The concept of honour and honour narratives

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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.

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 Muelengracht 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). 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 meet [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). 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 Asante Twi 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: ‘Kvinner ærbarhet, dyd og kyskhet er samfunnets grunnsten […] Familier, slekter, klaner, stammer og nasjoner kan ”tvinne” et æresbegrep som legger byrden, smerten på kvinners skuldre’. [Women’s honesty, virtue and chastity are the foundations of society. [...] Families, generations, clans, tribes, and nations can ‘twist’ an honourary 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 Sursson, Gisla saga Súrssonar, and one dealing with events from a late medieval society, the saga of Torgils and Havlide, Pørgils saga ok Haflíða. 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 Pørgils saga Súrssonar, 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 Eriksen Rekdal presents a reading of one Old Irish King saga, Echtra Fergusa mac 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 Llambíás’ 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 Zangenberg’s ‘’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 Marcusian 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 Kaaberbol. 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 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 – familietragodie 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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


