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## Men's and women's honour

ANNE-MARIE MAI

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

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

**TO SACRIFICE ONE'S HONOUR**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*NORA. Det har hundre tusen kvinner gjort.’)*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1. Welsh *What is Honor?*, 9–23.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## HONOURABLE EMANCIPATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In a conversation with her father she says:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## WELFARE AND HONOUR

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

In the Nordic countries, the welfare state was especially characterised by a defamiliarisation<sup>2</sup> that placed children, young people and adults in new situations and tested them in ways that were unpredicted.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## HONOUR, BODY AND SEXUALITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

## AN HONOURABLE MORALITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘I do. You’re the one who doesn’t.’

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

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

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

(Brøgger 1984, 283)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## TOWARDS REGIMENTATION

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

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

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

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

His writing insults her honour:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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