

Honour and recognition in the German novel of banditry circa 1800

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‘Capitano! You see, you are no good to anyone outside our small circle. There’s no place in their policed world for you. Why not stay in these inhospitable valleys, in the woods and wild places, feared and honoured by your comrades? The die is cast, accept your fate!’ – Christian August Vulpius, *Rinaldo Rinaldini*ⁱ

Fictional representations of gangs ranging from the late eighteenth-century *Räuberroman* or novel of banditry to the Mafia novels of Mario Puzo have exerted an enduring grip on the popular imagination. They do so in part by their treatment of the theme of honour: an apparently superfluous principle in modern societies that retains its sway only in counter-cultural groups or in cultures deemed to be anti-modern (Berger, 1970). In this essay I will attempt to account for the prominence of the honour theme in the German novel of banditry by relating it to changes in the economy of prestige around 1800 as experienced by authors and readers.ⁱⁱ In doing so I want to use the honour theme to address a larger question, that of the complicity between authors and readers at a time of significant change in reading practices. The interpretation will concentrate on two novels from the 1790s: Johann Heinrich Zschokke’s *Abaellino der große Bandit* (1794), and Christian August Vulpius’s bestseller *Rinaldo Rinaldini* (1799). In my reading of these works I shall be guided by the theory of recognition developed by Axel Honneth, largely from his engagement with Hegel’s *System of Ethical Life* (*System der Sittlichkeit*).

Drawing not only on Hegel but also on Kantian notions of reciprocity and George Herbert Mead’s psychology, Honneth suggests that successful models of personal identity are dependent on the mutual recognition of individual (free) will and a psychological need to be recognised by others. Negotiations concerning this mutual claim for recognition lie not only at the core of identity formation but also at the heart of social and political life, its underlying normativity and ‘moral grammar’.

Together with the apparently extra-literary discourse on history and on civilization and the state of nature, the honour theme is highly relevant for the emergence

of the novel of banditry as a phenomenon of popular literature. How does a popular form such as the novel of banditry participate in such discourses? In his work on a closely related popular form, the German *Ritterroman* (novel of chivalry), Barry Murnane considers whether these fictions can be said to participate in historical discourse around 1800. To claim such participation for the historical novels of Walter Scott and his imitators is relatively straightforward. Scott's historical novels employ a technique of double-layering, superimposing a narrative layer containing invented characters on to a historically documented sequence of events. But what of those historical novels where the historical reference is less substantial? This is the case in Benedikte Naubert's novel of chivalry *Alf von Dülmen* (1791), loosely based on the thirteenth-century dispute over succession to the throne of the Holy Roman Empire between Philip of Swabia and Otto of Brunswick. Unlike Naubert's other historical fictions, *Alf von Dülmen* does not rely on the technique of double-layering. Yet a novel of chivalry like *Alf von Dülmen* does refer to the age in which it was written, though this reference is less a matter of substance than of gesture. This gesture manifests itself in the setting of the plot in a generalized antiquity, in the use of dates to mark intervals in the plot, and in the use of explanatory footnotes. By virtue of these gestures of reference the novel of chivalry fulfils the minimum criterion for participation in historical discourse.

What, then, is the nature of this participation? Is it the case that the novel of chivalry, and its sibling, the novel of banditry, act in the manner that Lukács (1971: 29-41) established for the historical novel, namely as an expression or mirror of the social conflicts that obtain at the time of composition? If the novel of banditry does express the conflicts of the late eighteenth century, then we have to admit that it does so rather indirectly. For one thing, it is often spatially displaced to Southern Europe, or temporally to the Middle Ages – far from the realms of the late eighteenth-century Enlightenment. One way of thinking about the historical reference embodied in novels of banditry and chivalry is to compare them to heterotopias (Murnane, 2011). Heterotopias, in Foucault's definition (Foucault, 1966), are places paradoxically located inside and outside society.ⁱⁱⁱ One of Foucault's most memorable examples is the cemetery: a place both strikingly apart from the life of the city and referentially connected to it. Novels of banditry and chivalry relate to other discursive forms in a manner that resembles the relationship

between a heterotopia and other places. They are both a part of and separate from other discourses to which they are linked by non-mimetic relations of reference.

The novel of banditry in context

Among the factors contributing in Europe to an exponential growth in popular narratives about robbers and their gangs in the closing decade of the eighteenth century four seem to have been of particular importance. Two of these factors are sociological in character, one is philosophical and the last is political. The first (sociological) factor consists in the emergence of a mass reading public, and in the accompanying shift from intensive to extensive reading. Altick (1983: 67-80) has characterized the 1790s as a 'time of crisis', in which increased literacy levels drove the dramatic social expansion of the literary market. Although the change was apparently more gradual in Germany, Engelsing (1973: 140) speaks of a 'revolution in reading', taking place in the second part of the eighteenth century. The second of our sociological factors is the general visibility of crime and punishment in both countries at the very moment that penal reforms are about to remove the processes of punishment from the public gaze.

But in the 1790s it was still early days for the prisons and penitentiaries of the Enlightenment. Throughout Europe public chastisements and executions are still administered in the town square: Germany's *Rabensteine* and England's crossroads gibbets are still standing. Apart from their official stagings, crime and punishment are also visible in such popular forms as ballads and one-act melodramas, anecdotes and colportage novels whose circulation attests to a widespread fascination with the existence of organized gangs of robbers. The capture of a gang member very often gave rise to literary activity; and robbers remaining at large were frequently represented in literature (Lindner, 1991: 313-348).

The opposite state of affairs was also possible: real-life robbers were measured against their literary counterparts. Thus, the horse thief Johannes Bückler (better known as Schinderhannes) was before his arrest and execution in 1803 portrayed in a novel as a 'counterpart to Rinaldo Rinaldini' (Jakob, 2005). If we accept that the Neapolitan bandit

Angelillo provided the inspiration for Vulpius's *Rinaldo Rinaldini*, then it is apparent that popular myth making and popular literature existed in a mutually influencing relationship. In this connection it is important to observe not only the general visibility of crime and punishment in late eighteenth-century Europe, but also the fact that a significant part of the population existed on the threshold of criminality. This was especially the case in areas where legislation was experienced as external compulsion at odds with communal ideals of justice. Attitudes of this kind combined with weak policing to create a climate of tolerance for poaching and smuggling.

The third, philosophical, factor contributing to the growing popularity of narratives of banditry is the declining influence of religious and transcendental values on the popular imagination. In the realm of ethics this process is accompanied by the decline of the concept of honour, which I shall attend to next. Finally, the political impact of such recent historical events as the Seven Years War and the French Revolution should not be forgotten. These events were experienced by contemporaries as an earthquake shaking the foundations of the absolutist state – a constitutional form that derived its legitimacy largely from the claim to protect subjects from the anarchy represented by gangs. By the 1780s it was evident that the absolutist state could no longer fulfil its role as a guarantor of enduring peace, and awareness of this stoked speculation about the political shape of a post-absolutist age. These are the factors on which the authors of novel of banditry as market-oriented fictions speculate.

The theme of honour

Friedrich Schiller did more than any other author to ignite the passion of the German reading public for bandits with his play *Die Räuber* (1781). Eleven years later, while compiling a collection of his prose works, Schiller made a small but telling adjustment to the title of a crime story that he had originally published six years previously. When it had first appeared in Schiller's own journal, *Thalia*, the story bore the title *Der Verbrecher aus Infamie, eine wahre Geschichte*, originally published in in 1786. Schiller gave it the new title *Der Verbrecher aus verlorener Ehre*. The effect of the title change was twofold. First, it gave added emphasis to the loss of honour as the determining factor in a criminal career. Second, the change of terms from 'Infamie' to 'Ehre' de-emphasized

the notion of honour as *bona fama*, the regard of others. In his story Schiller understands honour not as the blamelessness and social esteem in the eyes of others that the protagonist sacrifices by his misdeeds, but as that self-respect bound to the awareness of personal integrity and dependent on the recognition by others of personal individuality. For Schiller, honour is less a matter of the regard of others than of self-regard, less an outward than an inner stance.

Schiller's amendment is more than just a footnote to the history of concepts. Indeed, it reflects a change in the content of a concept that was tangible to many people at the turn of the nineteenth century. In *literature* one of the visible signs of this change was the shift from an aristocratic to a bourgeois model of honour reflected in the rise of the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel*, or drama of the common man (Alt, 1993). Axel Honneth (1995: 124) perceptively distinguishes two distinct ways in which the honour concept was reconfigured around 1800. Honour was simultaneously universalized as human dignity, and privatized as subjectively defined 'integrity'.

In the pre-modern corporatist social order (*Ständeordnung*) the individual possessed honour to the extent that he or she successfully embodied or lived up to the particular values of his or her estate or status group (*Stand*). Honour was not equally distributed among the estates: the nobility and clergy stood at the top of the hierarchy of prestige with other groups below them – but each estate offered its members a particular form of honour and a standard by which honour could be measured. The rise of bourgeois honour at the expense of its aristocratic equivalent was one indication that the hierarchy of prestige was subject to change in the course of the eighteenth century.

While the social system of estates offered a reasonably secure anchor of personal identity and a framework for self-realization to its members, this was of no comfort to growing numbers of people subsisting outside the corporatist order. Demographic factors, especially the expansion of the class of landless peasants, acted to destabilize this order in the course of the eighteenth century – with far-reaching consequences in France. Such developments fed into the new discourse on human rights, leading to demands that honour, now understood as the dignity proper to every human individual, be extended to all. But the universalization of honour as dignity was hampered by the failure of legal and political reform to keep up with the new ideas, and with economic developments. One

sign of this lag was the persistent denial of esteem to those persons whose occupations (the dyers of animal skins, charcoal-burners, executioners and knackers) or ways of life (vagrants and criminals) were traditionally regarded as unworthy (Küther, 1976: 23-24). So persistent was the stigma attaching to 'unworthy' occupations that not even the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (1971: 13-29) could find a place for the historical bandit Johannes Bückler, *Schinderhannes* (Knacker-Johannes) in his canon of 'social bandits'. The stigma of unworthiness must have been particularly painful for literate members of these socially marginal groups, and we can only speculate to what degree the careers of such historical bandits as Johannes Bückler were motivated by the knacker's awakened consciousness of his own dishonourable status. The pre-eminence of the honour theme in the novel of banditry is, however, beyond doubt. One reason for this may have been the theme's attractiveness for 'new readers', especially where reading represented a form of self-determination and an opportunity to transcend traditional barriers and restrictions.

The effects of the universalization and privatization just described were to hasten the decline of the category of honour. Because honour as 'dignity' could be claimed to inhere in every human individual regardless of social standing, it no longer came with a set of attributes particular to an estate. Whereas formerly individuals could be sure of getting and keeping honour by adhering to a traditional way of life, they now strove increasingly for social prestige, a much hazier and more evanescent quality. In the corporatist social order the values of each estate were esteemed because they formed the mutually complementary components of a cosmos of value, the historical and ideological underpinnings of which was the Christian idea of *ordo*. As the structures of the *ständisch* order began to weaken following the French Revolution and in the course of the resulting 'defensive modernization' in Prussia and other German states, this cosmos of value began to lose its validity as set of objective measures against which to assess the worth of persons. Privatization laid the burden of defining honour squarely on the shoulders of the individual, whose social esteem was now evaluated not in terms of the concrete values of an estate but with reference to the abstractly defined goals of society.

In Zschokke's *Abaellino* honour no longer serves as a reliable source of ethical orientation. As in many novels of banditry the story begins with the unjust denial of

outward honour, when Count Obizzo of Naples is exiled as the result of an intrigue. He wanders through Italy in disguise, assuming the name Abaellino, and eventually falling in with assassins in Venice. During his induction Abaellino is enlightened on the ‘philosophy of bandits’ by the gang leader, Matteo, ironically dubbed an ‘excellent teacher of philosophy’ (Zschokke, 1994: 19). Matteo’s disquisition on the subject is worth citing in full because of the light it sheds on the erosion of honour as a normative category of social organization in this period. I shall quote from the translation by M.G. Lewis:

Perhaps you will tell me, our trade is *dishonorable!* and what, then, is the thing called honor? ‘Tis a word, an empty sound, a mere fantastic creature of the imagination! – Ask as you traverse some unfrequented street, in what honour consists? – the usurer will answer. ‘To be honorable is to be rich; and he has most honor who can heap up the greatest quantity of sequins.’ ‘By no means,’ cries the voluptuary; ‘honor consists in being beloved by every handsome woman, and finding no virtue proof against your attacks.’ ‘How mistaken,’ interrupts the general; ‘to conquer whole cities, to destroy whole armies, to ruin whole provinces – *that* indeed brings *real* honor!’ The man of learning places his renown in the number of pages he has either written or read; the tinker in the number of pots and kettles which he has made or mended; the nun in the number of *good* things which she has done, or *bad* things which she has resisted; the coquette, in the list of her admirers; the republic, in the extent of her provinces: and thus, my friend, everyone thinks that honor consists in something different from the rest. And why then should not the bravo think, that honor consists in reaching the perfection of his trade, and in guiding a dagger to the heart of an enemy with unerring aim? (Lewis, 1972: 45)

Matteo’s cynical discourse reads like a parody of Enlightenment assaults on prejudices and idols of thought of the kind practised by the materialist *philosophes*. Honour is dismissed as a mere ‘word, a hollow sound and an empty figment of the imagination’, and self-love acclaimed as ‘the mainspring of all human actions’ (Zschokke, 1994: 19-20). This assessment chimes with Hobbes’s prioritization of the motive of self-preservation over the love of honour in his theory of struggle (Siep, 1974: 172-173). It also recalls Bernard de Mandeville’s denial that honour consists in anything more than ‘the good Opinion of others’ and his assertion that inner honour is ‘an Invention of

Moralists and Politicians’ and ‘a Chimera without Truth or Being’ (Mandeville, 1714: Remarks C, R). For this fictional bandit, for the cynical London physician Bernard de Mandeville, and for Hobbes, all human actions are ultimately motivated by self-interest, or more specifically by self-preservation.

Banditry and authorship

Who are the authors of bandit novels, and what do we know about their social standing? Scholars of the genre owe Dainat (1996) a debt of gratitude for his excellent collective portrait of these authors in the German-speaking lands around 1800. The German authors of bandit novels appear as a sociologically more sharply defined group than their British contemporaries. Dainat (1996: 73) has labelled the German authors ‘arme Bildungsbürger’ (poor educated burghers). Among the members of this group we find petty officials, vicars, private tutors, lawyers and students: they are almost exclusively male, young men with a university education. They are usually in their twenties when they pen their sensational fictions, usually impecunious, and on the thorny path leading from a degree to a secure position of employment. Johannes Heinrich Zschokke (1771-1848) was twenty-three years old when his *Abaellino* was published; behind him lay two failed attempts to establish himself in stable employment, and he was about to embark on the perilous career of the freelance writer. The newly-fledged author could look back on experiences as a private tutor, a publisher, a hack-writer with a company of strolling players, and as a student of theology. Goethe’s brother-in-law, Christian August Vulpius (1762-1827) had a similarly chequered career behind him when, at the age of thirty-seven and working as a poorly-paid librarian in Weimar, he published his *Rinaldo Rinaldini*.

The generation of writers that began to publish around 1790 – among them Zschokke, Karl Grosse (the author of *Der Genius*), and Ludwig Tieck – possessed an ideal of authorship that was decisively influenced by the *Sturm und Drang* cult of genius. According to this ideal, only those literary works that were the outgrowths of a distinctive and original personality could lay claim to value. Ethically, these authors also laboured under the normative pressure of the Kantian and Fichtean ideals of self-determination. As early Romantics they were pioneers of the aesthetic revolution around 1800 – a shift from an aesthetics of mimesis to a constructivist aesthetic. Although the constructivist turn

could have a liberating effect on authors it was also experienced in terms of the pressure to innovate and as? a painful separation from literary traditions. Moreover, the ideal of aesthetic self-determination and innovation was constantly frustrated by the insatiable demands of the literary market. Such demands required very different skills of authors: the ability to vary a relatively small stock of motifs and plotlines, and to appropriate, even plagiarize, material (Dainat, 1996: 65). In view of the frustration arising from conflicting priorities, the requirement simultaneously to follow the market and to develop a distinct authorial style, writers may have been attracted to the imaginary role of the literary freebooter or bandit. The potential attractiveness of this role seems plausible when we consider the circumstances of these poor educated burghers. The combination of a relatively high level of educational attainment, material insecurity, and frustrated claims to recognition allow us to draw a parallel between these writers and the highly-educated victims of contemporary structural underemployment identified by Anne and Marine Rambach (2001) as ‘les intéllos précaires’. Though not a novel of banditry, William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* (1794) offers an insight into the intersection between the new, uncomfortable position of authors and the imaginary role of the criminal. In volume three we learn that the hero, who has been fleeing from unjust persecution, is eking out a precarious existence as a hack writer in the East End of London. In an effort to meet his publisher’s incessant demands for new material the fugitive falls back on ‘the resource of translation’, feverishly reworking ‘incidents and anecdotes of Cartouche, Gusman d’Alfarache, and other memorable worthies, whose career was terminated upon the gallows or the scaffold.’ (Godwin, 1988: 268). Here we find all the elements of the insecure self-consciousness of the literary bandit: the pressure to write at speed, translation as a source of fresh material – Godwin himself drew on German sources in the writing of *Caleb Williams* (Hindell, 1988: xxvii) – and the painful awareness of the fragility of personal honour. This last element preoccupies writers and their readers alike.

The ‘new reader’ as bandit

The popularity of the bandit novel probably had less to do with the stimulus it offered to the political imagination than with its appeal to a new kind of reader. In the following I shall use Engelsing’s term ‘new readers’ to refer to a group of readers identified by

cultural critics towards the end of the eighteenth century on account of their ‘new’ habit of extensive reading (Engelsing, 1974: 182-215). Of particular interest in this context are those members of the lower social estates for whom the repeated, intensive engagement with a select few texts was the norm, and the extensive or promiscuous reading of a great number of texts the exception. I am therefore using the term ‘new readers’ in a narrower sense than Engelsing, for whom the term denotes ‘a stratum not identifiable with any particular social estate’ (1974: 186).

New readers faced the possibilities of a kind of secession, not political in character, but social – one in which their reading separated them gradually from the estate of their birth. It is widely acknowledged that the end of the eighteenth century witnessed a shift in reading habits away from the intensive reception of the Bible and other canonical texts and towards the extensive consumption of non-fiction *Sachbücher* and of highbrow and popular literary fiction. Although this shift in reading habits was not confined to a particular social estate, it was experienced differently by those readers who were more constrained by economic and social factors. Relatively high prices for new books put them out of the reach of most servants, artisans and labourers, though some privileged domestic servants enjoyed access to the libraries of their employers. In view of these high prices, ‘new readers’ were obliged to turn to the lending library, and even here the subscription charges as a proportion of income were not negligible. These readers also faced social sanctions, for all reading outside the traditional canon of Bible, devotional literature, and the almanach, was apt to be regarded with suspicion. Unlike academic readers who could justify their extensive reading by referring to the cultural prestige of Latin and French literature, artisans were obliged to overcome both the prejudices of their peers and the general propaganda against reading novels (Engelsing, 1974: 198).

If many new readers struggled to justify their reading habits to their social peers, then the difficulties were particularly acute for autodidacts. In his autobiography, the Swiss weaver Ulrich Bräker (1735-1798), a charcoal-burner’s son, relates how his wife, herself unable to read or write, would often take him to task for spending an unreasonable amount of time reading and writing (Bräker, 1852: 189). Readers like Bräker clearly risked sanction for failing to conform to the archetypal patterns of conduct prescribed by

membership in an estate. Criticisms levelled at autodidacts like Bräker formed part of a wider attack on *Lesesucht*, addictive or over-extensive reading (Schenda, 1987: 57-65), made possible by a dramatic increase in the number of printed books in circulation. By the 1790s the proliferation of titles in print was already so great that the individual reader could not hope to survey the field of published works.

It is my thesis that bandit novels derived their appeal from the possibilities of identification which they offered the ‘new’ readers, a group that relied for their supply of reading matter on the lending library, an institution long associated with popular materials: historical novels, Gothic tales and family sagas. The thesis is likely to be easiest to verify in the case of those ‘new readers’ whose reading was at the service of an emphatic kind of self-development – the autodidacts.

As far as this author is aware the suggestion that autodidacts may have felt a particular affinity with fictional bandits is new. Interestingly, the work of Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, whose comparison of the French and German literature of banditry was cited above, has encompassed both ‘the fascination of brigand literature’ and the ‘loneliness of the autodidact’, without attempting to link the two phenomena (Lüsebrink, 1991, 2000). Individuals for whom reading was directed towards the ends of self-formation and enhanced personal prestige may have found the treatment of the honour theme in bandit novels appealing. Such readers staked what esteem they possessed in the eyes of their peers in the hope of garnering more prestige. As the reproach made to Ulrich Bräker by his wife clearly shows, voracious readers ran the risk of being shunned as unproductive idlers or dreamers. Where extensive reading included literary fiction the claim to be engaged in self-improvement must have been particularly difficult to sustain. Among artisans, labourers or farmers, reading of this kind would have seemed to many an affront to principles of the reader’s social estate: the need to use one’s energies efficiently and effectively. The resulting sense of being at odds with peer behaviour and values combined with the relative difficulty of obtaining books – the raw material of self-development – may have made the fictional role of the bandit a suggestive one for autodidacts. Snatching or siezing books are actions frequently encountered in the biographies of enthusiastic readers. Bräker (1852: 187) reports grabbing every book he could lay his hands on. The anecdote about the young Johann Gottfried Herder’s

relentless search for reading material in the small East Prussian town of Mohrunge might well be applied to many young self-educators in this era (Engelsing, 1973: 124). In their memoirs, autodidacts tend to represent their reading as voracious, even excessive, as a sort of athletic achievement. The English author Thomas Cooper (1805-1892), the 'Chartist poet', who lists *The Bravo of Venice* among the books of his youth, often claimed to have read to the point of exhausted collapse (Altick, 1983: 218). Christian Friedrich Hebbel, the orphaned son of a mason, for whom every new book was a momentous event, boasts of his deviousness in obtaining the sole copy of Goethe's *Faust* in his hometown of Wesselburen. Though not himself an autodidact, Gustav Freytag, who read 'with mercy neither to myself nor to the proprietor of the lending library', found the defiant pride of the voracious young reader confirmed in 'tales of knights and robbers' (Pleticha, 1957: 29).

The bandit role may also have suggested itself to readers on account of the opportunities and risks of self-education in the thickets of printed matter. Any zealous reader overcoming the problem of supply by subscribing to a lending library would have faced the problem of choosing what to read, and in what order, to attain the goal of self-education. In such circumstances the form and content of self-formation is necessarily contingent. The reader who is obliged to show autonomy or self-determination in his choice of reading matter appropriates material by making brief forays in different directions. Educational material appropriated in the opportunistic and unsystematic manner typical of the autodidact demands to be seen as booty, as ill-gotten gains.

An important function of the new reading habits developed in the Enlightenment period was the control and management of personal time. As Erich Schön shows (1987: 265-275), in seventeenth-century primers on reading, the activity was initially promoted as a means of dispelling the boredom of travel or waiting. Around 1800 reading was promoted less as a pleasant diversion and more as a means of utilizing unproductive time in 'formation of the heart and mind' (Schön, 1987: 269). This argument provided support for a new habitus of reading which could justify itself with reference to self-formation as the content and goal of prolific reading. The constant presence and ostentatious display of the book about the reader's person and the demonstrative 'snatching' of reading time on walks or on journeys were the visible signs of this new habitus.

The novel of banditry certainly did not fulfil the specifications of ‘good’ reading directed towards self-formation; but as a genre these novels flourished in the conditions of extensive reading given legitimacy by these specifications. Episodic plots mirrored or catered to an accelerated and time-conscious reading behaviour that resembled forays or raids. But the spoils of forays into the fictional worlds of bandits and vagabonds could only be measured in terms of pleasure. The reader partaking of such delights must in many cases have felt like an offender against the norm which dictated that reading had to be at the service of education.

The novel of banditry and the struggle for recognition

In the foregoing I have pointed to the special prominence of the honour theme in the novel of banditry. This is not a remarkable finding: anyone familiar with Mario Puzo’s *Godfather* instantly associates representations of criminal families or syndicates with their typical protagonist: the ‘man of honour’. I have tried to develop this superficial observation in an attempt to account for the appeal the genre held for authors and readers at the end of the eighteenth century. In doing so, I have sought to shed some light on what was at stake for such individuals in the context of new patterns of authorship and readership, arguing that the producers and consumers of such fictions shared a preoccupation with an honour that was personal rather than family honour or the honour of one’s estate. I now want to develop this point by suggesting that one way of understanding the special prominence of the honour theme in fictions of banditry (and in crime fiction generally) is to read them with the aid of the theory of recognition developed by Axel Honneth.

Eberhard Ostermann’s (2001) productive reading of Schiller’s novella, *Der Verbrecher aus verlorener Ehre*, is informed by precisely this theory. The criminal career of Schiller’s protagonist, Christian Wolf, is prepared when he is repeatedly denied personal recognition. At the beginning of his career Wolf is a footloose individual deprived of sustaining primary relationships. The early death of his father robs him of a source of love and discipline. Wolf helps his mother with the running of the family tavern, called The Sun, but business is poor and the youth is often underemployed. He becomes infatuated with a local girl, hoping that her affirmation will compensate him for

his unsatisfying personal relationships. But Wolf's disadvantages also include an unprepossessing physical appearance and the girl rebuffs his advances. The would-be lover then changes his tack, lavishing gifts – the proceeds of illegal hunting on the prince's estates – on his intended. Trespassing of this kind, 'honest stealing', even offers a measure of social recognition: the wildlife thronging the forests is regarded by Wolf's neighbours as fair game. But Wolf is arrested when a jealous neighbour informs on him, and escapes a custodial sentence only by paying a severe fine. Having no resources left, and scourged by wounded pride, he soon returns to petty crime. When he is caught for a second time, the youth is sentenced to prison for one year. On his release Wolf's inability to find employment even as a swineherd, the lowest rung on the ladder of the *Ständeordnung*, prompts a renewed lapse into crime.

When the recidivist appears before the court for a third time he is treated with the utmost severity. But the court also recognizes him, if only in a narrowly legal sense, as a bearer of rights and obligations who has repeatedly abused his freedom. This abstract recognition grasps the criminal as a generalized individual, without any regard for or interest in his personal characteristics, motivations or extenuating circumstances. Ostermann rightly observes that the disrespect shown Wolf first by his neighbours and then by the abstract judgements of the court are mere preparations for the actual crime of murder that reveal the moral logic of that crime (Ostermann, 2001: 216).

In prison Wolf seeks the company of his fellow inmates, though he is repelled by the coarseness of their behaviour. On his release he makes a further desperate effort at reintegration into the cosmos of shared values when he returns to his hometown. Hopes of reintegration are dashed when Wolf's gift of a coin to a young boy is contemptuously thrown back in his face. Paradoxically, this rebuff is experienced by Wolf as a rejection of his whole person, because the boy – who can know nothing of his misdeeds – is responding spontaneously to his whole presence and the values made manifest in it. The honour loss of the story's title is an act of self-abandonment, the despairing renunciation of a self-esteem made unsustainable by the contempt of others.

From this point onwards the criminal's actions are emphatically motivated by the desire to inflict damage on a society whose institutions deny him recognition and treat him with disrespect. Wolf slaughters game indiscriminately on the prince's lands,

wantonly destroying resources. Later he commits his first and only murder when he kills the neighbour who had informed on him. These are acts of negation aimed at recuperating self-esteem and compelling recognition of the bandit's person. Soon afterwards Wolf is initiated into a criminal gang living in the forests and becomes their leader. Here he apparently finds the recognition hitherto denied him both on the primary level of his affective relationships and on the secondary level as a member of civil society. Relations among the gang members seem to be characterized by solidarity, a mode of recognition in which Wolf is esteemed for his personal attributes.

But in Schiller's novella solidarity among members of the criminal gang proves illusory: the entity is undermined by rivalry and suspicion and by the constant fear of betrayal. As Ostermann argues, Christian Wolf attains full recognition only when he is finally apprehended. When his interrogator's initially aggressive tone modulates into a polite mode of address, Wolf finds himself for the first time treated with respect as a person of equal value, and is in return able to utter the words that close the story: 'I am the Host of the Sun'. These words contain an acknowledgement both of the criminal's own self-identity and of the society whose order he has perturbed.

The differences of aims and emphasis between Schiller's crime story and the novel of banditry are illuminating. Schiller's stated aim is to enlighten his readers about the motives and psychological states attending the act of self-banishment from society. The actual career of the bandit is disposed of summarily: to dwell on the morally repugnant deeds of the criminal has no instructive value. For the novel of banditry, however, it is precisely the banned state and the *res gestae* of the bandit that are of greatest interest. On the other hand, while social and biographical details are grist to the mill of Schiller's diagnostic fiction, such matters are of little interest in escapist popular fictions of the calibre of *Rinaldo Rinaldini*.

The reader wishing to trace the theme of honour in the heterotopia of popular literature soon fetches up against the intrinsic limitations of the genre: the tenuousness of its references, its repetitiveness and lack of self-reflexivity. Because of these limitations, and in view of the relative shallowness of the genre, applying the theory of recognition in reading novels of banditry can seem like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. As an interpretive instrument applied to the object of popular literature the theory of recognition

apparently fails to provide the ‘added value’ rightly identified by Albrecht (2012: 329) as the litmus test of a successful application. The objection that applying Honneth’s theory to *Rinaldo Rinaldini* produces a reductive reading that fails to do justice to the literariness of that work may, however, be fairly dismissed. Even critics favourably disposed to popular literature would be hard pressed to claim an elaborated degree of literariness for fictions that may advisedly be classified as trivial.

The theory of recognition contributes not to the interpretation of the novel of banditry as a genre, but to our understanding of a field of cultural production and consumption, in which the genre forms the nexus between authors and readers. Like the protagonists of the novels these authors and readers found themselves in an *interregnum* in which the relationship between personal and societal value was being reshaped. On the one hand, the institutions of the pre-modern corporatist order were weakening and were no longer capable of serving as a durable framework for the societal value of honour. On the other hand, the human dignity claimed for each individual irrespective of social standing by the Enlightenment, and the social prestige defined by elites, were either unsatisfactorily acknowledged or not as easily obtained as the values they were replacing.

It is when we apply the theory of recognition not to the novel of banditry but to the ensemble of discourses reflected in it as in a distorting mirror that we get a sense of its significance as a nexus between authors and readers. It is then that the appeal of a fictional bandit like Rinaldo Rinaldini becomes understandable.

In the heterotopia of the novel of banditry we find all the inhabitants of the corporatist social order, the nobility, the clergy and the burghers – and the dishonourable ones who exist outside and beneath the system of estates. In keeping with its focus on the deeds of the bandit and the life of the gang, *Rinaldo Rinaldini* provides sparse biographical detail on its protagonist, whom we encounter fully-formed, like one of Walter Scott’s heroes. Such biographical details as are included are those that encourage the poor educated burghers to identify with the gang leader. Rinaldo’s humble social origins – the young goatherd exists on the very brink of ignominy – contrast with his vaulting ambition and thirst for knowledge. He is taught reading by an anchorite who later disappears, leaving the youth his books. From the histories of Livy, from Plutarch’s *Lives*, and from novels of chivalry, Rinaldo concocts an ideal of the heroic life that he

attempts to realize, initially by becoming a soldier. His ambitions are dashed when he is cashiered for insubordination. When he takes revenge by stabbing his superior officer to death, he becomes an outlaw and a fugitive.

This cursory biography ushers in the story that readers of the novel actually want to read: the life outside the corporatist order that so suggestively recalls their experiences in an *interregnum* of societal values. Yet the fascination of the gang does not derive entirely from its outside status, for the gang is paradoxically governed by a distinctive code of honour of the kind that formerly held sway in each estate and defined the identity of its members. The fictional gang is the focus of longings for an identity patterned on archetypal patterns of behaviour, and for the solidarity underpinned by a code of honour well understood by all members of the group. Novels of banditry and chivalry might aptly be called *honour nostalgia fictions*. There is a historical irony in this longing. Readers of bandit novels, for the most part members of the third estate, are not only unhoused by the erosion of *ständisch* honour and solidarity: they also participate collectively, if unwittingly, in the destruction of the objective standards embodied in the *Ständeordnung*. As advocates of the rights of man and opponents of guild privileges educated burghers were agents of the *embourgeoisement* of honour. That process began with the assertion of bourgeois honour over its feudal, aristocratic equivalent, and ended with a thoroughgoing individualization of honour. With the onus of defining the content of honour placed squarely on the shoulders of the individual, the way was open for the replacement of honour by social prestige.

What values and behaviours were to be deemed prestigious was henceforth to be decided by whatever social group was dominant at a particular historical moment. In other words, social prestige was now a matter of conflict, and the novel of banditry captures something of the atmosphere of this struggle over values. It allows the reader to imagine the freedoms of realizing his or her individuality outside the constraints of the *Ständeordnung*, while simultaneously indulging nostalgia for the shared values that governed life for members of an estate.

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ⁱ Vulpus (1959, 205-206). Translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

ⁱⁱ I have chosen to use the generic label ‘novel of banditry’ for that category of fictions usually designated as *Räuberroman* in German because the etymology of the word ‘bandit’ is especially helpful here in drawing out the preoccupation of these works with the themes of honour and recognition – preoccupations that I will expand upon here. The word ‘bandit’ derives from the Italian *bandito* (pl. *banditti*), and ultimately from the verb *bandire* (to pronounce a ban). The reader should keep this sense of the bandit as a banned or proscribed person in mind when considering the following.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. also Ní Dhuill’s article on utopia in this special issue.