

ROXANA PATRAȘ, *The Remains of the Day. Literature and Political Eloquence in 19th Century Romania*, Roma, Aracne editrice, 2018, 247 p.

Par tradition, l'histoire littéraire du XIXe siècle en Roumanie s'est faite dans un horizon positiviste. Il ne s'agit pas seulement de la prééminence du documentaire et des études factuelles – attendue dans ce domaine –, mais surtout d'une confiance dans la capacité de l'enquête tardive du chercheur de reconstituer intégralement les réalités historiques. La plupart des travaux historiques s'est appuyée sur l'illusion d'une connaissance sans reste des auteurs et des créations, sans rien prendre en compte des phénomènes de perte et de disparition. L'histoire de la littérature au XIXe siècle s'est faite dans une perspective « optimiste », qui écartait d'emblée toute inquiétude quant à l'oubli. À partir de G. Călinescu, qui y situait l'âge classique de la littérature roumaine, le XIXe a été envisagé comme un siècle des « œuvres », caractérisé par le culte de la complétude et conservé par défaut dans une mémoire inaltérable. Pas de place dans cette narration pour les lacunes, si ce n'est que pour leur donner une interprétation philologique : manuscrits égarés, textes fragmentaires, paternité incertaine, anonymat. En fait, ce n'est qu'à tâtons qu'on a commencé à prendre conscience – et cela depuis peu – du processus de transmission et de ses « oublis ». Tout d'abord, comme une réflexion sur la dimension collective et institutionnelle de la mémoire. Depuis une vingtaine d'années on constate l'intérêt pour les fluctuations du cours des objets historiques, pour les surenchères ainsi que pour les passages sous rature. La consécration du poète national, la célébration des figures révolutionnaires de 1848, l'émergence ou l'effacement des mythologies historiques, la mémoire de la révolution de 1989 sont de tels thèmes qui constituent pour la culture roumaine, petit à petit, un univers de l'apparition et de la disparition. Dans ses remous, cet univers qui tresse sur-visibilité et oubli est mobilisé principalement par les passions de la communauté nationale, par sa quête de reconnaissance, par ses événements fondateurs et par ses traumas.

Je n'ai pas fait cette introduction pour dire que *The Remains of the Day. Literature and Political Eloquence in 19th Century Romania* illustre parfaitement cette nouvelle attitude face au XIXe siècle. Certes, la proposition de Roxana Patraș concerne un phénomène de disparition, mais elle y est une réponse atypique. Ce que désignent ces « restes du jour », auxquels le livre fait allusion en reprenant le titre du roman de Kasuo Ishiguro, c'est principalement le processus de communication sociale engagé par l'éloquence politique au XIXe siècle, entravé par le caractère éphémère du contexte de la performance politique. Ce qui est voué à la perte c'est la présence de l'orateur et du public, le rapport privilégié d'admiration ou de séduction établi dans la situation concrète, voire les réactions momentanées, d'approbation ou d'interruption. L'auteure, qui a rédigé une anthologie en trois volumes du discours parlementaire roumain au XIXe siècle, préfère mener sa réflexion loin des discours conservés dans les archives ou dans les annales, pour enquêter les réalités subtiles et provisoires qui accompagnent la réalisation circonstancielle de la parole politique. Reconstituer une histoire des « moments rhétoriques perdus » signifie, de ce point de vue, la volonté d'accéder à une authenticité de l'instant, au-delà de tout moyen de reproduction discursive.

L'originalité (et la difficulté) de cette démarche tient donc à l'échelle où l'on cerne la perte : au lieu des grandes tourmentes de la transmission culturelle, on voit un processus d'altération qui se déroule au niveau moléculaire des passions individuels. Car il n'est point question ici de la précarité qui affecte la mémoire « longue » des institutions collectives, mais de la mémoire « courte » de la production et de la consommation de l'éloquence publique. Aussi, est-on plus proche de Walter Benjamin et de ses considérations célèbres sur l'aura, que des aléas de la mémoire culturelle décrites un demi-siècle plus tard par Jan Assman. Dans cette perspective, on peut dire que les phénomènes de perte envisagés par Roxana Patraș dans son livre correspondent à ce qu'on appelle la « destruction de l'expérience » dans la modernité : un concret qui se refuse au sujet, qui se retire dans la fulgurance presque insaisissable de l'instant. En tant que tel, cette perte

est un signe de la dissolution accélérée des modes de vie, entraînée par le changement incessant de la société : même si les disparitions (de disposition, de passion, d'émotion etc.) n'y engagent pas toujours les thèmes centraux de la modernité, l'éloquence est le lieu par excellence d'une authenticité menacée et de la fragilité de la présence.

Je tiens à souligner deux implications de ce regard singulier sur les réalités du XIXe siècle en Roumanie. La première concerne la représentation de l'institution oratoire. Le livre, qui débute avec une section intitulée « Moments rhétoriques », s'apprête à reconstituer le champ de la communication politique autour de la présence du public et de son acculturation. Ce n'est pas en retraçant l'histoire des cadres officiels de l'éloquence (parlement, église, tribunal, place publique etc.), de leur composition et de leur statut symbolique, qu'on y refait la rhétorique publique en Roumanie, mais à partir de l'action imprévisible d'un public non-initié. Ainsi, dans une excellente analyse, Roxana Patraș met en évidence l'effet des vociférations et des interruptions sur la performance rhétorique de la parole (« Particular Audiences », pp. 92-95). L'importance de ce déplacement d'accent ne doit pas être sous-évaluée : en effet, mettre le public au cœur de l'échange politique justifie une réflexion sur le rapport entre la performance du discours et la constitution de la communauté nationale. C'est tout un peuple qui se forge autour de l'orateur, mais c'est un peuple qui se définit par ses dissonances et par ses investissements éphémères. Au fil de plusieurs applications subtiles à la réalité de l'éloquence, l'auteure arrive de la sorte à questionner la perspective courante sur l'invention de la communauté nationale. À la base de la construction de l'espace public et de l'élaboration sociale de la nation, se trouvent la parole proférée et ses réalisations provisoires, l'efficacité et les échecs de l'éloquence – c'est-à-dire des « moments » d'un échange verbal. À la différence de maintes analyses contemporaines de nationalismes européennes « petites », qui se focalisent sur l'application des formes et des recettes idéologiques et sur leur circulation transnationale, on part ici d'une situation de communication locale, tout en montrant la fondation fragile et éphémère des mythologies et des grandes institutions de la nation.

La deuxième implication vise le rapport avec la littérature, annoncé par le sous-titre de l'ouvrage (*Literature and Political Eloquence in 19th Century Romania*). Roxana Patraș choisit d'emblée – c'est un choix structurant de sa démarche – d'envisager des orateurs dont la carrière se bifurque entre l'éloquence et la littérature. La seconde partie du livre, « Rhetorical Moods », est construite comme une série d'études de cas qui mettent en parallèle la production littéraire et la production oratoire de plusieurs hommes politiques du XIXe siècle. On trouve dans cette liste le nom de M. Kogălniceanu, B.P. Hasdeu, B. Delavrancea, P.P. Carp ou Take Ionescu. Au-delà de l'intérêt sociologique de cette catégorie d'écrivains dilettantes, elle représente ici la solution donnée à une difficulté épistémique. Roxana Patraș entend répondre par la littérature au problème de la disparition. C'est dans le jeu de reflets entre l'œuvre littéraire et l'éloquence qu'on cherche à récupérer les « restes du jour » : les traces et les survivances des énergies de la parole se retrouvent dans le détail des textes littéraires. L'auteure se laisse guider par des notions exploitées surtout dans le domaine de l'histoire de l'art par Georges Didi-Huberman ou Carlo Ginzburg, suivant les suggestions de Aby Warburg. Ce sont de notions, telles les « gestes intensifiés », qui justifient l'attention accordée aux réalités infimes ou secondaires des œuvres d'art. Est-il légitime de transférer ce procédé dans la lecture des œuvres littéraires ? Sans donner ici une réponse, je constate que dans la démarche de Roxana Patraș cette décision interprétative engage une critique des passions mineurs. Il ne s'agit pas de la reproduction naïve des situations rhétoriques dans des textes littéraires, mais d'une mémoire commune des passions, qui véhicule entre éloquence et littérature les mêmes émotions, souvent en état embryonnaire. Par exemple, on met en rapport les rituels de séduction des orateurs avec leur manière de penser la fiction érotique ; ou la notion de gloire rhétorique avec la représentation de l'honneur dans les traductions de Shakespeare. En effet, les commentaires évoquent des passions qui marquent soit l'engagement de l'individu dans le cours des honneurs (gloire, domination), soit le psychodrame de la communication (désir, séduction), soit la mélancolie de la perte et de la mort qui accompagne cette activité éphémère. À part le mérite de récupérer des figures textuelles souvent ignorées, il faut reconnaître à cette hypothèse de travail

l'aperture culturelle large. Ainsi, l'herméneutique de la trace permet à Roxana Patraș d'esquisser une histoire des valeurs rhétoriques dans la culture roumaine et leurs rapports à la réalité de la société, et de distinguer entre plusieurs dispositions passionnelles caractéristiques de la communication publique au XIXe siècle : héroïque (régime de la mobilisation), dissidence (régime de l'individualité) etc.

Difficile d'apprécier à présent les retombées d'une telle démarche. Par son corpus très particulier – la littérature écrite par les orateurs – et surtout par la langue de sa publication – en anglais, chez une maison d'éditions italienne –, cette recherche est vouée à une circulation restreinte. Néanmoins, par ses prémisses, on a affaire à une proposition novatrice, dont la vocation est de déplacer les cadres interprétatifs de l'histoire culturelle et littéraire au XIXe siècle. L'édification nationaliste de la société roumaine et le processus de sa modernisation sont corrélées à des passions qui caractérisent des contextes fortement marqués par leur caducité. Et repenser la nation à travers les figures de l'éphémère a de quoi changer la donne. La force de ce livre réside notamment dans sa capacité d'inciter de nouveaux questionnements sur des thèmes qu'on croyait résolus concernant le processus de la formation de la culture roumaine au XIXe siècle. Je pense qu'on doit le lire non pas comme une contribution sur l'histoire de l'éloquence roumaine, mais comme une réflexion sur l'articulation complexe entre l'émergence culturelle et la micro-événementialité d'une société : comme une tentative de se positionner devant le niveau le plus fragile et le plus incertain de l'élaboration d'une culture nationale.

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ANDREI OIȘTEANU, *Sexualitate și societate. Istorie, religie și literatură*. [Sexuality and Society. History, Religion and Literature], Iași, Polirom, 2016, 664 p.

Andrei Oișteanu's book, published in 2016, is a consistent and convincing analysis of the manifestation of sexuality throughout history and across different cultures. The study opens with a historical documentation of *Ius primae noctis*, the so-called right of the first night, a privilege to which sovereign figures from the Antiquity onward were entitled. The right of the first night implied that these persons of higher status were either designated to or took pleasure in depriving young brides of their virginity. Andrei Oișteanu offers numerous examples of this practice, from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to the Old Testament, The Talmud, as well as several historical writings documenting the persecutions of Christians in the Roman Empire. The author goes on to discuss the tales from *One Thousand and One Nights*, where *Ius primae noctis* also implied the daily execution of the deflowered virgin. Although Oișteanu insists on the pronounced Oriental origin of this ritual, he offers innumerable other examples of literary works where *Ius primae noctis* assumes the spotlight: *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, Dostoevsky's *The Adolescent* or Guillaume Apollinaire's *Les onze mille verges ou Les Amours d'un hospodar*. As for the latter, it is a recurring example, not merely because of its portrayal of the right of the first night, but for its multiple accounts of sexual deviation and due to the fact that the central character originates in Bucharest, a city with a prominent exotic character, as depicted by the literary representations on which the author lays repeated emphasis.

The selected narratives depart from a purely literary sphere: the author idles on several anecdotes figuring Priapic men made famous throughout historical literature. Among these, the

story of Count Ranieri di Biandrate, who wishes to deflower a young miller's daughter, Violetta. She resists his attempted rape and decapitates him, whereas the whole community rebels against the count's court and ransacks his castle in a collective revengeful fury. The author doesn't leave the rest of Europe out of his focus: he documents *le droit du seigneur* or *le droit de cuissage* in France, the *right of the first night* in the British Isles or *dreptul grofului* in Transylvania. He also documents the peasant rebellions that demanded the abolishment of either the rituals symbolizing *ius primae noctis* or its actual realization in Piemont (1194), in Scotland (1297), in England (1450), Catalonia (1486) or Transylvania (1514). In several of these lands, a traditional and often informal tax on virginity was in place. Either the bride's family or the new husband had to pay money, furs of foxes or martens or farm animals to their senior in order to escape this practice. Subsequently, in many Indo-European languages, the name of the animal or the animal's fur has become synonymous with the concept of 'tax' or 'fine'.

Another noteworthy observation launched by the author regards the fact that the sexual practices of the European nobility have been retrospectively exaggerated in order to discredit aristocracy itself and to push forward the Illuminist agenda more easily. In part, rumours about the depravity of Marie Antoinette and that of the entire French sovereignty led to the success of the French Revolution, the author argues. In fact, throughout the entire book, a thread of symbolic equivalence binds together political power, sexual domination and cultural authority. The ruling class exercises its right to sexually dispose of its subjects, simultaneously transforming it into a tradition, that is to say, into a cultural good. To these three elements, a fourth is to be added, namely male dominance. The author hereby invokes dogmatic texts about the religiously approved sexual practices within the Catholic world that strengthen the idea according to which for hundreds of years the most encouraged and practiced sexual position was the so-called 'missionary position', whereas the man would sit over the woman, symbolically proving his superiority.

Regarding this inequality, the author discusses the different mechanisms and processes which enabled a deeply unequal evolution of the mythology of virginity. The importance of the hymen is emphasized time and time again, since it must remain intact up until the wedding night. If the bride proves not to be a virgin, she is to be publicly humiliated and ultimately sent back home to her parents. According to the author, the proof of the bride's virginity prior to the wedding night (the blood-stained sheet) was – more often than not – to be publicly exposed so that all the guests could see and bear witness to the bride's purity. This crass inequality is also to be found in the display of sexual desire or conduct: men are allowed to and even praised when displaying sexual behaviours, however immoral, whereas the same behaviour is condemned in a woman. A pardonable behavioural pattern in men is a deed worthy of disgrace and social exclusion for women. Regarding premarital rituals, the author insists on several expressions in Romanian that recall archaic customs and prohibitions, for example "tied to the fence", "children of the fence", "child born in flowerbeds", symbolizing the illicit character of premarital sexual encounters. As for "jumping the fence", it meant that a girl or young woman had prematurely lost her virginity. In regard to what happens after the wedding, the author illustrates several of the rituals surrounding the organization of the household, which revolve around the wife and her numerous symbolic functions. She is either "tied to her parents' hearth" as she remains unmarried, she can "fall on somebody's hearth", when she is chosen as wife by a man whose parents do not agree with her, or she can "hit herself against the hearth" if her parents do not allow her to marry, as if trying to escape from the invisible chains tying her to it.

Another recurring representation brought into question is the poisonous virgin and, in correlation to it, gynophobia as a result of *vagina dentata*. Within the narrations depicting gynophobia, the maid must be deflowered by a stranger or a second-class citizen, so that only he should suffer either the effect of the poison or the castrating bite of the female organ. The myth of *vagina dentata* is to be found all across the world and in nearly all historic periods, according to the author, who then argues that this basically universal representation originates from a deeply Freudian castration complex. That is why, in certain parts of the world and during certain historic

periods, the *ius primae noctis* was not a right, but a task closer to a punishment, a borderline unpleasant duty assigned to male servants or inconspicuous travellers.

Another aspect addressed in this book is the fetishization of hair and the fixation on a married woman's curls as a voucher for her fidelity, given that they remain hidden in public and are displayed only to her rightful husband and only during moments of conjugal intimacy. On the contrary, men's hair – and especially the facial hair – was historically regarded as a symbol of virility: the longer, thicker, more aesthetically pleasing the beard, the more potent the man. Indeed, it seems that, corollary to the question of sexuality, the question of virility takes the scene. Which brings us to the ritual of the erotic binding of the dragon, the unicorn or other otherworldly beings by the beautiful virgin. In all narrations that feature such representations, the dragons are domesticated and subsequently killed by the hero, which in this way proves his worth and virility. More often than not, from the dragon's meat a feast is prepared for the guests at the wedding between the fair maiden and the victorious hero, and its bones help build the newlywed's house. Another historically documented practice – in fact, so often documented so as to become tradition – is the *ius occupant*, the right of the occupier. Oişteanu hereby discusses the practice of collective rapes and the existence of rape camps from Ancient Greece up until the 21st century, all while idling in his considerations on the rapes practiced by the Turkish soldiers on the Romanian women through centuries of Turkish dominance over South-Eastern Europe.

Nevertheless, the most striking aspect of this book is the sheer mass of its bibliographical apparatus. Not one single claim finds its way in the pages of this book without being backed up by several references. The cross-referencing and the scholarly manner in which the most seemingly evident and self-explanatory information is being presented to the reader are worthy of admiration, even if the recurring references sometimes tend to become redundant. Another laudable feature of this book is the universality of the author's references, pending between Romanian and exotic authors, between contemporary and ancient cultural practices, in order to underline the universal character of sexuality itself and its nearly invariant historical manifestations.

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CĂTĂLIN GHIȚĂ, *Coliba din mijlocul palatului. Frica și marile idei* [*The Hut in the Middle of the Castle. Fear and the Big Ideas*], București, Cartea Românească, 2018, 206 p.

The passionate book written by Cătălin Ghiță explores the modern socio-philosophical imaginary as a system of “big ideas” that relies onto authoritarian media in order to hide and perpetuate some social fears. The notion “culture of fear” has already been discussed in some notable studies in anthropology and sociology, whereof can be reminded Frank Furedi's approach (*Culture of Fear. Risk-Taking and the Morality of Low Expectation*, London – New York, Continuum, 2002) that reflects on the reification of fear, a process leading to the individuals' incapacity of coping with adversity, or the studies coordinated by Uli Linke and Danielle Taana Smith (*Cultures of Fear. A Critical Reader*, London – New York, Pluto Press, 2009) that analyse the formation and normalization of fear through political, military and administrative instruments. Constructing his essay around an architectural metaphor, that is the poor hut inside the shiny castle, the author shifts the interest to the cultural studies by asserting that our intellectual universe consists, in fact, of repressed anxieties, a relation that becomes even more transparent in the

postmodern era of relativism. Nevertheless, the author is sharp enough not to pin relativism to his own discourse, since such a concept, besides free thinking, can also emerge into new fears, such as the fear of axiological absence. Rather than using Derrida's deconstructionist method, Cătălin Ghiță's enterprise resembles Foucault's architectural thinking, which is visible in his constant *positioning*, as the essayist says, *intra* and *extra muros*: debunking the cultural mechanisms of fear, but also pleading for a certain subjective axiological scale; inside the Romanian space, but also in a detached exile into other cultures; playing with the acquisitions of exact sciences (especially those coming from neurosciences and digital technology) and placing his approach at the pole of humanities.

The first chapter reinterprets religion through the optics of a fear of autonomy that is acutely sensed by the "post-Nietzschean man" who, for the first time, feels abandoned and confronted with his awareness of being alone in the universe. The seduction of the transcendental authority is rooted, quoting Karl Popper, in the early European thinking, namely in Plato's philosophy, that preaches a society of servile and incapable individuals condemned to obey in the name of a greater good represented by an omniscient authority. Therefore, organized religion is unmercifully classified as dictatorship that provides arbitrariness, intolerance, and irrationality. More than this association between religion and totalitarian forms (echoing Nietzsche, Shelley, and Bertrand Russell's reflections), what holds the interest here is the relationship between autonomy and authority in the aftermath of religious thinking. The fear of autonomy, instrumented by a culture of transcendental authority (and, I would add, any kind of authority besides God), generates a submissive society of individuals that lack responsibility for their actions.

The next chapter focusses on ethics as fear of anarchy, questioning the link between the law and a desirable lifestyle (the Aristotelian "good life"): is the hypothesis of ethical universalism available (as in Sam Harris's controversial theory) or is the relativist subjective moral code the path to follow? Cătălin Ghiță is swinging between the two poles without an explicit answer, as it is not the pursuit of the good life or of freedom that drives the moral stance, but the double fear of anarchy and marginalization. On the one hand, the author insists on the arbitrariness and absurdity of some moral taboos, such as polygamy and euthanasia that are reconsidered as personal options and not as the object of legal action. On the other hand, the essayist states out that a moral code is absolutely necessary in the context of the postmodern relativism, but only a code that is able to transgress the artificial taboos to a practical art, understood as "an unusual form of aesthetics" providing altruism and generosity. Therefore, the "good life" is replaced with the "beautiful life"; aesthetical forms are also moral forms, in the sense that art concentrates on the transitory particularities of life instead of general rules.

Eventually, Cătălin Ghiță explores the inequality of gender as the fear of competition, decoding some "techniques of power" (Michel Foucault) of the patriarchal society that lead to the inequity of gender representation, by addressing some searing issues, such as abortion and prostitution as forms of physical control, as well as advertising as intellectual manipulation over women. Also, the deconstruction of competition advances the possibility to redefine the very concept of "gender": instead of classifying the population based on a "map of power" (in Foucault's terms), it is more important to accept the fluidity of gender demonstrated by neurosciences (it became a fact that there is no such thing as "pure gender"), and to question the utility of the concept in our society. In fact, whether we think that gender is a well-defined category or accept that it is a result of social production, or even a result of language performance as, for example, in Judith Butler's thinking (see *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York/ London, Routledge, 1990, second edition 1999), the real dilemma regards its practical implications, and Cătălin Ghiță suggests that gender become futile when confronted with problems of social equality.

The subsequent chapter analyses the idea of patriotism as fear of the Other. Nationalism has been interpreted as a construct, a matter of social, geopolitical and cultural imaginary preceding the nation state (it is Benedict Anderson's merit to have defined the nation as an "imagined

community”). In his turn, Cătălin Ghiță considers that nationalism is, in fact, the expression of an emotional impulse that was politically and culturally instrumented, namely the fear of the Other, that is seen, in Emmanuel Lévinas’s terms, as the absolute stranger, the alterity, fascinating and yet menacing. Therefore, what defines the nation is the fear of unfamiliarity and not the collective identity. The gain of this chapter resides in the analysis of patriotic poetry, both in Western and Eastern European cultures, as an example of manipulation of fear by means of discourse, emphasizing our superior and their inferior set of values. Poetry is reconsidered in its performativity, meaning it produces affect and functions as social action. Indeed, the national discourse, and poetry is the best example, carves the national feeling, and generates the national mythology. In Romania, for example, it was the ’48 Generation that brought the concept and the emotion of nationalism as the result of contact with the Western culture, and then developed it in concrete actions such as 1848 revolution. Also notable is Pascale Casanova’s point of view (*Republica mondială a literelor [The World Republic of Letters]*, trad. Cristina Bîzu, București, Editura Curtea Veche, 2007), which considers that the rise of national literatures is conditioned by relations of power between the Centre and the periphery, in which case the marginal literatures create difference in order to enter the space of world literature. To return to Cătălin Ghiță’s perspective, the obsession with borderlines and national difference is the consequence of humans’ battle for supremacy, and the rational response is to replace the national community with the cosmopolite community that is able to overcome any kind of adversity.

Further on, work is read as fear of gratuitousness. Rooted in the Protestant ethics, as Max Weber demonstrates, work, or at least productive work, promotes the image of the active agent, prized and gratified by society, in contrast with the contemplative life. On the contrary, Cătălin Ghiță thinks that the correlation between work and value is artificially constructed through concepts such as “efficiency”, “utility” or “sense of property” as response to an existential fear. In this case, work functions as a compensation and reward for the human psychic, inefficiency and unproductiveness being equivalent to the absence of meaning in life. The author analyses two cultural paradigms that describe opposite attitudes toward work: the Robinson Crusoe and the Oblomov cases. While Defoe’s character is the figure of the early middle class capitalist that lives according to the work ethics, Oblomov is the archetype of the dreamer for whom contemplation is the way to make a living. Of course, *in extremis* are situated the decadents who escape labour in order to transform their lives into a piece of art. However, Cătălin Ghiță thinks that work is just a means of subsistence, and not a personal fulfilment. A distorted interpretation of work ethics generates a society that values diligence, hard work or even the desire to work hard instead of imagination that may seem like a disorganized activity.

The last chapter elaborates on the idea that culture hides a fear of forgetting and seeks a modality to stop time. The author believes that culture is organic and hence subdued to a process of ageing, in which case the canon of eternal art is just an artificial way of preservation (beautifully associated with a state of induced coma). The idea of culture as institution is against the real nature of culture that is resistance to any form of canonization. Personally, I agree with the temporality of culture, as culture is dependent on historical, sociological, mental, or economic circumstances, on the reading practices, on the media (compare only the oral and the written forms), on the collective representations of some communities etc. Nonetheless, the relation between culture and the process of remembering/forgetting is more complex than the one described here. Jan Assmann (*Memoria culturală. Scriere, amintire și identitate politică în marile culturi antice [Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination]*, trad. Octavian Nicolae, Iași, Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2013) introduces the concept of cultural memory, an artificial structure operated by specific cultural agents that is not equivalent to tradition, patrimony or the canon. Assmann thinks that, in fact, cultural memory is a connective structure, meaning it re-enacts the past according to the needs of the present. In this case, culture does not only preserve certain artefacts, but it also revives them and puts them into circulation.

Cătălin Ghiță's book rediscusses some key concepts of the history of mentalities in connection to the human affect, problematizing the way emotions shape our intellectual universe, but also the way they are instrumented and manipulated through culture. To conclude, I would like to comment on the idea that the central figure of the postmodern age is *homo timidus*. Indeed, I think that despite its freedom and relativism, shyness is one of the main emotions of the 21st century, an emotion that determines people to seek authority, security and comfort before freedom and self-fulfilment.

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CONSTANȚA VINTILĂ-GHIȚULESCU (ed.),
Sexualitate și discurs politico-religios în societatea românească premodernă [*Sexuality and Political-Religious Discourse in the Romanian Pre-modern Society*], Iași, Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2016, 341 p.

What has mostly lacked in the historical perspective on Romanian premodern society was the interest in themes closely related to the intimate, daily lives of citizens in the Romanian Principalities. These were regarded as external or – at best – auxiliary to the national and international socio-political and institutional phenomena; in other words, they could not be employed to explain issues on a greater scale. Studies that expressed interest in the “mundane” and seemingly apolitical realities preponderantly ignored precisely their political and ideological importance for the evolution of the Romanian modern society. They were regarded as *Cultural Studies*, with no other aim besides a documentary one.

The volume *Sexuality and Political-Religious Discourse in Romanian Pre-modern Society*, edited by Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu, takes into consideration both the ways in which the object of sexuality and that of sexual life was symptomatic for the ideological environment of this period and the modalities in which it had actively participated to the institutional and sociological development of the Romanian Principalities in the 18th and 19th century. The methodology of most of the studies in this volume is similar to the one developed by the Annales school; however, Liviu Pilat observes in his contribution (“Gender, Sexuality and Power in the Middle Ages: Romanian Concepts and Perspectives”) that the appropriation of the methods of the Annales school in the post-communist Romania is characterized by an anti-Marxist attitude, determined by ideological reasons and not by theoretical adversities. Therefore, the political factor is generally ignored, a problem this volume attempts to redeem. Another methodological approach implied by the present studies borrows from Foucault's view on history, from whose perspective sexual phenomena are being discussed as political, social, religious and institutional power mechanisms that participate to the internal transformations of the State. The book succeeds in portraying the relationship between sexuality and the socio-political element during the laicization of the Romanian state.

The key elements of such an approach to sexuality include the analysis of social life, religion, politics, the medical system and the education of this period. The contributions aim to describe the relationship of these factors with the issue. However, these individual attempts converge in offering a broader perspective on the discourse on sexuality in this epoch. It can be observed how different forms of sexuality, despite being socially and religiously (therefore, ideologically) anathematized and sometimes even declared illegal, were a decisive part of citizen life and actually

tacitly accepted. Sexuality in itself was not the main concern of the clerical domain either: Petronel Zahariuc's study, "A few considerations about the Orthodox priesthood and the morals of the Moldavian Christians (the half of the 18th century – the beginning of the 19th century)", proves that the theoretical view on sexuality of the Orthodox Church was not properly institutionalized, since most of the Moldavian priests were members of the rural community and some of them were illiterate. However, the sexual factor was still addressed with reluctance, but only in given cases. Sexuality as a discourse was a socio-political instrument that condoned the patriarchal power relationships and the xenophobic attitude of the citizens. Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu's essay ("Following celetnica Chiriiachi: on morals and sexuality in the Romanian society of the 18th century") shows how women were the principal victims of sexual interdictions during these times: the social status of the promiscuous female actors, either prostitutes or simple women, had an impact that impacted even the legislation of the Principalities, a state of fact also legitimized by the clerical domain. The main fear of citizens was also related to the foreigners' contribution to the "alluring" of women: "alterity plays an important role in the constitution of the accusations" (19). Liviu Pilat argues that political power itself made the promiscuous behavior of certain rulers possible; however, this problem raises the community's interest only inasmuch as it is related to a subsequent religious conversion (to Islam, for example). However, despite the fact that the general attitude towards these phenomena does not fundamentally change, the end of the 18th century marks the moment when "sin slips from the incidence of law" (49). This is also the period when venereal diseases (especially syphilis) became common issues. Both Bogdan Mateescu and Nicoleta Roman discuss the relationship between sexually transmitted diseases, prostitution and the sanitary system in the periphery and in the Capital. Their conclusions are similar: venereal diseases were an important factor for: 1) the systematic intervention of the state in building hospitals and facilitating the access of patients to medical help and 2) a more organized and institutionalized approach to prostitution. As far as education is concerned, Ramona Caramelea's "«In the critical age for love». Childhood, adolescence, sexuality and public education (sixth-eighth decades of the 19th century)" shows that, while the laicization made the state more permissive on issues related to sexuality, education still had the role of repressing and censoring sexual impulses among youngsters, as sexuality continued to be a taboo, barred from interfering with children's moral development.

The problems raised by this volume are important because they contribute to a more accurate view of sexuality in premodern Romanian society. More than being an individual, particular theme, sexuality is a discourse that infiltrates each level of the social and political life. Through the laicization of the State, sexuality shifted from being a publicly censored (but still politically instrumentalized) issue to a more systematically organized one, both from an administrative and a medical point of view. However, as far as ideology goes, the social sphere continued to find itself under the influence of the previous feudal system. This can more easily explain the view on sexuality in later times in Romania.

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MIHAELA URSA, *Eroticon. Tratat despre ficțiunea amoroasă* [*Eroticon. A Treatise on Amorous Fiction*], București, Cartea Românească, 2012, 216 p.

Mihaela Ursa's *Eroticon*, playfully subtitled "a treatise on amorous fiction", is an essay in the fields of comparative studies, the history of ideas and, last but not least, the literary theory/aesthetic of reception about what could be termed as the "unseen life" of emotions and feelings. Very similar to the characters created by Chrétien de Troyes or by Jane Austen, whose lovesickness is pinned to the "errors in reading and interpreting the signs of the invisible world", the readers of love fictions are – in Mihaela Ursa's view – the (most often willing and happy) victims of the "self-identifying/immersive" potential of this type of literature. By design, the volume discloses and discusses specifically the "artistic tricks" used by love fictions "to express the promise of life-as-literature", emphasising the series of interpretative misuses and shifts of meanings generated by the – intended or unintended – non-recognition of the cultural/scholarly nature of love. For this reason, the "treatise" promised by *Eroticon* proves to be, in fact, a reader-friendly companion to the dismantling of some of the most influential clichés attached to love literature.

The power of the erotic emotions/feelings found in books to pass as "true" or "authentic" and, thus, to prompt mimetic attitudes and behaviours or even mythologies is explained by Mihaela Ursa using the two major components of love fiction: the eroticon and erotology.

On the one hand, the eroticon, defined as an "undiluted", "nuclear visual image", a narrative staging which allow us to "see" rather than to "read" the amorous plot, enables a demonstration on the need (in the love feeling) of a ritual script encoding its affiliation to the conventions of a sociocultural community relatively easy to pin down chronologically. The exegete mainly analyses the eroticon of the window/balcony (of contemplation and of passion) and the one of the theatre (of action and of seduction), deemed as fundamental units of classic love fictions, snapshots not of love alone, but also of the typical mind-set of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and, respectively, of the Romantic age. Panning over the strategies of discourse-iconic organisation of love, which have grown to be increasingly more arborescent and more refined through time, *Eroticon* convincingly destabilises "the innocent belief that love is tied to spontaneity and to the games of the unforeseeable". Thus, the case study focusing on the "woman-as-nature" – "man-as-culture" relation is symptomatic; it starts from the biblical *Genesis*, it goes on to the myths of Don Juan and Casanova, it draws in Ovid's *Art of Love* and the Shakespearian *Taming of the Shrew* and it arrives at Süskind's *Perfume*.

On the other hand, erotology, "a pseudo-explanation, a pseudo-theory or even an ideology of the Eros, an identity code of 'true' love or of the 'nature' of love" prompts the critical revisiting of famous misreadings. While, in the first half of the book, dedicated to the eroticon, the analysis of the image/iconic figures was predominant, in the sections focusing on the configuration of erotologies, Mihaela Ursa frequently adopts an almost traditional text criticism, paying attention to stylistic, rhetoric, narratological structures too easily overlooked. Classic love texts/texts about love are reread beyond or against the clichés gathered over decades of critical reception. The legend of the androgyne in Plato's *Symposium* finds its gravely metaphysical dimension invalidated by a demonstration of the parodic-burlesque character of Aristophanes' speech, just as, in platonic love, the author emphasises the predisposition to both physical beauty and the homoerotic relationship. Likewise, the representations of love as sickness, as a curse, as a mystical experience, respectively as an idyllic projection are redefined by proving their estrangement from the natural, respectively the total conformity to artifice and to the cultural. In this respect, the case of the paradoxical love in Longus' pastoral novel is revealing. Despite the ingenuousness, the idealism, the natural simplicity and freshness with which the love between Daphnis and Chloe is usually identified, their relationship follows the logic of "affective accumulation". In order to become a

couple, the two young people need the old Philetas and the “sexual wolf-woman” Lycaenion, two “teachers of lovemaking”, mediators of the “complex art of love”: “A close connection between lovemaking and pedagogy lies beneath the idyllic fiction in which nature alone cannot teach you anything. It is precisely there that love is more dependent on culture and artifice rather than on nature”. The pages focusing on the erotology of “love as psychology” are also memorable; they submit a captivating parallel reading of the novels *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina*. The anti-romanticism of Flaubert’s protagonist (“In lieu of the romantic immersion in emotion, like in a water swirl, Emma strikes an emotive pose. [...] Motivationally, she is much closer to the bankers’ suicides during the crisis of the 1930s than to Werther’s suicide over love loss and uncompromising grief”) is strengthened by the anti-bovarism of Tolstoy’s heroine (“when she dreams of herself replacing the characters she reads about, Anna Karenina dreams that she invades their life with her own personality, with her own life, forcing them out, to make room for a vital force and for a will to live too big to fit her own life”) to conclude that Charles Bovary stands for a “triumphant” bovarism. For him, and, in fact, for most of the characters in Mihaela Ursa’s book, “emotion itself has become less important than its precise encoding”.

For these reasons, despite the fact that it pleads for “a reconnection with the original meanings of literature as an invention of worlds, as a pure and simple delight”, *Eroticon* is an antidote for those who want to fall in love like in the novels. Love fictions should not just be (re)read; they should also be understood beyond the patterns dictated throughout the years.

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SIMONA VASILACHE, *Cinstite obraze, moftangii și domni [Dignified Figures, Triflers and Gentlemen]*, București, Cartea Românească, 2012, 157 p.

In recent critical and cultural studies, honor, alongside other concepts such as revenge, shame, guilt, has benefited from consistent studies and exhaustive histories (with some key references including James Bowman’s *Honor: A History*, Alexander Welsh’s *What is honour? A Question of Moral Imperatives* and *Honour and Shame: The Values of the Mediterranean Society*, edited by J.G. Perestiany). Whether these concepts are purely discursive projections of ineffable sentiments or functional abstractions that can be employed in the analysis of literary discourse is subject for numerous debates. Simona Vasilache’s volume opts for the former approach, analyzing honor in the Romanian literary discourse as it is materialized through three different eras – the Romanian Romanticism, literature written in the pre-war period and, finally, the novels written in the interwar period. The author employs an intelligent linguistic game in order to synthesize the three autochthonous variations of honor: the honor of the *made*, the honor of the *make-believe* and, finally, the honor of the *unmade*. One of the three phrases used in the very title of the book, “cinstite obraze” (which roughly translates to “dignified figures”) has quite a career in the Romanian language. At first employed in the clerical discourse, this phrase underwent distinct transformations over the period analyzed in Vasilache’s essay, according to the aesthetic and ethical canons of the time. This is why the author warns us from the very start that “characters have an honor that belongs less to the individual and more to the epoch” (5).

If, in Western culture, “honor as shame” (specific to the pre-modern period) is replaced with “honor as guilt” in modernity, for the Romanian cultural space the concept of honor remains bound to pre-modern thinking as late as the nineteenth century. This accounts for what Simona Vasilache

assesses on the Romantic view on honor: it is simultaneously defensible in the public sphere and nation-bound (following the tradition of the Moldavian chroniclers), canonical and a sign of civility, militant and collective: “The ‘dignified figures’ do not belong to the clerical-literary era that established the phrase, but to a Romanticism that reiterates collective honor. A communal honor that, historically speaking, was never familiar to our culture in any of its forms, “neither in chivalrous acts, nor in public service, traditions of monuments, or grateful memory” (26). The plural sense of honor in Romanticism is thus linked to serialized forms of representation in the Romanian Romantic poetry.

The second part of the volume is concerned with honor in the “transitional”, pre-war period. Here, the author identifies a shift from “honor” to “honorable” – an adjective that saturates, for instance, I.L. Caragiale’s literary discourse in order to unmask the moral levity and waywardness of his characters. This apparent honorableness that characterizes the transitional period is explained by Simona Vasilache through the use of “caprice”: the favor (which is the premise of caprice), the trifler (the agent of caprice), the family honor (seen as a transcendental form of caprice), justice (as the instrument of caprice) and finally the claim (which cycles back to the favor) are all both echoes and part of the vicious circle of this central notion. Simona Vasilache treats all these elements independently, with copious amounts of literary interpretation of canonized literary works that manages to go beyond the canonized readings of these works. One such original interpretation is the one on *O scrisoare pierdută* (*A Lost Letter*), which employs the literary device of the misplaced letter threatening the family honor, a frivolous device that could only gain core relevance in modern literature. The author compares this letter to the one from *Romeo and Juliet*, that also went astray, only to conclude that: “Small things, in more recent times, make literature” (p. 104).

The last part of the study is dedicated to the “ladies” and “gentlemen” of the interwar period. During this era, honor becomes one of the self, but this is also the period in which honor meets its inevitable modernist dissolution. Simona Vasilache chooses to discuss the concept of honor in the interwar period not through its materializations (which are few and subjected to inauthenticity, dilution, and pathologic contortions) but through the inherent lack of Romanian literary works that would have managed to create a pertinent representation of it. For example, in regard to the typology of the successful woman, Vasilache concludes that it is absent “from our interwar literature. All [women] have an obstacle – too ambitious, too greedy, too fashionable. Could it be that this is because both honor and success are handled by men?” (p. 143).

Simona Vasilache’s essay ends with challenges for further studies. For the time being, the concept of honor and its manifestations in Romanian literature are all but exhaustively analyzed in her treatise, and the artistic profile of the concept is cleverly mapped, as well as originally exemplified through several key interpretations that could very well be considered as key references in some cases.

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CONSTANTA VINTILĂ-GHIȚULESCU, *Patimă și desfătare. Despre lucrurile mărunte ale vieții cotidiene în societatea românească. 1750–1860* [*Passion and Pleasure. On the Little Things of Romanian Everyday Life. 1750–1860*], București, Humanitas, 2015, 484 p.

The author provides an interdisciplinary survey of the collective imaginary of “the first Romanian modernity” by employing the lines of Oswald Spengler’s historical philosophy. The so-called “little stories” of the past are approached as parts of the general history, “testing smells, odours, flavours, sounds, music, colours, sceneries” assuming the role of unravelling attitudes, gestures and positions typical for the fascinating Far East.

Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu succeeds in demonstrating that the historical narrative is composed not only of the often occulted historical sources (inventories, commercial charts, notes about businesses, stamps, lithographies, letters, medical documents, travel notes, lordly or religious papers), but also of interpretation, synthesis, imagination, figurative and historical language, denoting an affective sensibility.

For example, the Romanian change in habits and fashion, generated by the transition from the Oriental to the Occidental paradigm, is noticeable in the 19th century verbal manners: Turkish words like “musafirlâcuri” or “egledisiri” are replaced by “ballrooms”, “saloons”, “conversation” or “waltz”. Moreover, food, beyond its well-known biological role, reaches ritualic functions, illustrating the “ipolipsis” as a way of living, mirrored in the proverb “the gipsy gets food when he receives some, the Romanian when he is hungry and the boyar when the chef desires”. Children, as well, have their own representation of food; during the summer they stare at the fruit from the churchyard but never eat any, not to be touched by “the dead’s grease”, a warning usually made by the priests committed to Christian piety. In a world of hunger and disease, the frugality of the peasants contrasted with the rich and frequent feasts of the boyars, that resembled to a real pantagruelic dinner, counting up to 12 dishes. In the Roznovanu house from Moldavia, the list of sweets included dozens of kilos of sugar, honey and rose petals, water lily petals, cherries, peaches, blackberries, plums and many other fruits, highly guarded as immense values.

Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu also emphasizes that the feeling of sacredness, manifested especially in the countryside, where the people used to keep religiously the four Lenten periods of the year, was disturbed only by the trade with wine and brandy. This trade became possible because of the mercy and the care of Church leaders, but was vehemently challenged by the peasants, due to either economical or bachic reasons.

The village, autarchic on all its levels of existence, offered practical solutions, written in the medical and folkloric calendar, to all the moral and social problems the community was confronted with, such as drunkenness, “treated” in Moldavia with butter and three chicken eggs previously kept in a tomb for nine days. History never mentioned any proof of the viability of such empiric practices; nevertheless, it is a certitude that the ignorance and superstition which built the rural imagery existed, with some extension in contemporaneity. In the extra-Carpathian space of Romania, characterized by an agrarian way of life, strongly rooted in tradition and in the values of the Church, “the processing of the body, simple gesture education, the control of basic instincts” were identified as a slight opening towards the elite’s modernization, which selectively integrated the European etiquette.

Hygiene, the intrinsic component of the road to modern civilization, found itself diversely mirrored in the imaginary depending on the historical period, class differences or house customs; water, for instance, was not an easy acquisition from the point of view of peddled prejudgement, because of the “fear of getting a cold, intimate indecency, the absence of direct links between health and cleaning, poor water quality and the shortage of water supply, the habit of relating bathing with a rite of passage”. For a part of the people living in Bucharest, bath would mean

relaxation and pleasure; for the people from the slums – just lust and prostitution. Overall, the habit of having a bath shows a lack of understanding of the role of water, even by those using it.

This is why the doctor became a very important character, although he was rarely present and in permanent conflict with superstitions, morbidity and lack of elementary rules of hygiene. People – as Vintilă-Ghițulescu underlines – had more “faith in riddles, demons and mages; they believed all diseases came from the devils and, when bad things happened to them, they appealed to shamans or old women, to relieve their pain by scratching and incantations”. The boyar’s house or the poor hut from the slum streets had the same immobility concerning any “physiological needs”, which were expelled in the courtyard, away from the house, where the toilets, poetically named “walkers” or “privates”, were placed. The rejection of this modern facility had its origins in a widely spread conviction that it was not right to defile the house, as animals did, a common mentality during the 20th century too. The daytime or nocturnal anguishes of the pre-modern people found an escape into “parties”, which allowed “bodies to meet” in the ludic universe of love.

The boyars’ epicurean life or the daily struggle of the poor living in the streets of the village or in slums were somehow brought together under the sign of “the predictable death”, a time of sorrow, reflection, perspective of inheritance for the relatives or joy for the baggers. The performance of the passage was different according to “the position, wealth, times”, yet, no one left this world without a last ceremony which brought the event to the attention of the community. Social order accompanied even death, because the passing away of the nobles had to be detailed in newspapers. At the same time, the poor received only one line dedicated to their death, because they died like „fools” in the street. And since death was as expensive as life, being regulated by the Christian tradition of the “sărindare” and by memorial services, the poor left this world hoping that the good and merciful God would place them too in „a bright, green place, where they can rest, where there is no sorrow and sadness”. The poor, the baggers, the prostitutes, the newcomers were taken to a communal grave, leaving their identity problem to the Lord, whereas the boyar’s body was taken to a churchyard or a monastery, beautifully dressed for his encounter with God. Death as performance, resignation and profit offers a scene where scatological fear mingles with magic rituals of pre-Christian essence in a perpetuum mobile of good and evil, as a dichotomy of human existence itself.

These are only some reasons why Vintila Ghițulescu’s book can be read as a historical fresco of a fascinating world placed at the edge of two cultures and civilizations, rendering the image of a hedonistic life in a permanent struggle for survival.

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MIHAI CHIPER, *Pe câmpul de onoare: o istorie a duelului la români* [*On the Field of Honour: A history of the Romanian Duel*], București, Humanitas, 2016, 360 p.

Mihai Chiper’s study explores a rather overshadowed aspect of the Romanian culture and society: the challenge to duel in order to “satisfy” someone’s honour. The author proves the extent of this social phenomenon during the 19th and 20th centuries by invoking the personalities implied in such so-called “honorable affairs”: Nicolae Bălcescu, Christian Tell, Dimitrie Bolintineanu, Cezar Bolliac, Al. Ioan Cuza, Mihail Kogalniceanu, Duiliu Zamfirescu (also known as *Duelius Superbus* due to his notoriety on the duel stage), Dimitrie Spiridon Inglezi, Toderăș Balș, Lascar

Rosetti etc. Even though this habit was not so common on the territory of Romania as it was in England, France or Italy, *Pe câmpul de onoare: o istorie a duelului la români* identifies – between 1821 and 1940 – no less than 1249 cases of “honourable affairs”, of which 424 ended with a duel.

As there is not too much research regarding the duel of the Romanians, but only brief comments in studies on other topics, Mihai Chiper begins his book with a brief introduction on the subject of the duel in Europe. Having medieval traditions and codifications, the duel comes to be considered a civilized way to resolve a dispute. It reaches the Romanian space as most of the European ideas do: through the young people educated abroad, who take over this custom and bring it to their country. The reaction of Romanians to duels is related to the various meanings different social strata offered to *honour*. For example, those considered noble man are easily offended and end up on the field duelling, while people of lower social status approach honour as a ridiculous thing to fight over. That is why the duel becomes a sign of nobility, implying some strict rules: the duelists must consider each other equal in honour, prestige and moral integrity, otherwise the duel can be denied on the grounds that the opponent does not meet the required standards.

It hardly comes as a surprise that the statistical analysis made by Chiper involves only some socio-professional categories: “officers claim satisfaction in 62.75% (219 cases), being challenged in a proportion of 37.25 % (130 cases); politicians claim satisfaction and are provoked in equal proportions – 48.51% (114 cases) and 51.49% (121); journalists are by far the most challenged professional category in the duel: only 29.09% (48 cases) have honourable business as a result of their challenges, in the remaining 70.91% of cases (117) they are provoked”.

Consequently, *Pe câmpul de onoare: o istorie a duelului la români* can delineate the main mentality mechanisms the practice of the duel emphasizes: “The duelists did not perceive themselves as violent men, nor as barbarians or primitives. On the contrary, they considered the duel to be an instrument of civilization for the primal instincts of men, because it essentially proposed a socially positive exercise: promoting mutual esteem and pacifying relationships”. So, men of the 19th and 20th centuries were not barbarians or primitives, but they had a primal instinct that had to be tamed by practicing the duel. Moreover, since it is a practice of the high society, inferior social classes, considered brutal, cannot civilize themselves by duel.

As said above, an important part of this book consists in details on how duels are regulated either by informal codes of honour or by the legislation. In the case of the Romanian Old Kingdom, the duel is strictly forbidden by law; however, the measures taken when duels do happen are selective – some participants in these “honourable affairs” are accused and incriminated, some are only fined, while others are completely overlooked, all these decisions being made according to the social position of the participants in the duel. One interesting thing is that even the legislation mentions that the duel is a noble activity, a “villainy characteristic of the boyars”. A revealing example the author gives is the duel between a councilor of the capital, George Florescu – an honourable member of the society, and N. Ioanid, also a member of the Communal Council, who dares to question the Florescu’s leadership. This case discloses how diverse were the vision about the duels: Ioanid, a grocery store keeper, is not affected by being called a man without honour; for him, as a practical man, the duel is simply a waste of the time and of lives.

Another important aspect focused by Chiper regards the codes of honour governing the duel. They illustrate who has the right to duel (“an honorable man in the highest sense of the word”), the steps leading up to the duel itself, how the challenge has to be made, the weapons used and how they are chosen, the role of the witnesses, the duel timing, the fight and the situations where it could be stopped, the age of the participants, arbitration and the jury of honour, etc.

After World War I, the practice of the duel is diminishing, but this method of resolving conflicts remains in the practices of Romanian public space. As Chiper shows, although it had been so often qualified as “outdated” and “alien” to the “habit of the land”, the duel “survives well and promotes the imperative of the code of honour with the same insistence”. Only at the end of the interwar period one can find an ever-lower number of “honourable affairs”, which disappeared completely during the communist period. This is especially true because of the mutations that took

place in the collective consciousness. The question asked now is “How do good citizens behave, respecting the laws of the state, without compromising their personal honour?” Moreover, men begin to realize that they are often the only ones who financially support the family and that their honour lies more in the ability to do so than in putting their lives at risk.

Among the most important achievements of this study is the establishment of the role of the duel in modern Romanian society, a topic now offering the possibility of a new perspective on the Romanian culture. Basically, Mihai Chiper’s book describes the structure of the Romanian society and, mostly, the upper class’s way of solving social problems. There are also two or three major questions raised by his study, which awaken curiosity and demand to be answered: As the author offers statistics of the frequency of duels only for the Romanian Old Kingdom, how do honourable affairs look like in Transylvania and Bucovina? What is their frequency before and after World War I and how does the duel change after the Great Union?

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