

[Review of the book *The Invisible Code: Honor and Sentiment in Postrevolutionary France, 1814-1848*]

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nities (at least in the Caux) that did not practice social discrimination and that would insure them proper burials.

Tracing this process of social differentiation in religious life is the most interesting aspect of Goujard's book. And he takes it as his prime example of the growing laicization of eighteenth-century religious practice. Laypeople controlled the management of the parish, while cures were restricted to the spiritual tasks of saying mass and administering sacraments. But it is not clear how lay management of parish finances necessarily leads to a laicization of religious sensibilities, or what connection there is between elite investment in churches as a source of prestige and the rejection of devotional invocations in testaments. Nor does Goujard's original question concerning the differences between the Caux and the Bray during the Revolution find a very satisfactory answer. As he admits (p. 404), his investigation reveals very few differences between the areas, except that confraternities are present in the Caux and not in the Bray. Although Goujard's immense effort in this meticulous study of two areas reveals little about the Revolution, it does say a great deal about continuities in the religious lives of Norman villagers.

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The Invisible Code: Honor and Sentiment in Postrevolutionary France, 1814–1848. By *William M. Reddy*.

Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997. Pp. xv+258. \$40.00.

The "invisible code" referred to in this elegant study of French society in the first half of the nineteenth century is the male honor code that regulated the expression of everything that occurred in France's newly invented public sphere. From the intricacies of politeness to the bloodiest rituals of violence, nothing was too trivial or too grand to escape the aegis of honor and considerations of honorability. The forms that governed almost all public discourse—letters circulated among officials, literature and hack journalism, conversation and florid speechifying—were contrived, as William Reddy demonstrates, to attain honors, avoid shame, or, more usually, both things at once.

The problem that Reddy wrestles with in the course of his study is why, if the honor code was so exigent and so blindly obeyed by the majority of men, was it not written down, spoken about, and analyzed in proportion to its actual importance? Why, in fact, was it not only an invisible but an often unconscious feature of individual motivation? Indeed, Reddy asks, why was it that contemporaries across the entire political spectrum believed everyone in the postrevolutionary era to be motivated not by honor but by self-interest and vulgar ambition? Honore de Balzac's novels, Alexis de Tocqueville's political writings, and Louis Blanc's socialist essays all certified, from their respective positions on the political spectrum, the fact that "*Men* in society operated on self-interest just as planets were held in orbit by gravity" (p. 237). The answers to these questions, Reddy suggests, may also explain why historians, almost up to the present moment, have simply perpetuated the "self-interest" interpretation of Bourbon and Orleanist society.

Reddy examines educational tracts extolling the virtues of ancient Rome, sentimental novels, the dossiers of marital separation cases, bureaucratic correspondence, and the rough-and-ready journalism of the era for his evidence. He finds in these essentially public sources that the restless search for worldly honors was paired invariably with

anxious efforts to avoid public shame and humiliation. Ambitious men wanted the same things they had always wanted: advancement, renown, wealth, power, love, and heirs. But the protocols of society had changed since 1789. These goals were now available, in theory, to all men; the corporate and estate monopolies that had reserved them for a privileged few were destroyed. In the new era, depending on the intensity of their ambition, all men were thus exposed to some degree to the possibility that they might not only fail in their efforts, but that the strategies and methods they employed to obtain them would attract public opprobrium and scorn.

The expression of such scorn, and the shameful feelings it provoked, was more appropriate to a society actuated by honor than by greed. It is precisely Reddy's point that a system of family honor based on property and heirship and a social order founded on patronage and the distribution of honors had been minimally affected by the institutional and economic transformations of the Revolution. Reddy demonstrates the implications of this disjuncture in three richly documented central chapters. The legal fiction of autonomy and independence, of careers open to talent, had been proclaimed, but advancement in the civil service was obtained by those most willing and able to cultivate patrons and discover the polite forms in which to plead a cause without too much painful obsequiousness. The state granted separations to the unhappily wed, but at the price of washing dirty linen in public, an operation that required highly developed legal rhetoric and left the essentials of patriarchy unscathed. Finally, Reddy shows how journalists reporting on the new political order engaged in character assassination to promote their careers but were also judged by moralists and commentators by a standard that required a consistency of principle and action worthy of an honorable man.

In all the domains Reddy explores, men (and women) struggled to avoid the feelings of shame that were the inevitable by-product of a democratizing and enterprising world still ruled by an honor culture of patriarchy and social deference. The will to believe that the new regime was ruled by self-interest rather than honor was a consequence of what a contemporary German philosopher might have called "an unhappy consciousness" at odds with the age in which it lived. Men were less likely to see, much less draw attention to this invisible code because of an anguish more or less unique to their gender. It was far easier to declaim against the new morality of self-interest and read the actions of competitors in that light than to question a system that, whatever its defects, reinforced a gender and property hierarchy in which men were the principal beneficiaries.

Because they were barred from the crucial exchanges of gifts and favors that made patronage and patriarchy work, Reddy argues that women were more likely to see the contradictions in the system than were men, and he finds in the female-authored sentimental novel of the era the most open acknowledgment of its injustices. Madame de Stael's *Corinne* is especially eloquent on the sufferings of women in this male-dominated system, but, as Reddy says, this insight came with a price: "The honor code is challenged, but no one's honor is endangered. Women speak their anguish; men see only confirmation of women's special relationship to feeling" (p. 232). Indeed, as Reddy stresses, though women were believed to naturally embody feeling, the honor code encouraged men to conceal their own. Shame was thus inevitable but unexpressible; it was surely felt, but could not be acknowledged without undermining the very foundations of male selfhood with its worship of outward reserve and sangfroid.

This book is an important contribution to a growing literature on the cultural tensions and contradictions in modernizing societies. It is also a pleasure to read. Perhaps because the texts he analyzes are meant to conceal as much as reveal, Reddy frames his topics and subtopics in the form of brief essays on moral subjects, employing a prose that is lucid and exact and a tone that is gently ironic. His three central chapters are richly

argued, but they cover widely scattered domains and are not meant to provide a comprehensive account of this complex phenomenon. Much, therefore, remains to be done, but Reddy has made an eloquent and persuasive case for taking seriously the persistence of a traditional honor culture in a democratic age and has given us some excellent evidence for it. The French Revolutionaries may have invented the modern public sphere, but the social practices that grew up within it were scarcely modern themselves.

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Etudes Notariales. By *Jean-Paul Poisson*. Preface by *Stanley Hoffmann*.

Postface by *Pierre Chaunu*.

Paris: Economica, 1996. Pp. ix + 445. Fr 250.

Notarial documents provide an extraordinarily rich source of information for French social, economic, and cultural history (as well as that of other continental European countries and their former colonies). Since the 1950s they have been mined intensively by noted historians such as Roland Mousnier and Pierre Chaunu, as well as graduate students, without significantly reducing the mass of those unplumbed. No mere authenticators of signatures, notaries in France are judicial officers who enjoy a government-protected monopoly to draft, witness, and safeguard a broad array of documents for private and corporate clients, all while functioning as a for-profit liberal profession.¹ Since 1575 they have been required under French law to retain in perpetuity numerous legal documents concerning marital arrangements and kinship, inheritance, property transfers, lending and borrowing, and business and professional transactions. As a perennial professional group within French society, notaries are worthy of study in their own right. Moreover, as a profession that mixes with virtually all other social groups, providing confidential services to all but the most impoverished, notaries are guardians of individual and collective memory. Their files can be crucial to historical research, particularly when other vital documents are lacking, as is the case, for instance, of the Paris parish and civil registers, destroyed in the Commune fires of 1871. Scorned by Balzac and other novelists in the nineteenth century as (sometimes crooked) paper pushers, notaries have survived every attempt at institutional reform and have unwittingly become mighty contributors to the study of history. Since 1928, French notaries have deposited the older documents in their keeping in the specially created "Minutier Central" at the National Archives in Paris and at the Departmental Archives elsewhere in France, where those dating back more than a hundred years are freely available for consultation and more recent ones available with permission. Beyond their evident usefulness for genealogical studies and prosopography, these documents (estimated at well over eighty million concerning Paris alone) are a fertile ground for studies of family history, professional activity, economic status, industrial and financial development, cultural attitudes, and many other subjects from the late Middle Ages to the twentieth century.

Jean-Paul Poisson has done as much as anyone to promote interest in notarial sources. Since 1951, in well over a hundred conference presentations and articles, Pois-

¹ See the fine analysis and criticism of the profession within the French institutional framework by Ezra N. Suleiman: *Private Power and Centralization in France: The Notaries and the State* (Princeton, N.J., 1987).