

century Transylvanian reception of Shakespeare is a phenomenon similar not only to the one valid in the mother country, but in the broader European context as well.

**Eliminating Taboos and Social Veils**  
**Marius Rotar: *Eternity through Ash. A History of Crematoriums***  
***and Human Cremation in 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Century Romania***  
– Review –

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*The* book by Marius Rotar, published at the European Institute in Iași, in 2011<sup>1</sup> is 630 pages long and also, it is the first fundamental Romanian book dedicated to an extremely delicate subject: cremation. The author, a researcher at the „1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia, is one of the few specialists on the subject of death and the process of dying, treating it individually through research materialised in books<sup>2</sup> or articles hosted by prestigious journals from our country as well as abroad<sup>3</sup>, but also in a way that has ample and generous openings towards the scientific community. Marius Rotar has organized an annual international conference in 2008, in Alba Iulia, meant to get closer to death from a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary point of view, in regarding its various aspects, whether social, cultural, medical, anthropological or architectural.<sup>4</sup>

If death has represented and, under different forms, continues to represent a cultural and social taboo – we refer to the paradigm of refusing death<sup>5</sup> – the destiny of

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<sup>1</sup> Marius Rotar, *Eternity through Ash. A History of Crematoriums and Human Cremation in Romania in 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Iași: The European Institute, 2011), 630 p., ISBN 978-973-611-778-7.

<sup>2</sup> Marius Rotar, *Death in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Transylvania. Vol. 1: Ten Years of Concubinage with Death. Historical Dimensions and Contemporary Perspectives on Death* (Cluj-Napoca: Accent, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Marius Rotar, “The Mask of the Red Death: the Evil Politics of Cremation in Romania in December 1989”, *Mortality* 15, 1 (2010): 1–17; Marius Rotar, “Between Two Fires: Cremation in Romania during 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> Centuries,” *Pharos International* 3 (2010): 4–9.

<sup>4</sup> The website for the conference and the researcher, Marius Rotar: <http://romaniandeathcremation.blogspot.com/>

<sup>5</sup> A western and American paradigm of death that was debated starting with Ariès or Gorer and which means, largely, the exclusion of the process of death, as an idea, as an individual and social reality, as well as of dying people from the visible social field. As a result, sick people die in hospital, far from the eyes of beloved ones, becoming incapable of confronting death and even cremation is seen by researchers such as Louis-Vincent Thomas, at least in one stage, as a form of

Western reception of cremation is even more complicated. From a more simplified perspective, cremation is subsumed to the general problems of death, because it is a way to dispose of the body, but on the other hand, it is a sore spot, a rupture between tradition and modern times, incorporating cultural narratives dealing with the body, nature or space, grafted on the backdrop of secularization, industrialization and technology. Cremation is not accepted in Orthodox countries, because it functions the same as suicide – only on the plain of the post-mortem process and options expressed during one's lifetime – like a generating element of social reprobation, associating oneself with the Christian concept of sin. This is a valid option for the one who chooses cremation as well as the one who puts their choice into practice, as well as the priests who dare overcome the limit imposed by taboos, with services which integrate cremation into Orthodox funerary traditions.

The task undertaken by Marius Rotar is not a very easy one. A supplementary complication appears not just from the pole of the subject of his research, cremation, but also from the pole of the author of the research. More precisely from the fact that the author is not just a researcher, he is also a supporter of cremation, the founder of the cremationist society *Amurg (Twilight). Romanian Cremation Association*, as we find out from the first lines of the balanced and discretely laudatory preface written by Peter c. Jupp, from the University of Durham, in Great Britain, an authority of studies on death. None of Mr. Marius Rotar's personal options reverberate in a negative manner, in the sense of manipulation or making up of historical truths, and also regarding the sources used or the resulted social and historical interpretation, more subjective, as far as Mr. Rotar's research activities are concerned. There is, however, something that becomes obvious to any reader of his book, there is a profound attachment to the chosen object of his research, a fact which can explain, in part, the appetite for information and for establishing logic and social mechanisms determining the configuration of lights and shadows for cremation in Romania, from its acceptance in the interwar period, to the contradictory and confusing situation during Communism and up to current attitudes, which are extremely polarized between recognizing the necessity of cremation and disapproval from the Romanian Orthodox Church or the media.

*About the unwritten journal of this book* is a tender testimonial, of unusual honesty, written by the researcher for his audience. It is here that one can notice the oxymoron-like structure of the title – eternity and historical delimitation, and fears which are exorcised by naming them – the fear of the incomplete, the fear of informational insecurity and it is also here that certain co-authors of various degrees are thanked in an authentic manner.

The elimination of taboos done by Marius Rotar in his book is a complex one. It is an extensive operation regarding cremation understood as a subsumed part of death. Bringing the theme of cremation into the discussion, the researcher contributes to enhance Romanian and international research regarding death and the elucidation, for those interested, of certain aspects dealing with death and the process of dying in the

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making death more occult, making the distance produced by death even more radical. For more details see: Geoffrey Gorer, *Death, Grief and Mourning* (New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1967); Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973); Herman Feifel, *The Meaning of Death* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 1959).

Romanian space. Then it is about de-tabooing insistently focused on cremation as a social, cultural and historically complex reality and, very importantly – a sign of the excellent traits of a historian exhibited by the researcher – a concrete one. Cremation „in general” is not the subject of Marius Rotar’s book, even though there is a strong view of cremation as a funerary practice which transcends space and time and which has the role to make the research process more legitimate from an ontological and existential point of view. What is interesting here is cremation in Romania, starting with the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and leading up to current times. Intensive de-tabooing of cremation produces certain de-tabooing effects on other elements, such as the relationship between Romanian Communism and the Romanian Orthodox Church. The global view we have at the end of the book becomes, in this game of complex de-tabooing, some completely unexpected, large and mobile, such as a corridor made up of mirrors.

Before we actually move on to discussing the main structural and content elements, we need to take a closer look at the title. Despite a large number of details – names, years, numbers – important for a type of research which is not only ideational, but also one which is built objectively and responsibly, through the accumulation of information derived from extremely varied sources, the book flows like a narration, like a story which, like Peter C. Jupp says, will captivate both the specialist reader, as well as the public, both the Historian, and the Theologian. We are thus dealing with a story, but also with a series of micro-stories, some concentrated on interesting figures such as Calinic I. Popp Șerboianu, and others on the mirroring of cremation, both textual and attitudinal, in Romanian literature.

Structurally, the book is made up of five chapters, preceded by the preface written by Peter C. Jupp, the one written by the author and a chapter made up of conclusions, after which there is a list of 1344 Romanian personalities who were cremated, the result of consistent archival work, sometimes comparable to the work done by a detective. In the first chapter, *between possible models and research trends*, Marius Rotar describes the situation of the subject of his research, both in relation with Romanian historiography, where it practically does not exist, despite a collateral or limited approach of the subject by other Romanian researchers, as well as in relation to studies on cremation, whether from the *strong* Western side, or also from areas either touched by Communism or predominantly Orthodox. Another aspect discussed is the nature of sources used in the analysis, a surprising variety (*the Flacara Sacra magazine, the România liberă newspaper, the Romanian Orthodox Church, Cuvânt bun*, the archives of crematoriums, visits to the two crematoriums, discussions with employees etc.), which can be classified into edited and unique sources but this classification is rejected by the author, based on the reason that it would be a uselessly raised descriptive flag and would turn suggestions regarding contents into prejudice.

The second chapter is about cremation in the Romanian space between the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first year of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when there is a synchronization movement in Romania with the cremationist ideas of the West and North America. Marius Rotar discovers, through thorough analyses of sources, that the discourse in this period actually comes in three forms: information about the practice, counteracting the assumption and the implementation of the practice and a pro-cremationist discourse, which cannot be equalled to the one which is pure propaganda, because it is rather thin, as a total, in that day and age and considered foreign from

Romanian reality. The author compares the situations in Transylvania and the Romanian Kingdom, from a point of view of adhering to cremation, and observes that, contrary to what was expected, the Kingdom was linked to the Western realities of cremation, which is why it has developed cremation, as an option as well as a real choice (without any practical support because there was no human crematorium), through the activity of doctor Iacob Felix, Athanasie Economu and Constantin I. Istrati, who promote the first hygienist ideas linked to cremation (the theory of miasmas was popular at the time). The researcher stresses the fact that the ones who promoted cremation were idealists who did not imagine that the Orthodox Church would oppose cremation.

Chapter three is dedicated to the interwar period, the most flourishing period regarding cremationist ideas and their fulfilment. The cremationist society *Nirvana*, later renamed *Cenușa*, because there were accusations of paganism and freemasonry, is founded in 1923. The foundation of this society is the reason why construction of the first crematorium in Romania, located in Bucharest, is begun in 1925, with funding from Bucharest City Hall. Bucharest is the place where all the cremationist ideas in this period come from. Including Syrian, Babylonian and Egyptian architectural elements, the crematorium is opened in 1928, being received with a protest from the priest Marin C. Ionescu and other Orthodox believers. If the Church was not vocal during the first period, the interwar period marked a strong anti-cremationist campaign. Two synods, organized in 1928 and 1933, prohibit religious service for those who choose cremation, which is also valid today, as opposed to the Catholic Church, which has accepted cremation in 1963 and considers it equal to burial. Marius Rotar notices the different combative interferences of theologians and priests, the association of cremation with the barbaric and oriental spirit, defining it as an anti-Christian practice and labelling it as a cheap adaptation to Western funerary practices. One thing the researcher will deconstruct during his entire research is the equalization by the Orthodox religion with the Romanian national spirit, attracting attention to the abuse of identity suffered, through it, by the silenced religious minorities. From this point of view, the fact that 84% of cremated persons were Orthodox seems ironic. On the other hand, performing, on a large scale, a religious service for the ones who were cremated shows, according to Marius Rotar, that cremation is far from being perceived as an anti-Christian practice. I. Popp Șerboianu, archimandrite, tried to demonstrate the links between the Orthodox religion and cremation.

This campaign against cremation is compensated by the creation of the *Flacăra sacră* (*Sacred Flame*) *Organ pentru propagarea cremațiunii umane în România* (a means of promoting human cremation in Romania) magazine in 1934. As it is shown in the title, its role was to make cremation more popular within the Romanian space; with a monthly circulation of around 3000 copies it determined a significant growth in cremations. Romania is represented in Prague, in 1936, at the international conference dedicated to cremation, by Mihai Max Popovici, thus entering the global circuit of the cremationist movement. Another acquisition of this period is the recognition of the practice of cremation as legal, by the Penal Code, in 1936, a recognition still valid today. Literature and literary critics have reflected on the struggle of the era between the sides for and against cremation. Paul Zarifopol, Anton Holban, Constantin Stere, Garabet Ibrăileanu and Eugen Lovinescu are some of the better known names of this period and they also have chosen cremation. Tudor Arghezi, Cezar Petrescu, Macedonski, Nichifor Crainic are among the most notable cultural and literary personalities who have expressed their point of view regarding cremation both in literary works as well as speeches.



**Șerban Savu, *Mountain of Nostalgia*, 2008, 150 x 200 cm, oil on canvas**

The fourth Chapter deals with cremation during the Communist period. It is here that the researcher's work is translated into an interpretation of gathered data and described realities. Through the law of nationalization, the *Cenușa* crematorium becomes property of the state, Bucharest City Hall becomes its owner in 1948 which leads to the termination of the relationship between Romanian cremationists and *the International Cremation Federation*. Marius Rotar explains through which mechanisms cremation starts to lose ground from the point of view of power and propaganda instead of being a cornerstone of the atheism spread by Communism, descendant of the Soviet model. Cremation continues to exist, but it is not associated with Communism, in the large and ideological sense of the term. Even though there is a corner dedicated to Communists in the *Cenușa* crematory, the *Béla Brainer* corner, or the red corner – a corner where there are Christian markings/symbols nonetheless –, none of the high ranking members of the Communist Party have been cremated. As an example, Nicolae Ceaușescu's parents were buried with an extremely sumptuous funeral service. There are four explanations for this situation mentioned by Marius Rotar, meant to destroy certain illusions of value in society, coagulated in structures of the social imaginary, as well as the persecution of Orthodox people by Communists or the classification of cremation and Communism in the same semantic field with the same values. The first explanation has to do with the rural roots of Communist leaders, the second one has to do with the high costs of functioning for the nationalized crematorium, the third deals with the attitude of the Orthodox Church, and the last explanation, a not very comfortable one, refers to the silent agreement between the Orthodox Church and the

Communist Party, through a division of power, according to different fields of reality, the Church receives death and the Party receives life.

The fifth chapter investigates cremation and the situation of crematoriums after the Romanian revolution in 1989. This is the year when there is a new wave of negative perceptions regarding cremation („the evil politics of cremation”). If Communism did not manage to create a practice specific to its doctrines out of cremation, it transforms it into its bloody end. Marius Rotar presents the way in which this takes place, through the *Trandafirul (Rose)* or *Vama (Customs)* operation. This operation was the theft of 43 bodies of young revolutionaries from the morgue of the Timișoara County Hospital, two days after they had been killed, on December 17<sup>th</sup>, and their cremation at *Cenușa*, under orders from Elena Ceaușescu. This operation only became known in January 1990, but it had a negative impact on the imaginary linked to cremation, it can be compared to a wiping of traces done by an abusive and radical political power.

The year 1994 however marks the opening of a second crematorium in Vitan-Bârzești, which paradoxically did not garner any kind of reaction from the Romanian Orthodox Church and the media. The strike of the crematorium employees in 1997 does however shed light on the phenomenon of trafficking with burial sites, which today has become a mafia of sorts, something mentioned multiple times by the author in this chapter. The employees revolt against the director of the Administration of Human Cemeteries and Crematoriums, Cristian Ștefănescu who was engaged in illegal operations regarding burial sites. On the other hand, the initiator of the protests, Ionel Gheorghe, is accused of being the administrator of the crematorium as well as the administrator of an illegal store.

The researcher also tackles other specific aspects of our current age: the lack of burial spots and its reflection in the media, the cremation of certain personalities, or the refusal of close ones to fulfil their wish of being cremated – Clody Bertola, Ilarion Ciobanu, Zoe Ceaușescu, Silviu Brucan, Aurel Baranga, Marcela Rusu, Monica Lovinescu, Virgil Ierunca, Magdalena Boiangiu, Florența Albu, Cristian Pațurca, Roxana Brihan – and the way in which these things are reflected in the media. This is followed by documented discussions regarding the legislative proposals regarding cremation, the creation of the *Amurg* (Twilight) cremationist society and the ideas of opening other crematoriums, and also the opening of the *Cenușa* (Ash) crematorium, in 2003. The relationship between cremation and the Orthodox religion occupies a special place in Marius Rotar’s analysis, an important element being represented by the discrimination used by priests in regards to offering services to people who were cremated. He points out exceptions in the case of famous people.

The chapter reserved for conclusions comes back to significant ideas of the research and tries to make predictions regarding the future of cremation in Romania, a problematic future, because there are two forces clashing: the reality of a lack of burial spots, to which cremation could provide a solution and, on the other hand the refusal of the Orthodox Church and the media’s representation of certain negative aspects of cremation. From another perspective, the confrontation between the Orthodox tradition and more modern views, cremation being in the western world and America a statistical competitor to funerary services, and as a reality, an alternative to burial.<sup>1</sup> The events of

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<sup>1</sup> *Pharos International* 4 (2010): 24–37.

January 2012, in Cluj-Napoca, determined by the decision of the local council to offer a space for the construction of a crematory by RDK Cremation,<sup>1</sup> in the Mănăştur graveyard, shows that the researcher was right to expect changes in the social and cultural landscape of cremation in contemporary Romania. Cremation will have a hard time imposing itself. It is certain that research such as the one carried out by Marius Rotar, is capable of breaking the layers of reality which are similar to illusions, made out of myths, preconceptions and the presence of negative imagery, manage to shed some light on the path which should be a step towards normality: accepting cremation as a total alternative to burial, having no social or religious sanctions for it..

***A kopula és a nominális mondatok a magyarban (The Copula and the Nominal Predicates in Hungarian) by Edit Kádár***

– Review –

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**Keywords:** non-verbal predication, nominal and adjectival predicates, copula, predication and identificational sentences, small clause, inflexion, referential noun phrase, predicative noun, typology.

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*Edit Kádár*'s monographic work<sup>2</sup> was published as the 161<sup>st</sup> volume of the prestigious series of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, *Nyelvtudományi Értekezések* (Studies in Linguistics) in December, 2011.

The book aims to establish the syntactic structure of sentences involving nominal predication using the framework of generative grammar, based on Hungarian linguistic data. The author does not describe the chosen theoretical framework in the book: she assumes familiarity with it given the fact that it is a widely known and employed linguistic theory. However, the theoretical notions are usually defined or explained at their first occurrence.

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<sup>1</sup> All the links for press articles regarding the crematorium in Mănăştur district can be found on the *Amurg* website. It can be seen how the Romanian Orthodox Church along with some political leaders, went from a rather neutral attitude to mobilizing citizens from Mănăştur to protest in order to show their disapproval of the Local Council's decision. The result was a prohibition to build a crematorium in Mănăştur district and anywhere else in Cluj, for that matter. <http://www.incinerareamurg.ro/>.

<sup>2</sup> Edit Kádár, *A kopula és a nominális mondatok a magyarban* (The Copula and the Nominal Predicates in Hungarian), *Nyelvtudományi Értekezések* (Studies in Linguistics) 161 (2011), 122 p. ISBN 978 963 05 9042 6.