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

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**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).

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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.<sup>2</sup>

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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

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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 climax<sup>3</sup>, establishes a reasonably conventional narrative structure. Moreover, the novel falls into a dystopian genre of literature that, according to Sarah Ljungquist, emerged during the 20<sup>th</sup> 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-den-ne-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).<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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.

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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).<sup>6</sup> Also, traditional utopias usually feature a systematic mapping of the (limited) enclave and a

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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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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;

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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 markedskreftene 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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)

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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 unngåelig 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.]<sup>13</sup> [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-chief<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

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'.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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'

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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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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)<sup>20</sup>:

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.<sup>21</sup> 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)<sup>22</sup> 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

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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).<sup>23</sup> When the company is accused of

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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.<sup>24</sup> 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.

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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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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'.<sup>27</sup> The organisational structure and the slogan indicate that honour is involved both horizontally (between equals) and vertically (between levels).<sup>28</sup>

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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: 'Problemene 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 afloat. 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.<sup>29</sup> 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 honour<sup>30</sup>:

Dere er [som mørk Hudete 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 gottas heldigvis ikke under noen omstendigheter. Ikke ennå. Jeg lover dere[.]

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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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and the cult of the Arian race<sup>31</sup>, 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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*.<sup>34</sup> 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 toleranselogikken 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.<sup>35</sup> 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,

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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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