lived at a children's home, has become more Western in outlook. She doesn't cover her head with a shawl and she admits to saying things that provoke Pakistani men (p. 82).

Her father's betrayal comes as a surprise to Noreen. Throughout her childhood, they have had a close relationship, and she loves him dearly, even towards the end of the novel. Although she is aware of the honour code of her caste and family, she reacts with disbelief when he chooses to follow it. How can it be that a father that until now has showered his daughter with love is suddenly willing to destroy her? For Noreen personally, this is a central question, as well as being an important issue in the discourse concerning honour-based family violence and honour killing. Wikan comments on the duality of honour: 'Ære handler om respekt i egne og andres øyne. Æren har altså både en indre og ytre dimensjon' [Honour is about respect in one's own and others' eyes. Honour has both an inner and an outer dimension] (2008, 13). Noreen's father shows a clear conflict between this inner and outer sense of honour. Although the family's honour is important to him all through the novel, it doesn't get the upper hand until Noreen brings dishonour on him. It seems to cause him pain to batter Noreen and force her to marry, at least as

regards the inner dimension. He repeatedly bursts out in fits of weeping (p. 115, 118, 120, 139) and appears genuinely distraught. When Noreen meets him again after having fled and annulled her marriage, his physical decline is striking: ‘Han virker ti år eldre, og er blitt mye tynnere. Ti år eldre på under et år. Min gud, hva er det som har skjedd med ham?’ [He seems ten years older and is much thinner. Ten years older in less than a year. My God, what’s happened to him?] (p. 138). It also appears that he learns from his mistakes to a certain extent, when he chooses not to let his youngest daughter Iram endure the same fate as Noreen (p. 143). His self-respect, i.e. the inner honour, is jeopardised for example when he uses violence to ‘persuade’ Noreen to marry and thereby strengthen the outer honour. The father is a pious man, he asks God for forgiveness (p.115) and claims that he is acting against his own wishes: ‘Jeg ble tvunget til å gjøre det slik’ [I was forced to do it like that] (s. 112). The father’s inner honour collides in several ways with the outer honour that belongs to the collective and family sphere.

Bowman points out a distinction between honour and ethics:

[...] it is useful to distinguish between honor and ethics. It is sometimes necessary to put loyalty to principle ahead of loyalty to the group, but even the highest-principled whistleblower or informer is likely to find himself regarded as a ‘rat’ and a traitor by the conflicting standards of honor (2006, 4).

Although the father for ethical (as well as personal) reasons doesn’t want to maltreat Noreen and force her to marry, his loyalty to the honour group is stronger than morality. In other words, the outer honour is the stronger. It is almost the object of worship and is associated with the divine in the sentence ‘Pappa ofret meg på ærens alter’ [Dad sacrificed me at honour’s altar] (s. 7). The code functions as a sort of law for him – it is not just about a desire for respect, but also about a deep fear of losing it. In his definition of honour, the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer emphasises the central role played by fear: ‘honor, taken objectively, is the opinion that others have of our value, and taken subjectively, our fear of that opinion’ (sitert i Stewart 1994, 14). Social anthropologist Frank H. Stewart refers to Professor Moritz Liepmann who divides honour into “‘objectified honor”, which is a person’s good reputation’ and “‘subjectified honor”, a person’s sense of their own worth’ (1994, 15). Noreen’s father finds himself in a conflict between these.

It can seem as if it is primarily fear that makes Noreen’s father give the honour code of the collective priority over individual morality – fear of being ostracised, of losing status, of losing face in relation to his family. Bowman links the Islamic

concept of honour to the concept of 'losing face', which is similar to dishonour, loss of honour. (Bowman uses the term 'Islamosphere' in reference to the Islamic world, which thus includes Pakistan.) He refers to the Egyptian Mansour Khalid who argues that 'This 'tyranny of the face' leads an Arab to do everything possible not to show his troubles to those close to him, let alone his enemies' (2006, 27).⁵ So maintaining honour involves appearing unaffected. This would go a long way towards explaining the father's behaviour in the scene where Noreen is battered; he grabs the stick and beats her, and doesn't look sad until he comes into the room where her wounds are being treated (p. 112). The father weeps at night, allowing his conscience to gnaw at him – but he shows no sign of regret to his family in Pakistan. Here Bowman refers to David Pryce-Jones who writes that 'Lying and cheating in the Arab world is not really a moral matter but a matter of safe-guarding honor and status [...]' (2006, 27).⁶ To complain to his family, to ask that things be done another way, to show that his love for Noreen is stronger than his desire for honour – all this would lead to a loss of face. The tyranny of the face holds sway over him.

It is easier to understand his actions if one looks more closely at how his life has developed. He doesn't adapt to his new homeland as easily as his daughter and therefore experiences alienation. He has high status in Pakistan because of caste, money and gender. His caste gives him respect, money gives him opportunities and control, while gender gives automatic status and authority. He loses much of this in Norway. Caste means nothing to Norwegians, his money doesn't represent wealth here. Although his status as father and head of the family gives him authority in the home, this doesn't apply outside it. Representatives of the welfare state, such as teachers, child welfare officers and psychologists have the power to take his daughter away from him, to give her the right to disobey him and thus bring dishonour on his family. In a strict honour culture, losing honour means losing everything, and therefore he stops at nothing to remain this outer honour. It becomes more important than morality and more important than Noreen. Although he experiences regret and grief, it doesn't change his actions. It is also important to emphasise that forced marriage is not the norm in Pakistan either – the father's actions are controversial in both countries. Noreen reflects over this herself:

Innvandrerens ideal er ofte det landet de en gang reiste fra. Det mange ikke tenker på er at de tyve, tredve årene som er gått siden de reiste har det skjedd en

5. Khalid Mansour, 'The Sociocultural Determinants of Arab Diplomacy' i George N. Atiyeh (red.). 1977. *Arab and American Cultures*. Washington: American Enterprise Institute. pp.123–142.

6. Pryce-Jones, David. 2002. *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

del forandringer også i hjemlandet. Folket der tar del i utviklingen, mens de som lever i utlandet kanskje forholder seg til en kultur som er foreldet.

[The ideal for immigrants is often the country they once left. Many of them forget that much has changed in the old country too during the twenty or thirty years since they left. People there have changed with it, while those living abroad perhaps relate to a culture that is obsolete] (p. 62–63).

So the father's concept of honour is not synonymous with Pakistani honour culture – it has been strengthened and made obsolete through his distance from his home country. Even so, we see that the Pakistani members of his family also support his actions. Nobody says anything or tries to help Noreen.

Honour killing and rape are other negative consequences of a strict honour culture, in addition to forced marriage. When a woman's honour is the property of her menfolk, her loss of honour impacts on the menfolk. Bowman reflects over rape and honour killing and argues that such cases (not least the statistics concerning rape in Pakistan) must be seen on the background of cultural honour:

The taint upon the woman's honor remains the same either way. Our individualistic, post-honor sensibility reaches out to the notion of 'consent' in order to explain what otherwise seems incomprehensible. But in honor cultures, a woman's honor belongs to her husband or father, and the dishonor of any sexual contact outside marriage, whether consensual or otherwise, falls upon him exactly alike, since it shows him up before the world as a man incapable of either controlling or protecting her. Dishonor is more like a fatal disease than a moral failing (2006, 18).

Noreen has not been raped. If she had been, it would have been after entering marriage and her family would have regarded it as permissible, and her lack of consent would have had no significance. In fact, both the father and the brother even ask the husband to rape her (p. 124). If she had been raped outside marriage, for example by the American she is interested in, it would be reasonable to suppose that it would have been highly detrimental to her father's honour.

A DOUBLE CONFLICT

As a multicultural person, Noreen faces a double challenge. She is alienated from both Pakistani and Norwegian culture. This is the background on which the double

conflict of gender and honour plays out. Her lack of a cultural foothold gives her a feeling of exclusion and she becomes desperate to fit in. So she does what is required of a woman in Western culture – she puts on a pink dress (p. 20) and she goes on a diet. The notion that a beautiful appearance will lead to greater acceptance in the group can be seen as a pretty universal challenge for women. The pressure to have a perfect body leads to her developing anorexia, triggered by a comment from Turid, a girl whose approbation she yearns for: ‘Noreen, du hadde vært mye penere hvis du hadde vært litt tynnere’ [Noreen, you would be much prettier if you were thinner] (p. 38). What starts as a way of gaining acceptance, ends up giving her a feeling of control: ‘Anorexiaen ga meg også et bevis for at jeg var sterk – jeg kunne hvis jeg ville’ [My anorexia proved to me that I was strong – I could if I wanted to] (p. 50). The need for strength and control over her own body can probably be linked to the inner conflict that arises from her being a girl with a modern, Western conception of honour in an alien, patriarchal honour culture. In the family it is her father’s conception of honour that prevails. Puberty leads to an escalation of the conflict. Fearing that Noreen will become like other Western girls, her father starts maltreating her and calling her names like ‘whore’ (p. 52). However, her father’s honour means a lot to her, even after she contacts the child welfare services. She abstains from alcohol and pretends to her uncles that she is still living at home. She rejects boys, fearing for rumours: ‘Og et slikt rykte ville, uansett hva sannheten var, skade pappas ære. Det kan jeg ikke ta sjansen på’ [And whatever the truth of it, a rumour like that would damage Dad’s honour. I can’t risk that.] (p. 81). She gives her father’s honour priority over her own will, thus participating his honour group. This participation stems from love:

Jeg er veldig stolt av pappa, og tenker ‘min pappa’. Han er pappaen min, og jeg er hans lille pike. Vi har alltid vært spesielt knyttet til hverandre. [...] Ingenting skal få komme mellom oss igjen, absolutt ingen skal få lov til å ødelegge det forholdet vi har tenkt å bygge opp. Ingen!

[I’m very proud of Dad, and I think ‘my Dad’. He’s my Dad and I’m his little girl. We’ve always been very close [...] Nothing must be allowed to come between us, and nobody must be allowed to spoil the relationship we are going to build. Nobody!] (p. 11–12)

This love also involves fear – the fear that it will be lost. By participating in her father’s honour group, she can keep his love. ‘Ære betyr mye for pappa, og gjør jeg noe som kan skade pappas ære vil jeg miste ham for alltid. Det kan jeg ikke

gjøre. Jeg er altfor glad i ham til det, så alt jeg kan gjøre er å innrette mitt liv på hans premisser' [Honour means a lot for Dad, and if I do something that damages Dad's honour, I might lose him forever. I can't do that. I'm too fond of him for that, so all I can do is to accommodate my life to his terms] (p. 13).

Bowman argues that even if one cannot accept the premise that a woman's honour is the property of her husband or father, one can understand how Western popular culture (which he calls a 'post-honor society') represents a threat to a traditional honour culture (2006, 25). A woman's honour is, according to Bowman, traditionally connected to her virtue: 'the basic honor of the savage – bravery for men, chastity for women – is still recognizable [...]' (2006, 5). Noreen is 'en jente med tanker om likestilling i et pakistansk hjem' [a girl with ideas of gender equality in a Pakistani home] (p. 5). When on a school trip she is spied on in the shower by two boys, she reacts with desperation. Her reaction is not connected to gender or nationality – it is a violation of her private life. It doesn't result in a feeling of shame or dishonour – she feels hurt. It would appear that her virtue is not associated with an inner feeling of honour, but rather belongs in the patriarchal idea of honour.

Noreen finds herself in a conflict between several honour codes: The first is the code of the Pakistani man, which I have already described. The second is the honour code of the Norwegian man, which is not defined in the novel. It functions as a contrast to the Pakistani code, when for example the Norwegian ambassador in Pakistan sacrifices his sleep and his Whitsun holiday to help her when everyone else has betrayed her (p. 130). The third honour code is that of the Pakistani woman, whose honour belongs to men. In other words, it is not her own, and thus not really female. Virtue and self-sacrifice brings honour, and the status and reputation of the husband or father is of great importance. When Noreen first arrives in Pakistan, she thinks the women look up to her because she is both Western and Pakistani and can move between male and female domains. People talk about her, saying 'Hun er født og oppvokst i Norge, men likevel kjenner hun våre skikker. [...] Hun er så pen, snill, flink og klok, hun har en rik far som elsker henne, og hun tar utdanning' [She's born and brought up in Norway, but still knows our customs [...]. She's so pretty, kind, clever and wise, she has a wealthy who loves her, and she is getting an education] (p. 81). This admiration is probably just an illusion. The esteem she receives is ultimately just connected to her father's honour, and it disappears as soon she breaks with their customs and ends up in conflict with her family. This is evident during the wedding where everyone behaves as if they are witnessing a happy event, in spite of the fact that Noreen is in tears during the whole ceremony (p. 118). Noreen's independence and Western affiliation no

longer has any significance – they don't respect Noreen as a person, they admire the wealthy, successful and compliant bride Noreen. Ultimately it is to a large extent the code of the Norwegian woman she relates to, a code that is not necessarily connected to honour. Is it possible to use the concept of an honour code at all in a attenuated honour society, especially one where there is more or less gender equality? According to Wikan, honour is a gendered concept: 'Grunnet sin langt mer fremtredende rolle i det offentlige liv, har menn langt fler muligheter til å høste ære. [...] Kvinner inngår i sine menns ære' [Because of their much more prominent role in public life, men have many more opportunities to gain honour [...] Women are part of their menfolk's honour] (2008, 9). In a society where women have gained a prominent role in public life, a remodelling of the concept of honour is perhaps required.

What is apparent is a universal and unchanging aspect of the concept of honour, namely the need for acceptance. It is a purely human need. Perhaps honour can be linked to a set of values where acceptance, respect and freedom can be said to be included. This set of values is not really linked to gender. In Noreen's eyes this honour is about fitting in, about being good at school. Having control over her life, which she achieves by dieting and doing well at school, gives her a sense of coping. It is a complicated conflict because the honour codes contradict each other in many areas. For a Norwegian woman, honour is perhaps not really worth taking into consideration, since the desire for independence, for example, is more important. But the idea of complete freedom for a woman is at odds with the father's concept of honour. For Noreen, as long as she takes her family into consideration the different sets of values are incompatible.

Wikan writes that '[æ]ren har en ytre dimensjon som dominerer over den indre. Samfunnet – æresgruppen er et bedre begrep – betinger hva du får av ære' [honour has an outer dimension that dominates the inner one. The community – the honour group is a better term – determines how much honour you gain] (Wikan 2008, 13). In liberal, Western societies, the freedom of the individual has a central position and the inner dimension will in many cases be the stronger. Where the individual is strong, the power of the community will often be weakened. Bowman points out that, in an honour group, subordinating oneself and sacrificing one's needs for the group will be seen as honourable: '[...] disloyalty and selfishness will be correspondingly dishonorable' (2006, 4). In other words, the inner dimension doesn't have much leeway in a strong honour culture. Noreen's conflict between an inner and an outer dimension becomes insoluble. As long as it is the honour group that determines the honour she is granted, she will be left without individual honour – which in turn is incompatible with Western values.

Wikan emphasises that the need for esteem is universal: ‘Vi er alle avhengig av andres vurdering for vårt syn på oss selv – vår selvfølelse og selvrespekt. Men i vestlige liberale samfunn står individet friere til å velge hvem hun eller han vil forholde seg til [...]’ [We all depend on the appraisal of others for our view of ourselves – our self-esteem and self-respect. But in liberal, Western societies the individual has more freedom to choose whom she or he wants to relate to [...]] (2008, 13). Noreen chooses to relate to her father because of her love for him and also chooses to accept his idea of honour, right up until it goes too far and she realises that she must break with him if she is to live as a free individual. Noreen wins this struggle by managing to flee and start a new life. But there is no honour in her victory. She reflects over this when she meets him again: ‘Du tenkte hele tiden på din izzat – hvor mye ære har du nå?’ [You were always thinking about your izzat – how much honour do you have now?] (2008, 139). She associates the concept of honour with her father and the family in Pakistan, and it now has a destructive rather than a positive function in Noreen’s life. The values she gives priority to are freedom, recognition and respect. Although she is concerned with a sort of honour – the sort that involves fitting into a chosen group (e.g. her class at school) – I cannot see that she has any clear concept of honour. She is hurt by racism and mobbing, but when she does anything for the sake of honour, it is never her own sense of honour. Due to her negative experiences with the patriarchal honour culture, Noreen’s concept of honour will be a form of ‘anti-honour’, i.e. an opposition to honour itself.

A FEMALE CONCEPT OF HONOUR?

Within the patriarchal honour culture we meet in *Izzat*, there is little room for a female concept of honour. The community of women that is established there can seem successful, provided we keep menfolk out of the picture and focus on the Pakistani women that have accepted the conditions of the honour culture and their code of honour towards each other. Two representatives of these women are Sadia, Noreen’s Pakistani girlfriend, and Emal, who is married to her brother Amir. Both appear contented. However, this honour group can hardly be called female, existing as it does on men’s terms. Noreen tries to understand Emal, who didn’t lift a finger to help her, but finds it a step too far: ‘Hensynet til pappas ære var viktigere enn hensynet til mine følelser eller hennes egne meninger’ [It was more important for her to consider Dad’s honour than my feelings or her own opinions] (p. 133). Sadia is a rather different case here, expressing a desire for rebellion without finding the courage to act on it: ‘Gjennom andre venner får jeg høre at Sadia gråter

fordi hun ikke kan møte meg. Hun fantaserer om at jeg vil dø, men som kvinne i Pakistan kan hun ikke gjøre noe for å hjelpe meg. Hun kan ikke slåss mot de mektige mennene' [I learn through other friends that Sadia cries because she can't meet me. She fantasises that I will die and that, as a Pakistani woman, she won't be able to do anything to help. She can't fight against all those powerful men.] (p. 113). Noreen's personal honour concept has been formed through growing up in Norway and this makes her different from the Pakistani women. In Norway, liberal values and the notion of freedom have a strong position. The individual has more freedom to choose community affiliation and can thus adapt more easily to a community if its honour code matches one's own. Family honour is also a factor in Western society, but the power of the family has been weakened. The central position of the individual means that self-realisation and finding one's own path is regarded as honourable, rather than sacrificing values for a (male) authority. Bowman argues that Western culture poses a threat to strict honour cultures:

We do not have to approve of either honor killings or of strict sexual segregation or of the assumptions of ownership involved in the attribution of a wife's or a daughter's honor to her husband or father in order to understand the very real threat posed by Western popular culture – which owes its existence to the freedoms unique to our 'post-honor society' – to the survival of any society bound together by the canons of honor (2006, 25).

Growing up in Norway, Noreen has learned to regard education and independence as honourable, both for men and women. In Noreen's family, that honour is associated with the menfolk – if they have money and a good education it gives the woman status, while neither she nor the menfolk gain any honour from her standing on her own two feet. Thus the attenuated Norwegian honour culture represents a threat to her father's honour, because her independent choices don't match his notion of what is right.

Can we speak of a woman's honour in the context of the collective Western concept of honour? In a society where there is virtually gender equality, does a woman participate in a traditional idea of honour (which is basically patriarchal) or does she have her own? If so, her honour must be independent of the man's and thus no longer gendered. As I mentioned to begin with, James Bowman connects women's honour and modern feminism to pacifism and argues that those that worry about the consequences of pacifist foreign policy should see the dangers, and not just the advantages, of women achieving full participation in the political process (2006, 321). He also argues that there may be a place for gender differentiation in a mod-

ern society and that women can find pride in traditional roles as wife and mother. His depiction of Western society, which he calls ‘soft’ and ‘feminized’ (2006, 323) represents a clear criticism of feminism expressed in a desire for a revitalised honour culture where masculine honour incorporates primitive concepts of honour that today exist in subcultures like street gangs (2006, 323). It seems unlikely that there is actually room for feminine honour in Bowman’s ideal society – the role of wife and mother can, of course, be gratifying, but it is still dependent on the masculine. His theory substantiates the point that honour belongs to the man as long power does. According to Wikan, honour is about power and pain. ‘Makt, fordi det er en elite eller de innflytelsesrike som setter standardene for hva som skal gjelde. Smerte, fordi æren har sin pris. [...] Andre kan måtte bære byrden av den enes kamp for, eller streben etter, ære’ [Power, because it is an elite or those with influence who set the agenda. Pain, because honour comes at a cost [...] Others may have to bear the burden of one person’s struggle for or pursuit of power] (2008, 9). The issue of honour and gender is thus inextricably linked to the issue of power. The question of what impact women’s power has, is a controversial one. Is pacifism feminine? Isn’t it possible for a woman, be she head of state or ordinary citizen, to have Bowman’s basic need for ‘reflexive honour’? It is unlikely that only men have the need to protect their honour, or the honour of their country or family.

Since the concept of honour historically has been associated with men, there is a need for a reformulation. Indeed it is worth asking whether there is room for the concept in our Western society at all. For Noreen, however, it is real enough, since the concept has such a strong position in the culture she comes from. *Izzat* resembles a political pamphlet – it demonstrates how a skewed distribution of power in an honour culture that favours men has fatal consequences for the weaker party. It is an incitement to political struggle, to social change, and it ends by addressing men themselves in a final appeal:

Derfor må dere foreldre tenke dere om. Vil dere ødelegge deres døtre? Hva betyr mest – ære eller liv? Avgjør hva som er rett! Ikke vær med på å skape mer urettferdighet enn den som allerede finnes. Det er ikke verdt det! [...] Ikke la det bli en tapssak! [...] HVA OVERLOT DERE OSS TIL?

[So you parents must think again. Do you want to destroy your daughters? What is most important, honour or life? Decide what is right! Don’t help to create more injustice than there is already. It’s not worth it! [...] Don’t let it become a losing project! [...] WHAT DID YOU LEAVE FOR US?] (p. 144).

Rather than suggesting an alternative feminine concept of honour, the novel shows how honour can be a threat to women and a challenge to men, a challenge to change their traditional, patriarchal honour culture.

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15

The significance of honour for sentencing in partner killing¹

NASIM KARIM

ABSTRACT Honour-related violence is the subject of this article, which is based upon Nasim Karim's Master's thesis in jurisprudence, *Partnerdrap – familietragedie eller æresdrap* (2015). Karim discusses sentencing in partner homicides. This article supplements Figueiredo's contribution. The two murder cases Karim discusses take place in locations in Norway, and both murders are committed by the spouse. Nevertheless, the first case is designated as an honour killing, while the other case is referred to as a family tragedy.

KEY WORDS honour | values | honour killing | family tragedy

Two women are killed. One when a man of Afghan origin fires six shots at her with a revolver (Rt 2004-750). The other when an ethnic Norwegian hits her over the head with a thermos flask (Rt. 1992-1994: 1095). In both cases, murder is committed.

The woman who is shot dies almost immediately. The other woman dies, according to the post-mortem report, more slowly, and as a result of sustained and massive violence. The murders take place in Norway. What the two murders have in common is that the perpetrator is the woman's ex-husband. Even so, one of the murders – the revolver murder – is termed an honour killing (Rt. 2004-750), while the other – the thermos flask murder – is termed a family tragedy (Rt. 1992-1095). The perpetrator who shoots his wife must serve eighteen years for the murder, and the other must serve eight years, for beating his wife to death with a thermos flask.

Two men commit murder. And yet the punishments differ so much. Why the differences in the sentences? Why does the sentencing differ so substantially, in apparently similar cases?

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1. This article is translated by Richard Burgess.

This article is based on my Master's thesis, *Partnerdrap – familietragedie eller æresdrap* [Partner killing – family tragedy or honour killing] (UiO, 2015). Here, I examined the role played by honour in sentencing cases of partner killing. I wanted to chart the structures and interpretations that underlie the legal communicative commonality, where honour killing and partner killing are concerned. In my thesis, I charted the grounds given for the respective sentences in such murder cases. Then I investigated whether there were any patterns for how the sentencing, in cases of partner killing, was arrived at. I compared partner killings perpetrated by ethnic Norwegians with those of other backgrounds, referred to as men from ethnic minorities. By comparing results, I wanted to find out why similar cases could result in such widely differing sentences, eighteen versus eight years imprisonment (cf. Rt. 2004-750 and Rt. 1992-1059). At the same time, this would give me insight into whether honour played any role in the sentencing of cases of partner killing.

The thesis is built on judgements delivered by Norwegian District Courts, Courts of Appeal, and the Supreme Court over a period of thirty years, from 1983–2013. During these thirty years, Norwegian courts passed judgement on 112 cases of partner killing that fulfilled my criteria. That is, cases where the perpetrator succeeded in killing his ex-wife, ex-common-law-partner or ex-girlfriend. The fact that 112 such cases fulfilled my criteria doesn't mean that this is the actual number of people killed in this period. Several cases may have been dropped because of the perpetrator's disappearance, or because the necessary information or proof is lacking, and other cases may be under investigation.

In order to get to the bottom of this discrepancy in sentencing, it was necessary to study the tool used to explain the grounds of judgement. The only tool a judge has at his/her disposal to express the jurisprudence here is language. I did a discourse analysis of two selected cases. In the case from Rt.1992-1094, the homicide was carried out by an ethnic Norwegian, while in the case from Rt-2004-750, the offender was an Afghan, that is, from an ethnic minority. By studying the judges' use of words and expressions in their judgements, the aim was to understand their thinking, as well as to illustrate the significance of the background of the case for the judges' interpretation of them. In this way I could gain insight into the thought processes that may have taken place, and the role these may have played in the sentencing.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Discourse analysis is an appropriate tool for shedding light on developments and attitudes within a particular field. By using this research method, I was able to go

more deeply into particular texts and analyse the significance of words and expressions in them. At the same time, the method can accentuate, and perhaps even expose, the self-understanding they are predicated on. This can help explain why similar actions are evaluated similarly or differently, while at the same time pointing to the understanding that underlies the assessment of the seriousness of the crime. The method allowed me to show the interpretation of circumstances as they were presented in the judgements.

My analysis was further inspired by Gunnar Grendstad, professor of political science and a researcher at the University of Bergen. He argues that research into the behaviour of judges in Norway reveals that court dissents are the result of the attitudes and characteristics that every judge brings with him/her into the profession (Grendstad Shaffer og Waltenburg 2001, 73–101). ‘Selv om dommerne er forelagt de samme juridiske fakta i en sak, kommer de likevel frem til ulike resultater. I slike tilfeller må det være noe annet enn de rent juridiske fakta som påvirker dommerne i deres beslutningstaking’ [Although judges are presented with the same legal facts in a case, they arrive at different conclusions. In such cases it must be more than the legal facts themselves that influence the judges in their decision-making] (Grendstad, Shaffer og Waltenburgh, 1945–2009).

That the behaviour of judges is expressed in the language of judgements is reflected in Supreme Court justice Kristi Coward’s statement in the magazine, *Rett på sak* (2010), that ‘[s]pråket i dommen kan si noe om hvordan dommeren har tenkt’ [[t]he language in judgements can tell us something about the thinking of the judge]. Her point is that the use of words and expressions can tell us anything about the attitude of a judge, and thus reflect the sentencing in the case. In this way, it can be clarified whether the background context has any significance for the fixing of sentences in cases of partner killing. By studying the use of, for example, adjectives and value-laden words, or by analysing how sentences were constructed, I gained insight into how judgements aimed to amplify particular circumstances. Can the language used in court decisions tell us something about the behaviour of judges? Are there grounds for criticising judgements, and suggesting that courts treat comparable cases differently, or that minorities are punished more severely than Norwegians?

LANGUAGE AS A TOOL FOR LAWYERS: THE FORMAL AND OBJECTIVE CLAIM VS. THE NEED FOR INTERPRETATION

‘Språket er tankens verktøy, og skriveprosessen bidrar til å styre tanken’ [Language is the tool of thought, and the writing process helps to govern thinking]

(NOU 2011:13 8.4.2.). A judgement is an important document, and the wording of a judgement is therefore correspondingly important. A judgement has significance for many more than those referred to in the case, and this in itself points to the importance of caution and awareness in the choice of words and expressions. The judgement should have a professional wording, and use language that, in addition to being professional, reflects objectivity, rather than the attitudes of the judge. This is also expressed in the specification of the judge's professional competence, and the position a judge is accorded (Domstoladministrasjonen, retningslinjer for dommerskikk, jf. Etske retningslinjer for god dommerskikk) [National Courts Administration, guidelines for judging practice, cf. Ethical guidelines for good judging practice] 2005.

There are guidelines, but no model for the language in judgements, which means that it is difficult to show deviation when the individual elements are not clarified to start off with. What is clear is that a judgement should be formal, objective and justificatory. In any case, a formal and objective approach will instil more confidence in the courts and decisions made in their jurisdiction, and be explanatory. Moreover, the importance of the duty to justify is pointed out in NOU 2011:13 8.4.2. The mandate expresses the importance of this duty in the following terms:

En skriftlig begrunnelse gir innblikk i hva som har motivert avgjørelsen. Man kan si at begrunnelsen forutsettes å speile overveielserne. Den viser partene at deres argumenter er forstått og vurdert og hever kvaliteten på avgjørelsen ved å fremme en reell og samvittighetsfull prøving uten at usaklige eller irrelevante momenter trekkes inn. At begrunnelsen gjør det mulig å kvalitetssikre avgjørelsen, er en sentral rettsstatsgaranti.

[A written justification provides insight into what motivated the decision. It could be said that it is taken for granted that the justification reflects the deliberations. It shows the litigants that their arguments have been understood and evaluated, and it increases the quality of the decision by promoting a real and conscientious hearing without reference to biased or irrelevant elements. It is central guarantee of a state governed by the rule of law that the justification makes it possible to ensure a quality control of the decision.]

The purpose of the judgement's wording is to portray reality, while at the same time, according to the Criminal Procedure Act of 1981-05-22-25 §39 and §40 fifth paragraph, giving an account of the main points in the court's assessment of evi-

dence for imposing sanction. The law does not state what is needed to meet the requirements of such an account of the main points, and it is not evident in other rules either, but is governed by convention.

The court administration's guidelines for best practice in judgement gives a comprehensive account of what a judge must take into account in reaching a judgement. The judgement should be constructed with the aim of expressing prevailing laws in the area, and the correct use of them. At the same time, it has an authoritative and representative significance, in that it expresses the thinking and the attitude of the courts. A judgement is connected to the courts' official view of events.

In law studies, there is also an awareness of the imprecision and ambiguity of language. Changes in meaning over time and the use of specialist terminology are some of the factors that require legal sources to be interpreted (Eckhoff and Helgesen 2007, *Rettskildelære*). The rule of thumb for interpreting legal documents is to use an everyday understanding of the language. Legal usage, judicial theory, custom and legislative history help to clear up ambiguities.

Norwegian lawyers follow a framework for the sources of law, developed by Torstein Eckhoff, that accounts for how changes in meaning over time should be dealt with, and how specialist terminology should generally be interpreted. The law is used as a basis for different types of interpretation, such as interpretation through definition, interpretation through specification, interpretation through expansion, interpretation through analogy, and so on. Andenæs, Boe, Lødrup, Eckhoff and others carefully explain how a word or an expression can be understood in a text. Interpreting the meaning of a legal judgement is neither a new nor alien phenomenon for lawyers or judges, but the method does not appear to be the same. The point I am making is that both lawyers and judges know the importance of the use of words, what they can imply, and how important it is that the neutrality and independence of the court be reflected in its decisions, its statements and its actions.

If a judgement is delivered, it will, in the last instance, have significance for the development of law, and contribute to legal clarification. Audun Kjus has done research into narrative strategies in criminal proceedings. In his book, *Sakens fakta* [The Facts of the Case], he gives an account of eleven cases, and concludes that the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Act § 40, fifth paragraph, were not met in any of the judgements (Kjus 2007). The same point is made by Arild Linneberg (Dragvoll, Ekeland and Linneberg 2014, 68). Both Linneberg and Kjus argue that the judgement is a summary of the judge's interpretation, in which the judge uses words and expressions to create confidence in his decision, and a social

acceptance, that is important for the survival of a judicial system. The courts will lose their significance if the victim and others take the law into their own hands to reach a just solution.

This acceptance is established by the judge's portrayal of the offender, and characterisation of events for the reader. According to Kjus, Linneberg and Hans Petter Graver, an exposition of the words and expressions used in a judgement can shed light on the court's interpretation of the case – not only with regard to what is said, but also what is not said in judges' deliberations (Kjus 2007; Dragvoll, Ekeland and Linneberg 2014). Language is a tool used to present a case, and judges, too, make use of interpretation and language. This point is underlined in an article by Jens Arup Seip published in *Lov og Rett* in 1965:

[D]ommeren tolker loven, men en lov er et bøyelig instrument. Den kan tolkes, den må tolkes, og i tolkningen er det ofte flere veier å gå. Dommerens avgjørelser skaper nye normer, nye lover. Det hender at han må dømme hvor ingen lov er, det hender han dømmer på tross av hva en lov sier. (Seip 1965, 1)

[The judge interprets the law, but the law is a flexible instrument. It can be interpreted, indeed it must be interpreted, and in its interpretation there are several paths to choose between. The judge's findings create new norms, new laws. Sometimes he must judge where there is no law, sometimes he judges in spite of what the law says.]

This sort of statement and legal usage can give the impression that a judge has no hard and fast guidelines for how sentencing should be done in criminal cases. The judge uses the arguments and factors he finds justifiable, and that appear legally correct, and thus the law is used in accordance with the judge's understanding of the case.

CATEGORISING HOMICIDE

My examination of the two cases of partner killing, or jealousy killing, illustrates the dilemma. Two men kill their wives, one a Norwegian, the other an immigrant. One is regarded as a family tragedy, and the other as an honour killing. The terms 'honour killing' and 'family tragedy' are used to designate the same act. In my analysis, I will try to show that these terms are based on interpretations and uses of language that involve cultural prejudice, and that this affects the judgements and sentencings in unreasonable ways. The analysis will particularly be focused

on the perpetrator's motive. In legal theory, it is argued that the motive behind a homicide plays a significant role in sentencing cases of partner killing. This has been demonstrated in several court decisions where the human aspect is seen as being central to the motive. Also, the analysis considers Gustav Wiik's point, that the terms the prosecution or defence use in reference to the killing, lead to something that is understood in the light of the categorisation. The term used to designate the deed affects the evaluation process, as a psychological mechanism, Wiik argues (2005, p. 33). Psychological mechanisms are used as mitigating or aggravating factors in sentencing, depending on the terminology. This is done simply by using expressions such as 'family tragedy' or 'honour killing'.

My examination seems highly relevant. 'Det finnes i dag ingen forskning på partnerdrap i Norge. Dermed vet vi lite om hva som kjennetegner partnere som begår drap og deres ofre eller situasjonen de er i når drapet skjer' [There is no research today on partner killing in Norway. Thus we know little about what characterises the killers and their victims, or about what circumstances they are in when the killing takes place], Vibeke Ottesen said to the radio programme, NRK Østlandssendingen, on the 27th April, 2013. International studies like *Global Study on Homicide* (2011), by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, can give an insight into what characterises partner killing. Most often it is committed in jealousy, or for fear of being deserted, or because of a suspicion of infidelity. The man sees the woman as his possession, and thus cannot accept the notion that she wants to leave him.

However, the terms used for characterising such deeds are by no means neutral. Common use of language indicates some important differences between family tragedy and honour killing. Family tragedy indicates that homicide is committed within the family, most often by men. Often the motive turns out to be the custody of children, divorce or other disagreements. The killing may be motivated by jealousy, but what distinguishes it from partner killing is the relationship of the deceased to the offender. The number of deceased may also be more than one.

Honour killing is carried out with the intention of restoring the collective honour of a family or a clan that feel violated. The attempt to restore this collective honour explains, in most cases of honour killing, why the offender has had time for consideration and planning, which will have bearing on the evaluation of premeditation, according to the § 233, second paragraph, of the Norwegian Penal Code. Honour killing is often planned collectively. It is not limited to one partner, but can also take place in cases where a father, brother, father-in-law or other person kills a female, and sometimes also a male family member, in order to restore family honour. Honour is associated with esteem, fame, dignity, reputation,

acclaim and praise, and the concept of honour has a strong position in traditional societies, where the family is regarded as an important social institution, and where the system of law enforcement is less developed. In research literature, both in Norway and abroad, there is an ongoing discussion about to what extent, and in what way, some homicides involving close relatives can be distinguished from others, because of the role played by restoring family honour as a motive for the killing (NOU 2012, 15; Narayan 1997; Phillips 2007; Wikan 2003).

RT. 2004-750 – A PRESUMED HONOUR KILLING

One day in April 2002, a man shot and killed his ex-wife outside Kristiansund district court, putting an end to a family story which had been going on for some time. The man and the woman were both from Afghanistan, and their reason for attending court was for a reconciliation meeting. At the time of the killing they were divorced, and their relationship was problematic, due the fact that they had been through a custody case, involving the local child welfare services. The outcome of this case worked in the woman's favour, leaving the responsibility for the children to her. When the man found that he was not allowed to see his children, and his interests and rights not were taken care of, he made death threats against his ex-wife. For these threats she reported him, and he spent 21 days in prison and was given an exclusion order. Obviously, the woman had every reason to be afraid of her divorced husband. She was terrified of him. Still, she kept in telephone contact with him to keep a check on his activities. On several occasions she met him in secret, even just before the reconciliation meeting. Her explanation of her frequent contact with a dangerous husband was that she was afraid. She wanted to keep a check on his movements. The meetings would give him plenty of opportunities to carry out the threats before the meeting took place. The murder the offender was found guilty of was, objectively speaking, very brutal. The victim was in a public place in the centre of Kristiansund, and many people were present. The sentence was fixed at 18 years imprisonment. The case received a lot of attention from the national media, where it was predefined as an honour killing.

The sentencing was clearly grounded in this term. Thus, there is reason to believe that the case and its outcome were decided beforehand. In connection with a debate in *Aftenposten* on 18 September, 2002, on the subject of honour killing, Svein Slettan and Erling J. Husabø wrote the following: 'Nettopp for å statuere et eksempel og si klart fra at den slags handlinger ikke aksepteres i det norske samfunn, burde det å begå en slik handling på bakgrunn av æresbegrepet være særdeles skjerpene.' [Committing such an act on the grounds of honour should be

counted as aggravating circumstances, precisely to make an example and let it be known that acts of this sort are unacceptable in Norwegian society.] The justification for this point of view is the deterrent effect of sentencing honour-based crime severely, as expressed in the article ‘Ære ingen formildende omstendighet’ [Honour not a mitigating circumstance] in *Aftenposten*, 18 September, 2002.

The treatment of the case as an honour killing is reflected in the proceedings. The victim got all the attention and sympathy, while no one was willing to hear the perpetrator’s side of the story. Going through the documents, I did not come across a single one that questioned the victim’s credibility. The deceased had repeated many times that her husband was violent and dangerous, and that she was subjected to violence in the marriage. Her portrayal of the marriage was swallowed whole by everyone from the female staff at the crisis centre in Kristiansund, to the refugee reception centre, the police and the child welfare services. However, during the case at the Court of Appeal one judge questioned the accuracy of the claims of the deceased, as he was incomprehensible for the fear she expressed and yet she met him to keep control of his activities. Before the court case started, the offender’s defence lawyer said: ‘Tiltalte havnet i en norsk kvinnekamp som strekker seg fra krisesentret i Kristiansund til sognepresten i Eide på Nordmøre’. [The accused found himself in a Norwegian struggle for women’s liberation that stretched from the crisis centre in Kristiansund to the parish priest in Eide in Nordmøre.]

On a second occasion, an outsider saw something different to how the case was portrayed. After going through the documents, Unni Wikan, appointed as an expert witness in the case, was not convinced that a planned honour killing had taken place. She pointed this out in her case assessment, an assessment that is not even mentioned in the judgement. Moreover, the appointment of an expert was requested by the defence, since the defence believed this might be of significance for sentencing. The question of whether or not this was an honour killing was crucial to whether it was premeditated, or a crime of passion. If it was not an honour killing, then what was it?

When I met the perpetrator at Ringerike Prison, he told me the motive for the killing: ‘Hun hadde satt opp et helt apparat mot meg, ingen ville høre på meg og jeg fikk ikke lov til å se mine barn. Hun hadde sverget på Koranen, og så sier retten noe annet. Hun sa at hun gjorde det for familien og at jeg måtte hjelpe henne’ [She had set up a whole system against me, no one would listen to me and I wasn’t allowed to see my own children. She had sworn by the Koran, and then the court says something else. She said she was doing it for the family and that I had to help her]. The fact that she swore by the Koran and stipulated family reunification as

the reason for this pretence was something that emerged during the meeting of reconciliation. Denied his visiting rights by the victim, he was obviously desperate to see his children. From the judgement, it emerges that he had been in contact with the district sheriff to arrange an out-of-court settlement for visiting the children, since several months after the court settlement, no such arrangement had been put in place. And after the reconciliation meeting, where she had sworn on the Koran to come back to him after family reunification with her parents and siblings, the custody case took a turn that was in conflict with what he had been promised. He dug up a revolver that he had previously buried and used it to commit an act that he had earlier rejected as an alternative. In his frustration, he had acquired a revolver to shoot his wife, but had buried the revolver when she explained why it was important to portray him as she had done. It cannot be denied that he may have been violent, but he admitted it. She hit the children as part of their upbringing, and 'I hit her to make her feel the same pain' as he said when I met him at Ringerike Prison, on 3 April, 2010.

As it turned out, for this man, honour was something very different to the concept of honour and the interpretation used as a starting point by the majority of the Norwegian population, as well as by anthropologists and the legal system. For him, the killing was not the result of external aspects which hallmark honour killings. It had to do with internal honour. He talked about himself and his dignity. He would not permit her to carry on like that. He wanted to show her, but the intention was to take his own life, so that she would witness the pain she had caused. But as he met her, and saw her smile and chat with an expression of indifference in her eyes, the situation changed. Instead of taking his own life, he took hers. According to him, he killed her as a result of betrayal, lies and double-dealing.

In sentencing, the understanding of the motivation for the killing plays a major significance. Despite the statement by the perpetrator, the motive for the homicide in this case was seen as being honour.

The treatment of the case as an honour killing is also reflected in the sentencing, in the ways the events are construed. The Court of Appeal summarised the circumstances that led to the murder, and the murder itself, in the following way:

I juli 2001 anskaffet A seg en stjålet grovkalibret revolver med tilhørende ammunisjon. Han brakte våpenet med seg til Kristiansund den 2. august 2001, i forbindelse med at ekteparet da møttes i Nordmøre tingrett i anledning midlertidig avgjørelse om samvær mellom far og barn. Det ble da inngått midlertidig avtale om samvær under tilsyn en gang pr. måned. Før retur til Kristiansund, emballerte A revolveren og ammunisjonen og fant et gjem-

mested for dette i et skogholt, ca. en halvtimes gangtur utenfor Kristiansund sentrum.

A gikk ut av drosjen, tok frem våpenet, rettet det mot B og avfyrte samtlige seks skudd mot henne, hvoretter han gikk rett inn til politivakta i samme hus, fortalte hva han hadde gjort og overga seg. (Rt. 2004–750)

[In July 2001, A acquired a stolen, high calibre revolver with appropriate ammunition. He brought the weapon with him to Kristiansund on 2nd August 2001, in connection with a meeting the couple were to have at Nordmøre District Court, concerning a temporary decision on the custody of the children. A temporary agreement was reached on access to the children, under supervision, once a month. Before returning to Kristiansund, A wrapped up the revolver and ammunition, and found a hiding place for it in copse approx. half an hour's walk from Kristiansund's town centre.

A left the taxi, took out the weapon, pointed it at B and fired all six shots at her, after which he walked straight to the police station in the same building, said what he had done, and handed himself in.]

In short sentences and descriptive words, the court tries to portray the murder as planned, premeditated and decided. Almost like the rehearsed scene of a film.

In the judgement, the significance of motivation is reflected in the Supreme Court comments on the reason the weapon was retrieved:

Her lå våpenet inntil det ble hentet frem igjen og benyttet til drapet 26. april 2002. Det var da hovedforhandling i barnefordelingssaken i Kristiansund. Saken startet 25. april, hvor det ble fremforhandlet at gjerningsmannen skulle ha 4 timers samvær med barna 3 ganger i året.

[The weapon lay here until it was retrieved and used in the murder on 26th April 2002. This was at the time of the main hearing in the child custody case in Kristiansund. The case started on 25th April when it was agreed that the offender would have the right to have 4 hours' access to his children 3 times a year.]

The court statement can give the impression that the judge does not rule out the possibility that the child custody case and the limited right of access to his children may be a reason why the revolver was retrieved. Later in the judgement the Supreme Court refers to the Court of Appeal's assessment of the question of guilt

and expresses its conviction of the guilt of the accused in the following terms: ‘[D]et er med overveldende overbevisning fremkommet under bevisførselen at hennes historie og frykt var reell, uten ubegrunnede overdrivelser eller beskyldninger’. [It has emerged with overwhelming conviction during the submission of evidence that her story and fear was real, without unfounded exaggerations or accusations]. The Supreme Court follows this line with regard to the cause of the murder, taking it more or less for granted. The judge comments explicitly on the killer’s motives, and in this way, creates a credible picture of the victim through his statements. The judge’s use of words like ‘overveldende’ [overwhelming] and ‘overbevisning’ [conviction] indicates that there is no room for doubt that the murder was intentional, that it was premeditated, and that the motivation was honour.

In several other court decisions, we see that the killing itself overshadows the guilt of the victim. The killing overshadows the mitigating circumstances, and any suspicions about whether the victim may have had other intentions with her accusations. In this way, the court takes it for granted that the victim’s fear was real from the beginning. This is further accentuated by the fact that the judge omits to mention the offender’s claims and objections in the case.

In apportioning blame, it appears that the court did not even consider viewing the case from the offender’s point of view. The case for the defence hardly gets a mention in the judgement, implying that the court is following a one-track approach and viewing the case as presented by the prosecution, on the basis of the deceased’s claims.

The court chooses to rely uncritically on the prosecution’s understanding of the case. By emphasising, as stated in the judgement, that ‘right from the start, murder was the only alternative’, any provocation or other mitigating circumstances are ignored as possible factors. This account of the murder seems to have won credence with the court, and thus exonerated the victim from claims of speculation and lies. Responsibility for what happened lies solely with the perpetrator, and mitigating circumstances connected to the behaviour of the victim are of no significance.

The court’s judgement continues as follows: ‘Ut i fra hjemlandet lokale tradisjon og kultur aksepterte ikke domfelte at ektefellen forlot ham og tok med barna, da dette betydde skam og ydmykelse.’ [In accordance with the local tradition and culture of his home country, the offender did not accept his spouse leaving him and taking the children with her, since this meant shame and humiliation.] Once again, the wording emphasises the relevance of honour for the killing, while the wording establishes this as certain and proven. The reference to ‘the local tradition and culture of the old country’ depicts the act as almost alien, and the way the sentence is

constructed can be seen as an intimation that Norwegian men accept marriage breakdowns, while partner killing is an Eastern phenomenon. The impression is given that only men from minority backgrounds have trouble accepting breakdowns in relationships, and that this is a cultural phenomenon. Thus, the court has disassociated itself from something that also happens in Norway from time to time, and has generalised a mentality to apply only to men of minority backgrounds.

The words and concepts the judge uses create and define our understanding of reality and indicate that there is a distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The fact that most Norwegian partner killings are committed as a result of the woman’s desire to break free from a relationship is ignored in this statement. In my view, the statement reveals that the court has already established a connection between the murder and the culture the offender belongs to, and they have, from the start, decided to make honour the motive, by establishing the link between the murder and the husband’s culture.

On the other hand, the language of the judgement cannot be regarded as suitable for the context it is used in. A court decision, which is the context given here, gives a framework for the text, and, by virtue of his/her role as an administrator of the law, a judge should demonstrate a rational and clarifying use of language that aspires to objectivity. Where this is not done, personal prejudices can come to the fore, and reveal the judge’s subjective attitudes (Jacobsen 2010).

According to the Court of Appeal, the wife’s behaviour led to the husband feeling ‘socially declassed by his young wife’. By constantly referring to culture, honour and a particular attitude to women, the Supreme Court tries to show that they have understood the underlying reasons why the murder was planned and carried out. Thus, attention is constantly directed to the motive. It is mentioned that the woman ‘evnet å tilpasse seg’ [managed to adapt], and wanted an education and freedom of movement, she wanted freedom from the strict regime that tradition imposed on women, and that the husband enforced.

By using the expression ‘managed to adapt’, the court points out a quality possessed by the woman, while at the same time signalling, without stating it explicitly, that the offender lacked such a quality. The word ‘evner’ [manage] is positively charged and ambiguous. It can be used in the sense of ‘to master something’, related to the noun ‘evne’ meaning a talent or gift, that is, something that not everyone has or can acquire. By using the word with that intention, it can appear as if the court is taking for granted that not all minorities are able to adapt, and that there is a process of adaptation that not everyone succeeds in. First Justice points out the deceased’s struggle for the right to education and to freedom of

movement. Reference is made to the deceased having to fight for something as basic as human rights – a globally accepted principle, ratified in law in the West and accepted as a norm. The judgement also uses the word ‘regime’, which can be seen as an attempt to stress the strict traditions and attitudes with regard to women’s position and independence in Eastern societies.

Afghanistan’s strict attitude to how women should be controlled by men is well known. The shooting of Malala Yousufzai in 2012, who inspired a global reaction to the Taliban’s doctrine of how education is harmful for women, has further entrenched their attitude to women. As we have seen, the judgement specifies that ‘[i]n accordance with the local tradition and culture of the old country, the offender did not accept his spouse leaving him and taking the children with her, since this meant shame and humiliation’. This wording expresses the court’s understanding of gender differences, and the suppression of women in Eastern societies. The use of the word ‘regime’ can thus lead to an association of the offender with the Taliban. ‘Regime’ implies, in most contexts, a system, rather than an individual act. By referring to systemic attitudes, the offender’s thoughts and understanding are associated with something more than simply honour, something that is organised and widespread in their homeland. In the worldview projected by the judges, the murder clearly had a conspiratorial intent. The narrative, as reconstructed by the court, gives an idyllic portrait of the victim by referring to her talents, thus accentuating the impression of the murder as a completely incomprehensible act. The victim is ascribed credibility, and the accused is ascribed guilt.

The judgement continues with the following statement:

For lagmannsretten er det overbevisende fremkommet at Bs selvstendige opptreden utsatte henne for fare for å bli drept i samsvar med nedarvede lokale tradisjoner fra Afghanistan. Drap som løsning var et motiverende alternativ for A fra første stund; om han ikke ønsket det, så fordi han eventuelt måtte besørge det. (Rt. 2004-750)

[In the Court of Appeal, it has been convincingly demonstrated that B’s independent behaviour exposed her to the danger of being killed in accordance with inherited local traditions from Afghanistan. Murder as a solution was a motivating alternative for A right from the beginning; if not because he desired it, then because he in the event had to arrange it.]

It is clear from the text that, in the opinion of the court, the victim’s fight for basic rights such as the right to take decisions herself, the right to education, and the

right to choose her own social circle, were the reasons why she had to die. According to the judges, there is no doubt that the offender acted on behalf of his culture. In this way, the court shows that the motivation of the crime was clearly cultural, and that the intention should probably be regarded as having existed for years.

The judgement is based on a credibility assessment of the victim's statements, in combination with the murder itself. Since the offender is of non-Norwegian origin, the court assumes, without reasonable grounds, that it is an honour killing, and appears to build on this assumption – an assumption that may be based on the offender's background, although this cannot be seen as proven. In the final analysis, it is the evaluation of the motive that is crucial for the assessment of intention and the likely cause. The motive is crucial because it determines the evil of the act itself.

A man motivated by money acts differently to a man motivated by reputation. A man driven by economic cupidity acts differently to a man driven by ideals, vanity or a thirst for excitement. A man who hates acts differently to a man who dreams. If the court mistakes the motive for an act, it also mistakes the act itself, and may sentence him for something he has not done, as covered by the provisions concerning homicide in the Penal Code § 233, second paragraph which deal with *premeditation* [*overlegg*] rather than *intention* [*forsett*]. A wrong assessment can be of significance for which provision is used, and for the length of sentence that is set.

The court decision continues: 'Hans liv ble fokusert mot B og egne følelser. Det er etter bevisførselen for lagmannsretten hevet over enhver tvil at han var iherdig etter å finne ut hvor B og barna oppholdt seg, han oppnådde også kontakt' [His life became focused on B and his own feelings. According to the evidence submitted to the Court of Appeal, it is proven beyond doubt that he was persistent in finding out where B and the children were, and he succeeded in making contact too.] (Rt. 2004–750). The court points out that the offender made contact, and if the murder was planned, as both the court and the victim claimed, a moment would have been sufficient to kill the victim, if that is what he had wished. Earlier in the judgement, the court commented, 'Murder as a solution was a motivating alternative for A right from the beginning; if not because he desired it, then because he would perhaps be obliged to arrange it.' (Rt. 2004-750). This indication of the court's understanding of premeditation does not, in my opinion, rhyme with the fact that he made contact, or with the description of the murder later in the judgement as a swift and specific act, as when it is commented that: 'Murder was the solution from the very start!', 'Her story and her fear were real', 'He was persistent in finding out where B and the children were!' and 'When he made contact, he grasped the opportunity to kill her immediately' (Rt. 2004-750).

In pointing this out, the court contradicts itself. If the murder was planned all along, why didn't he grasp the opportunity when he, according to the victim, succeeded in making contact? It is emphasised that he made persistent attempts to find them, so why let this opportunity slip when he finally achieved it? According to the court's own statements, he had the opportunity earlier – so why did he kill her where and when he did?

Assessing the court's statements and reading them in context, I find it difficult to understand how the claim, that murder was the only solution from the very start, can be sustained. On one hand, the fact that he had managed to make contact and, on the other, the court's portrayal of a desperate and determined act where he chose to kill at the first available opportunity, simply do not add up. If the court's statements are seen in context, and from an overall perspective, there is a contradiction between them and the purpose indicated in the court's choice of words.

Earlier in the judgement, the court comments that the murder weapon was dug up the night before the murder took place, but nowhere is the question asked, why was the weapon buried in the first place, if it was his intention to kill her right from the start? It cannot be ignored that the court perhaps did not understand the symbolic significance of burying something for Muslims. In countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, burying something symbolises being finished with it, just as in Muslim burials. Why would this man bury a pistol unless he intended to put all thoughts of murder behind him? Another question is if he had put such thoughts behind him, why should he change his mind about killing somebody, who, in a sense, had taken everything from him?

My theory is that he, in the meantime, had received a satisfactory explanation of why she was behaving the way she did, as indicated in the seized documents. The emphasis of the court shows clearly that the husband's claims have been entirely ignored in the construction of the narrative. What the court includes and excludes tells us a lot about where the focus lies in the assessment process. The focus is constantly on what the victim experienced and claimed, on the attitude to women, on culture, and on the terrible act itself. The court amplifies the act by using words and terms that create a stronger impression than if other words had been used.

Concerning the subjective circumstances, Court of Appeal states the following:

Lagmannsretten mener de forutgående planer og overveielser som redegjort for foran må tillegges skjerpene vekt ved straffutmålingen, selv om den beslutning som førte til overlegget ble tatt i nærmere tilknytning til drapet. Selve drapet ble utført på en måte som var en sjokkartet opplevelse for mange

uskyldig involverte. Bevisførselen etterlater ingen tvil om at A opptrådte bestemt og målrettet. Det var ikke fortvilelse, men aggresjon som var synlig. Dette fremstår som en ren henrettelse (Rt. 2004–750).

[The Court of Appeal believes that the prior plans and deliberations explained earlier must be counted as aggravating circumstances when sentencing, even if the decision that led to premeditation was taken in close connection with the murder. The murder itself was carried out in a way that was a shocking experience for innocent bystanders. The evidence leaves no doubt that A behaved in a determined and purposeful manner. It was not despair but aggression that was visible. This appears to be a pure execution.]

The description depicts the murder as one of the most brutal ever heard of. Clearly, the court establishes that the motive for the murder was cultural:

Forsvarer for Høyesterett har i tilslutning til de rettsoppnevnte sakkyndiges rapport og møtende sakkyndiges forklaring for Høyesterett, vist til at domfelte har diagnoser F 60.9 Uspesifisert personlighetsforstyrrelse, F 43.2 Tilpasningsforstyrrelse, F 43.1 Posttraumatisk stresslidelse og F 32.9 Uspesifisert depressiv episode. Forsvareren har anført at de sakkyndiges rettspsykiatriske erklæring gir støtte for at drapet kan ha vært en frikobling av primitive, aggressive og destruktive impulser, utløst av en langvarig krisesituasjon hos en mann som på forhånd kan ha vært alvorlig personlighetsskadet gjennom en traumatisk oppvekst, hvor vold og drap var en nærværende del av hverdagen. Jeg bemerker at ved utmåling av straffen vil den objektive grovhet og en nærmere vurdering av domfeltes overlegg bestemme straffens lengde. Domfeltes personlighetsavvik vil ikke kunne tillegges nevneverdig vekt i en sak som denne. Domfeltes kulturelle bakgrunn kan heller ikke få noen betydning når den gir seg utslag i alvorlige straffbare handlinger.

[In connection with the report of the judicial experts and the attending experts' statement to the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court defence has indicated that the offender has the diagnoses F 60.9 Unspecified personality disorder, F 43.2 Adaptation disorder, F 43.1 Post-traumatic stress disorder and F 32.9 Unspecified depressive episode. The defence has stated that the experts' forensic psychiatric statement supports the notion that the murder may have been an unleashing of primitive, aggressive and destructive impulses, triggered by a prolonged crisis situation in a man who may previously have suffered severe

damage to his personality through a traumatic upbringing in which violence and murder was a part of everyday life. I note that in sentencing, the objective brutality and a closer assessment of the offender's premeditation will determine the length of the sentence. The offender's personality abnormalities cannot be ascribed significant weight in a case such as this. Neither can the cultural background of the offender be of any significance when it results in serious criminal acts].

The judge is referring to a court decision where the motive was honour, and the offender acknowledged the circumstances as an honour killing. Such a statement can be defended on the basis of events in which there were no doubts concerning the honour aspect of a crime, in which both the sister and the brother-in-law were killed as a result of the sister's breach of family honour.

The judge draws a comparison between an honour killing and this killing in order to justify the sentence given. However, no reference is made to another homicide where the victim was killed in public, and where the sentence was considerably more lenient, since it does not support the sentence given. The judge is attempting to gain support and agreement for his sentencing by referring to comparable cases. Cases that point the other way are ignored. This tactic has been used in several court decisions. It seems that the court uses the arguments that support their choice of punishment in this case.

The grounds for the judgement suggest that the murder had the appearance of an execution. This comparison by the First Justice draws parallels between the way the killing was carried out and the act of an execution. The judge's use of a strong, negatively charged word can indicate that the murder was committed as part of an organised act. As a reader, I understand the use of such a term as expressing an action planned down to the smallest detail, purposeful and committed in cold blood, perhaps in cooperation with others.

The judge's account of this homicide portrays an execution, in contrast to the account of the case in question, where the documents relating to the case indicate a killing committed in anger by an unstable man who at the time of the act was unbalanced and distraught. After firing five shots at the victim, he went directly to the police station, put down the revolver, and confessed to what he had done, as he wept.

On the basis of the judge's account of events, it appears that the judge has a very different understanding of what is implied by the term 'execution'. In the grounds for the judgement, the judge points to the fact that the murder was committed in anger by an unstable man, circumstances that are not counted as mitigating; and still the judge allows a comparison with an execution.

The murder was regarded as premeditated, while the act itself and its background were seen as aggravating factors. On the other hand, the point is made that, due to the time the killer had at his disposal, the murder is seen as being premeditated. It is pointed out that the offender had time to reflect. However, whether he actually did reflect or not was not discussed.

In Andenæs's description of the assessment of premeditation, he points out that if the offender has had time at his disposal and, nevertheless, not deliberated, then premeditation cannot be said to exist, regardless of the time interval (Andenæs 2013, 232), as the Supreme Court has observed in several court judgements (Rt. 1949, p. 402, Rt. 1954, p. 821).

In Rt. 1954, p. 821, the court stated that they suppose that: 'lagretten her har bygget på at tiltalte har handlet under så sterk affekt at motforestillinger ikke har gjort seg gjeldende på en slik måte at han kan antas å ha handlet etter en overveiet beslutning.' [the Court of Appeal builds on the assumption that the accused has acted in such a state of affect that no second thoughts over his actions was possible such that he can be presumed to have acted after a deliberate decision.] In spite of arguments from the defence, the judge in this case, without prior discussion of whether such deliberations may have taken place, decides that the subjective conditions of the provisions regarding premeditation are exceeded in his estimation.

Neither did the court give credence to the offender's argument that the purpose of bringing a revolver in the first place was to commit suicide in front of his wife, to show her the suffering she had caused him. As far as it goes, the reports from supervised visits to his children tell of how he wept and sobbed over the loss of his children and their mother. He said that he had nothing to live for, if the deceased did not change her mind and return to him. This implies that the plan of suicide should not be excluded without consideration, as the Supreme Court also commented: In Rt. 1959 (p. 991) the murder was not regarded as premeditated, even though the offender had considered it for a while. In the unanimous verdict, the First Justice stated:

tiltalte i tiden forut for drapet har vært inne på tanken om at han skulle ta ikke bare sitt eget, men også B s liv, og at han da også traff forberedelser og la planer for det tilfelle at drapet skulle komme til utførelse. Men forberedelsene er gjort og planene lagt på et tidspunkt da han ikke hadde fattet en fast beslutning om å utføre drapet, og fremdeles håpet på at det ikke måtte skje, eller på et tidspunkt da han på grunn av sin affekt var i en slik psykisk tilstand at motforestillinger ikke kunne gjøre seg gjeldende. (Rt. 1959, 991)

[In the period before the murder, the accused considered the idea of not only taking his own life, but also B's and that he made preparations and laid plans in case the murder came about. But the preparations were made and the plans laid at a time when he had still not decided to carry out the murder, and was still hoping that it would not have to happen, or at a time when he was in such a psychological state of affect that he was unable to reflect over her actions.]

While it is true that these judgements are in the past, the decisions that Andenæs refers to are good examples of how assessments have been made. By omitting such assessments in the case in question, the judge demonstrates that he gives no credence to the offender, and thus bases his understanding on the claims and testimony of the deceased. Without prior examination, he creates the basis for passing a sentence of 18 years, an irreversible decision that both the offender and several others have to live with. Professor dr. juris and Supreme Court judge Carsten Smith has stated, 'From time to time I think that when the Supreme Court justifies an aggravated punishment on the grounds of general deterrence, that this is pure fiction if people do not have insight into the judgement.' (Smith 2012, 71).

THE THERMOS FLASK MURDER (RT. 1992, P. 1094)

The judgement in the thermos flask murder concerned a Norwegian man of 35, who wilfully killed his wife by beating her to death with a thermos flask. In the Court of Appeal, the sentence was set at eight years imprisonment. The prosecution, finding the punishment too lenient, lodged an appeal, arguing that it should have been set at twelve years imprisonment. The Supreme Court made the following statement regarding the sentencing in the judgement:

Jeg er kommet til at anken over straffeutmålingen må forkastes. Jeg legger da vesentlig vekt på at det her etter min mening ikke er grunnlag for å anse drapet begått under særdeles skjerpende omstendigheter.

Ved avgjørelsen av om det foreligger særdeles skjerpende omstendigheter etter straffeloven § 233 annet ledd, må det anlegges en relativt bred vurdering. Selve drapshandlingen vil stå sentralt, men også domfeltes subjektive forhold, bakgrunnen for drapet og omstendighetene omkring det, må trekkes inn, jf. Rt. 1989–1330.

[I have concluded that the appeal over sentence must be rejected. I emphasise that in my opinion there are not grounds to suggest that the murder was committed under aggravating circumstances.]

In deciding whether there are aggravating circumstances or not according to the Penal Code § 233 second paragraph, a relatively broad assessment must be made. The murder itself will have a central role, but also the offender's subjective circumstances, the background of the murder and the circumstances surrounding it must be taken into consideration.]

On 12th February 1992, Frostating Court of Appeal passed the following judgement:

A, født 0.0.1957, dømmes for overtredelse av straffeloven § 233 første og annet ledd til en straff av fengsel i 8 – åtte – år. I straffen fragår 188 – etthundre og åttiåtte – dager for utholdt varetekt.

Påtalemyndigheten har vist til at lagmannsretten med rette la til grunn at drapet er begått under særdeles skjerpene omstendigheter ved bruk av grov og vedvarende vold. For en slik drapshandling er en straff på 8 år vesentlig for mild. Straffen bør her være på 12 år.

[A, born 0.0.1957 is sentenced to 8 years' imprisonment for violating § 233 first and second paragraph of the Penal Code. 188 days' served custody are deducted from the sentence.

The prosecuting authority has shown that the Court of Appeal was justified in emphasising that the murder was committed under particularly aggravating circumstances with the use of brutal and prolonged violence. A sentence of 8 years is too lenient for a murder of this nature. The punishment here should be 12 years.]

The offender has asserted that there are no grounds for increasing the sentence. In evaluating whether there are aggravating circumstances, the Court of Appeal has exclusively focused on the murder itself. Insufficient emphasis has been placed on the background of the murder and on the offender's subjective circumstances. On the basis of a broader assessment, it is incorrect to regard the murder as having been committed under particularly aggravating circumstances. Furthermore, it must be taken into consideration that the murder was committed during a temporary state of automatism and in justifiable anger.

My conclusion is that the prosecution's appeal over the sentence should have been rejected. I attach importance to the fact that, in my opinion, there are not grounds for regarding the murder as having been committed under particularly aggravating circumstances. The decision as to whether such grounds exist accord-

ing to § 233 second paragraph of the Penal Code should be based on a relatively broad assessment. The murder itself will have a central role, but also the offender's subjective circumstances, the background of the murder and the circumstances surrounding it must be taken into consideration, cf. Rt. 1989-1330.

The prosecuting advocate correctly points out that massive violence was used. But the tragic background and the events leading up to it must also count in the general assessment:

Domfelte og den drepte B hadde vært samboende og gift i tilsammen 17–18 år da drapshandlingen fant sted. Som beskrevet i lagmannsrettens dom var det hele tiden problemer på grunn av Bs alkoholmisbruk, festing og forhold til andre menn.

Jeg må legge til grunn at dette gikk sterkt inn på domfelte, som var oppriktig glad i sin kone. Men han tilga henne, og han holdt familien sammen. De siste fire–fem månedene bodde domfelte og hans kone fra hverandre. De hadde imidlertid regelmessig kontakt, og de ble enige om å gjenoppta samlivet. B lovet å bryte det forhold hun da hadde innledet til en annen mann.

[The offender and the deceased B had lived together and been married for 17–18 years when the murder took place. As described in the judgement of the Court of Appeal, there had been problems all along, as a result of B's alcohol abuse, partying, and her relationships with other men.

I must emphasise that this had a profound effect on the offender, who was genuinely fond of his wife. But he forgave her, and he kept the family together. For the last 4–5 months he and his wife lived apart. However, they were in regular contact and they agreed to resume their life together. B promised to break off the relationship she had started with another man.]

In its judgement, the Court of Appeal describes the meeting the offender and his wife had on the evening of the murder as a 'meeting of reconciliation', and tells how the offender, having left his wife's flat, suspected that it was a friend of their son that she had started a relationship with and that she was now expecting a visit from. It was after he had returned to her flat to confront her with this suspicion that the murder took place. It is reasonable to suppose that the wife confirmed the offender's suspicion, and that this triggered the state of affect that the murder was committed in.

When the events leading up to the murder, and the state of affect they triggered in the offender, are included in the general assessment, it is my conclusion that

there are no grounds for considering the murder as committed under particularly aggravating circumstances. § 233 second paragraph is therefore not applicable.

The defence has asserted that the murder was carried out during a state of temporary automatism, cf. § 56 nr. 1 b. I do not agree here, and refer to the forensic psychiatrist's report. On the other hand, there are, in my opinion, stronger grounds to raise the issue of whether the murder was committed in justifiable anger. Over a period of 17–18 years, the offender was continually affronted by his wife's drunkenness and infidelity. When the murder was committed, they were temporarily separated, and although they had agreed to resume their life together, and the offender had reason to feel affronted during and after the 'meeting of reconciliation', I am still inclined to assume that the conditions for justifiable anger in § 56 nr. 1 of the Penal Code were not satisfied. However, I can find no grounds for reaching a definite standpoint here, since I cannot see that the provision could be applied here to bring the sentence under the minimum punishment. In my opinion, the sentence of 8 years' imprisonment should have remained standing.

The wording of the judgement refers to the importance of family values and the understanding the court has for the offender as a person. By describing his love for his wife, using the word 'oppriktig' (genuinely), the court emphasises the offender's feelings. At the same time, it appears that there is understanding for his frustration. He is characterised in almost idyllic terms when the judge points out that he forgave his wife for her alcohol abuse, her partying, and her relationships with other men.

Thus, infidelity as a motive appears to be something even Courts of Justice understand. In the grounds for the judgement, the judge says that the court regards the background of the crime as tragic, and therefore understandable, as well as being the cause of the murder. This emerges in several court decisions, and was also the case in Rt. 1948-992, where the First Justice pointed out the following:

Når deres kjærlighetsforhold likevel fikk en så tragisk slutt, må årsaken søkes i tiltalte noe defekte sjeleliv sammenholdt med hans utpregede sjalusi, hvorvidt han virkelig har hatt grunn for sin sjalusi, er ikke tilstrekkelig klarlagt, men det må i et hvert fall ansees godtgjort at avdøde ofte ertet tiltalte med at hun flørtet med andre og at hun ved sin opptreden bidro til å gjøre tiltalte mistenksom og usikker på seg selv.

[The reason why their love relationship ended so tragically should be sought in the somewhat defective mental life of the accused, along with his intense jealousy. To what extent he actually had grounds for his jealousy is unclear, but

it should in any case be regarded as proven that the deceased often teased the accused with the fact that she flirted with others and that by her behaviour she contributed to making the accused suspicious and unsure of himself.]

The court states that although massive violence was used, the reason for the murder must also be taken into consideration when sentencing. This statement can almost be interpreted as an attempt by the court to imply that when the motive is emotional, it should count as mitigating circumstances.

The judge presents his points of view and his arguments in the judgement to achieve an acceptance that the result is just, proportional and lawful, in view of the nature of the crime. The purpose of the judgement is to make the reader understand that justice has prevailed. By reading the judgement, the reader can assess whether the judge's interpretation is reasonable or not.

*

My examination of the two cases shows that homicide is categorised through the use of designations. Family killing, jealousy killing, honour killing and family tragedy are terms that can be used in reference to the same act, depending on the judge's interpretation of the motive and the cultural context of the homicide. It should be mentioned that experts in the field cannot rule out that a lack of knowledge concerning partner killing may have led to partner killing being mistaken for honour killing, and *vice versa*. In the case of partner killing, the killing is always carried out by a person who either is or has been in a (sexual) relationship with the deceased. A survey of homicide from Kripos (the Norwegian Bureau of Crime Investigation) reveals that they have categorised homicides according to the motive seen as causing the killing. The following categories are used by the police: 'jealousy', 'quarrel', 'mental illness', 'honour killing', 'fear', 'revenge', 'family killing' and 'unknown'. However, the point is that the sentencing can be very strongly influenced, depending on whether a case is categorised as a family tragedy or a honour killing.

The comparative analysis of the two cases indicates that sentencing practice in cases where honour is assumed to be the motive is strict. This is also evident from several other honour cases in my material (cf. Rt. 2004-750, LA-2009-72131, RG-2007-1112, LE-2014-101506). In all of these cases, sentences were set at 17 years. All the cases showed similarities with ethnic Norwegian partner killings where the conflict concerned relationship break-up or custody of children.

‘Avgjørelser forsterker og videreutvikler samfunnet’ [Court decisions reinforce and improve society] (Smith 2012, 15). As ex-Supreme Court judge Carsten Smith points out: ‘Enhver dom kan ses som et bidrag til samfunnet ved at den tar stilling til de forskjellige rettsspørsmål på det aktuelle tidspunkt’ [Every judgement can be seen as a contribution to society by making a decision on the various legal issues at a particular moment in time] (NOU 1999, 19).

Smith’s statement indicates that social changes have an impact on law in society. This means that the attitude to honour killing has changed over time. It started with the so-called ‘Turk murder’, where a father and his sons killed the daughter’s lover (Rt. 1984-1146). In that case, honour and cultural factors were regarded as mitigating circumstances. The Supreme Court, unlike the Court of Appeal, took into account prevalent attitudes in the homeland of those convicted, and reduced the prison sentences from 16, 13 and 12 years to 12, 8 and 7 years respectively. A couple of decades later, the same cultural factors were seen as aggravating rather than mitigating in our case (Rt. 2004-750), where the Supreme Court stated that culturally contingent acts required particular legal protection, and the offender was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

In punishing a crime and reaching a decision on proportionality, the legislator expresses how dangerous and socially unacceptable an act is (Brattholm 1980, 592). The length of sentence also expresses the judge’s thinking, and at the same time signals that the criminal has got his/her just deserts in the eyes of the law. Rt. 2004-750 sheds further light on this point. In fact, this judgement has been used on several occasions as a reference for sentencing in homicide cases, often in cases where the court suspects that honour has been a motive for the killing. For example, in RG.2005-942, RG.2007-112, LA.2009-72131, LB.2013-41556, TDRAM.2014-5306 and others, guidance was sought from and reference made to the judgement in 2004. The judgement in Rt. 2004 p. 750 was also mentioned, and used in the legislative history for the Penal Code of 2005 in Ot.prp.nr. 22 (2008–2009), and later repeated in Prop. 97. The legislator referred to the judgement to illustrate the need for more severe punishments in cases of honour crimes, and homicide in general. At the same time, the court decision was used to demonstrate developments in the application of law in the direction of more severe punishments for homicide. The judgement was used almost as a template for homicide sentencing, especially in cases where men from minority backgrounds committed the offence. In LA. 2009-72131, First Justice states that the case has parallels to RT. 2004 p.750 in that B’s wish to lead an independent life without A’s control was difficult for him to accept. The offender is sentenced to 17 years in prison and the

next phrase of the judgement refers to the sentence being fixed in accordance with Rt. 2004-750 and other judicial precedents.

The motive in the two cases is of great significance for the sentencing. In case Rt. 2004-750, the motive for the homicide was seen as being honour. In the grounds for the sentencing, the point was made that such acts call for extra protection of victims. The sentence of eighteen years is intended to give an impression that the perpetrator has been punished as deserved. In case Rt. 1992-1095, the motive appears to result in a more lenient punishment. Even if the killing was carried out with great brutality, it was the result of many years of infidelity and frustration. This was pointed out in the grounds for the judgement, thus emphasising that the act was carried out in justifiable anger. By assessing a homicide carried out with massive violence to a sentence of eight years, the court is expressing an understanding of the premises that infidelity can have tragic consequences.

In both cases, the evaluation is made from a subjective interpretation as well as a legal one.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that my findings seem to correspond with other research projects. In 2005 Kristin Skjørten analysed the way the killing of family members was portrayed in the media, and pointed out that murders in majority families were referred to as family tragedies, while murders in minority families were referred to as honour killings: 'I førstnevnte tilfelle blir vold og overgrep gjerne forstått med utgangspunkt i individualpsykologiske faktorer, mens det i minoritetsfamilier forstås som et uttrykk for en kultur, og da gjerne med fokus på ulikestilling og kvinneforakt som en del av kulturen' [In the former case, violence and assault were understood in the light of individual, psychological factors, while in minority families they were understood as an expression of culture, and often with a focus on gender inequality and contempt for women as part of the culture] (Skjørten 2005).

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