

The Ideological Instrumentalization of Literary Myths in 19th Century Romanian Literature¹

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Abstract: The historical archetype of the bandit has many variations, but the literary prototype of the hajduk, present both in folklore and in written literature, best exemplifies the nature of the social outlaw, the one who constructs an image of boundless bravery in the collective imagination, feared and admired alike by peasants and boyars. The suggestive power of the hajduk's archetype equates to the romantic principle of seeking refuge in a heroic past, where the glory of the social rebel is a construct of the collective imagination, eluding the need for introducing real biographical details. The allure of the myth draws reflections on lost virtue, freedom against oppression, and the ideal of justice, principles the outlaws fight to impose.

Key-words: *ideology, hajduk, hero, history, social banditry.*

The adventures of “rural outlaws” come to fulfill a social document role, dressed attractively in the cloak of sensational novels. Mircea Muhtu argues that the inclination to exploit social documents “characterizes South Slavic prose” (Muhtu 2017: 318). Similar to Eric Hobsbawm, the critic finds in the “exemplary historicity of the hajduk” a defining phenomenon for Southeastern Europe, a late medievalism through which a “true feudal institution is organized following the captaincies model” (Muhtu 2017: 294). The literary historian highlights the connection between pastoral life and hajduks's path, a continuity emphasized by folk ballads. Banditry becomes, for the passive shepherd, an active solution to an existential and identity crisis, leading to a “leap in history”. Following in the footsteps of Ovid Densusianu, Mircea Muhtu asserts that “the hajduc was often a rebellious shepherd, which could explain the numerous interferences between pastoral and hajduk ballads” (Muhtu 2017: 294). In light of this interpretation, the combative aspect of the hajduk's mission appears as a historical-social necessity, fixed in a literary typology of the rebellious hero.

However, the association proposed by Mircea Muhtu between the shepherd and the hajduk is unfounded and confusing. The presumed continuity followed by the coexistence of pastoral life and banditry appears forced and lacks

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theoretical basis. The figure of the hajduk is situated at the crossroads of history, national myth, and social claims, a relationship accurately describing the transition from a folkloric hero to a protagonist of a regional novel subgenre and an exemplary model of a mobilizing narrative. The novel borrows from ballads a well-defined hero, already established in the collective consciousness, which it develops according to the literary and ideological imperatives of the moment.

The fascination of our early novelists with the symbolism of rural outlaws' rebellions can be explained by the sovereignty of the romantic imagination, under the influence of which the beginnings of Romanian literary modernity took shape. The protean nature of the hajduk's figure allows the crystallization of the moral stakes of writing, and the act of rebellion gains social implications, directed toward challenging the existing social-political order. The hajduk becomes an extension of the oppressed masses, for whom they act and fight. Eric Hobsbawm introduces the concept of "social banditry" to explain the nature of robbery as a form of communal claim, supported by the solidarity of the broad social class from which they come and which they protect: "banditry simultaneously challenges the economic, social, and political order, contesting those who hold or claim power, law, and control over resources. This is the historical significance of banditry in societies with states and class divisions" (Hobsbawm 1981: 19-20). The mythology of hajduks emerges from popular culture and is recorded by writers belonging to the journalism guild, with the feuilletonistic fiber replacing direct experience or documentation from indisputable and rigorous sources. Bands of outlaws emerge in turbulent historical epochs, manifesting their normative moral quality, dressed in the nuances of an anachronistic ideal.

The revolutionary romanticism of the 19th century found in folklore one of the richest sources of representations of nationalist insurgency. Folk literature offered numerous forms that could be qualified as revolutionary, and at the same time, the tales of hajduks transposed into ballads contain significant potential for popular mobilization, deriving from the image of the untamed rebel. Popular novels elaborated on the theme of the hajduk's struggle against corrupt authority, augmenting the patriotic aspect. Between Balkan folklore and the history of Eastern European countries, there are concordances regarding memorable figures of noble robbers. Novelists who chose to write about the adventures of the hajduks demonstrate that the battle for national liberation is a favorite theme in 19th-century literature. The symbolic struggle for national independence is accompanied by a cultural one, the entry into the modern era. The dawn of cultural modernity comes to be invoked through symbolic representations of the social rebel. Early on, the romantic narrative of the hajduks rebellions acquired a standard formula, crystallizing an alternative canonical configuration, applied by all authors of hajduk novels. Thus, each hajduk novel is constructed as a heroic tale, based on a Manichaean model, glorifying the rebellion of patriotic noble bandits against the Turks, Phanariots, or corrupt boyars, presented as demonic otherness.

The figure of the hajduk, successfully exploited by literature, permeates the ideological sphere, becoming instrumentalized as a symbol of rejection of anything that is not characteristic of a nation. Another defining element for

understanding the specificity of the battles waged by social outlaws is the choice of a formidable adversary representing the opposite of all the ideals embodied by the bands of hajduks. The image of the Turks and the Phanariots is instructive for a symbolic struggle whose ultimate goal is liberation from foreign authority, coupled with the strengthening of national sentiment. As representatives of foreign authority, leading the Romanian countries, the Phanariots come to be demonized, and they are morally blamed for establishing a corrupt regime dominated by the politics of privileges and corruption. Occupiers, illegitimate rulers, and main enemies of the noble bandits, the Turks and the Phanariots are portrayed in social and historical novels as “exponents of an Oriental despotism that has perverted the noble traditions and ancestral values of the Romanians” (Roman 2014: 3). Andreia Roman offers a possible interpretation of the ambivalence of the Phanariots’ status in the Romanian lands and resorts to a more nuanced image, provided by historiography, namely that of the enlightened despot. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that the Greek language facilitated Romanian boyars’ access to the writings of Enlightenment thinkers.

Of the two aspects of the Phanariot, one offered by literature and the other by historiography, only one has ensured stability in the collective imagination, that of the detestable tyrant, usurper of the noble national tradition. We owe to literature, especially the novel, the sedimentation of this imagological construct in the national consciousness. Benefiting from an efficient formula due to the accessibility of an appealing message and increased dissemination capacities, the novel claims the role of shaping a memorable image of the foreigner by accentuating the negative traits incompatible with the moral exemplariness of the hajduk. The thirst for power and odious behavior are the eternal flaws of Oriental despotism, and the hajduk novel reproachfully presents how these vices are transmitted to Romanian boyars, coming to characterize them. This ideological line becomes increasingly strong with the rise of the novel and the consolidation of national states. The victimizing perspective on the disastrous history and the glorious past abruptly interrupted by the forces of invaders legitimizes the challenges and claims of the outlaws in sensational literature. Folklore and history have preserved allegorical events which, through tradition, have polarized social realities and literary constructions.

Myth, symbol and banditism in hajduk narratives

The hajduk novel retraces the symbolic trajectory of the nationalist discourse of the 19th-century revolution, which superimposes, within a Manichaeian framework, two categories of characters onto the national-foreign antagonism. Despite lacking consistency, the “complex” character is attributed all the symbolic qualities of patriotic struggles against the monstrous representatives of foreign occupation. The hajduk-hero embodies a set of invariant attributes, praised in each narrative, and the legendary lineage, crystallized by ballads, is recalled and updated by incorporating folk songs into the body of the novel. Songs of war or love mediate the fusion between the picturesque texture of the ballad and the epic form infused with didacticism. The dynamics of literary taste and the utilization of historical events in favor of delivering principles with which

the era could align itself, such as the consolidation of national independence and the rejection of interference by corrupt foreign authorities, favor narratives where the effort of objectification is diminished by the histrionics of a narrator seeking to guide the reading towards the demonization of the social-political product of a history tragic for the nation's genius.

The adaptations of the noble bandit's image and the work-in-progress nature of the hajduk prose highlight the extraordinary mobility of this type of social imaginary, which relates to the canonical configuration only relatively, relying on the ability to adopt, develop, and imagine alternative directions for the adventures of the heroes of hajduk narratives. The constant shifting between the registers of orality, consecrated by the ballad formula, and the textual conventions of an epic form as comprehensive as the novel does not articulate itself as a unilateral process, acting in one direction only, but implies a perpetual return to popular sources, involving a re-oralization of the motifs processed through the educated tradition:

(...) this tradition oscillates between the registers of orality and the written text, often moving freely between them: ballad performances provide motifs and inspiration for literary treatment, which, in turn, not only reverberate in the literary canon by way of imitation, emulation, spin-offs, or re-workings but are also disseminated into popular culture and re-oralized. (Cornis-Pope 2010: 407)

Therefore, the hajduk novel employs the conventions of written text to portray the circular nature of the narrative that chooses to present the adventures of social bandits. Inspired by folk ballads, the legendary aura surrounding the struggles of these folk bandits becomes a mobile construction of literary imagination and will undergo various literary operations, alternately distancing and approaching its popular source. Positioned between the ideological manipulation of the hajduk's rebellious act and the construction of a literary formula that gained rapid popularity, this hybrid novel subgenre distinctly shaped the evolution of modern Romanian literature.

Hajduks' Camp as an Alternative Society

C. Boerescu made a name for himself as a political orator, and his few writings had political and social implications. Biographical information about this younger brother of Vasile Boerescu is scarce. Coming from a noble family, he studied law in Paris, like many young people of his time. As for his only novel, *Aldo și Aminta sau Bandiții*, the first hajduk novel in Romanian literature, critics and literary historians have tried to highlight the adaptation of multiple foreign models. What is overlooked is that an ostensibly artificial novel like *Aldo și Aminta*, which uses clumsy literary language, only compensates for the lexical poverty and the lack of local models to which it could relate. The Romanian narrative tradition around 1850 was not sufficiently developed to legitimize the narrative consistency claimed by the novel's form. The impact of translations is crucial because they shape the future novelists' style and refine readers' aesthetic taste, piqued by the exciting literary form: "the reading public demanded novels inspired by its life, novels that would talk to them about local

realities and people. Writers were encouraged to embrace a new literary form that offered them creative possibilities”² (Vîrgolici 1963: 13).

Boerescu’s novel faithfully reflects the conflict between the foreign, Western form of the novel and the local culture. The narrator’s voice finds itself in the position of mediating the harmonization of local material with the demands of the complexity of the Romanian imaginative world. Franco Moretti describes this distinct role of the narrative voice in the vast body of non-canonical literature, or “the great unread”, by introducing a conventional, or even traditional, relationship between form and content. The researcher describes the osmosis between national material and the foreign form as a compromise, explaining why the narrative as a whole can appear fragile, lacking naturalness and fractured due to the difficulties of “domesticating” the form:

(...) foreign plot; local characters; and then, local narrative (...). Which makes sense: the narrator is the pole of comment, of explanation, of evaluation, and when foreign ‘formal patterns’ (or actual foreign presence, for that matter) make characters behave in strange ways (...) the historical conditions reappear as a sort of ‘crack’ in the form; as a faultline running between story and discourse, world and worldview: the world goes in the strange direction dictated by an outside power; the worldview tries to make sense of it and is thrown off balance all the time. (Moretti 2000: 65)

Formal structures borrowed from the Western tradition influence the crystallization of the story into discourse, transfiguring characters, who end up acting in an unnatural way for the reader who expects a harmonious adaptation. According to Moretti’s theory, historical conditions fragment the literary form that the Romanian space attempts to adopt, a aspect reflected in the gaps between the story and discourse or between the world and the worldview perspective. Mircea Zăciu’s critical assertion, indicating that the novel is “an artifice, written in a plethoric and prolix style”, seems to find theoretical justification through the analysis of the relationship between the form borrowed from the foreign cultural capital and the indigenous effort to adapt it to the local tradition (Zăciu 1967: 411). The lack of nuances in the critics’ judgments and literary history blatantly ignores the significant role of this hajduk novel as the foundation of a highly successful literary paradigm of its time.

An initial outline of a theory of “popular novel” can be attributed to Titu Maiorescu. In his study *Literatura română și străinătatea*, the mentor of the Junimist movement placed at the center of the Romanian narrative construction the typology of the hero arising from the broadest social stratum (Maiorescu 1967: 242). Unlike the tragic character, reflecting the exceptionality of the individual, the novel’s hero embodies the life of the nation in all its dimensions. While tragedy prohibited the entry of commoners onto the main stage, Maiorescu argued that the novel could rectify this injustice in artistic representation. The unjust conventionalization of high-ranking characters profoundly affected literature, and Maiorescu viewed this as a hindrance to the

² Original quote: “[...] publicul cititor reclama romane inspirate din viața lui, care să-i vorbească despre realitățile și oamenii autohtoni, iar scriitorii erau stimulați în abordarea unei noi forme literare, care le oferea alte posibilități creatoare”. (Vîrgolici 1963: 13).

attainment of the art object. However, European realist novels of the 19th century contradicted Maiorescu's theory. Romanian writers like C. Boerescu demonstrated how this popular literary "enclave" of a hero emerging from a marginalized social category functioned in the Romanian cultural context.

Published in a transitional period, the novel symbolically marks the transition to the construction of a literary mythology incorporating the image of a glorious past, the aspirations of post-revolutionary nationalism, and the perspective of a future meant to fulfill the desires of the members of the 1848 Revolution. Following in the footsteps of Eric Auerbach and Walter Benjamin, Benedict Anderson describes in *Imagined Communities* a specific simultaneity, which can be attributed to historical prose during the rise of European nationalism, consolidated by the "Springtime of Nations". Anderson's proposed simultaneity corresponds to Walter Benjamin's concept of *messianic time*³, constituting a "simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present" (Anderson 2006: 24). This simultaneity becomes a decisive factor in historical prose during the ascent of nationalism. Literary dynamics play an overwhelming role in shaping the image a nation constructs for itself, and the evolution of journalism and the popularity of novels transform into social instruments that foster solidarity with noble causes:

Why this transformation should be so important for the birth of the imagined community of the nation can best be seen if we consider the basic structure of two forms of imagining which first flowered in Europe in the eighteenth century: the novel and the newspaper. For these forms provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the kind of imagined community that is the nation. (Anderson 2006: 24-25)

According to Anderson, the nation is a construct of the imaginary, signifying that representations of the collective "self" are directed by imaginative productions. While the anthropologist's theory primarily concerns 19th-century Western Europe, it can be extended to the beginnings of modern Romanian culture, whose literary morphology faithfully reflects the construction of national myths. Printed text began to provide a tangible embodiment of the tribulations, claims, and hopes of a people envisioning themselves as a nation. The novel *Aldo și Aminta sau Bandiții* encapsulates, albeit clumsily, explicit social objectives. Structurally and thematically, Boerescu crafts a hybrid prose — a historical and simultaneously social hajduk novel — that employs imported settings to valorize regional archetypes, initiating their transformation into national myths.

³ Walter Benjamin describes the necessity of establishing a causal connection between different essential moments in history. The historical afterlife and the significant distance between past and present are eluded by the historian through the explanation of the past by correlating it with their own historical moment: "The present, which, as a model of Messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgment, coincides exactly with the stature which the history of mankind has in the universe. [...] A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the «time of the now» which is shot through with chips of Messianic time." (Benjamin 2007: 263)

The general impression derived from reading the text is that the author endeavors more to write a novel about allegorical and timeless struggles, without attempting to adapt the imported formula to the peculiarities of the cultural milieu into which it is transplanted. The characters merely adhere to romantic patterns, acting predictably, and their names bear no Romanian trace, being foreign. In *Romantismul românesc*, D. Popovici signals a defining Italian atmosphere, possibly influenced by Friedrich Schiller's *Die Räuber*, "a work known to Romanian readers either in Lamartellière's French adaptation or its translation by Alecu Vasiliu, printed in Iași in 1847" (Popovici 1972: 322). Popovici's argument can be justified by the free circulation of influences and models, a diffusion that proves challenging to definitively map. The French language mediates, according to the critic, the adoption of thematic and typological strategies from a German drama, with Boerescu taking an indirect route to describe Romanian history. The novel opens with a French motto from Schiller, indicating the novelist's attempt to claim lineage from the German playwright.

Narrative disharmonies consist of losing proportions within romantic frames and exaggerating melodramatic scenarios. Historical scenes are pale, but what the author accomplishes best is the panoramic view of significant events. Despite the challenges of objectivity, the scenes of battle are captured in all their heroic drama. Instantaneous displays of hajduks' bravery as they confront the enemy have an epic quality about them. In the dedication to his brother, Vasile Boerescu, which opens the volume, C. Boerescu categorizes his text as a historical novel, a "simple tale of times past", written with the "maturity of a young man emerging from his childhood years" (Boerescu 1855: 3). The penchant for historically inspired literature lies precisely in the remnants of Enlightenment thinking and the spectacular development of historiography, which, along with rich material in imagological representations and philosophical arguments, offered a clear perspective on the distinctive evolutionary path of the Romanian nation. Post-Paşoptist novelists would intensely exploit the heroic physiognomy of figures extracted from the national past. In *The Historical Novel*, Georg Lukács describes the moment when interest in history is activated by nationalist movements as an alloy of "regeneration and reaction" that awakens the sense of living history: "The appeal to national independence and national character is necessarily connected with a re-awakening of national history, with memories of the past, of past greatness, of moments of national dishonour, whether this results in a progressive or reactionary ideology" (Lukács 1989: 23). According to Lukács's view, this living of history by the masses facilitates the rise of the national element and brings about claims related to social reorganization.

The novelist's task becomes that of revealing how, paradoxically, history, as a supposedly objective science, acquires through cultural-patriotic determination the attribute of subjectivity, confronting a methodological resurgence seeking to impose the guardianship of values extending beyond scientific definitions. This perspective on the science of history explains not only the emergence of the historical novel genre but also the versatility of the stylistic expression of romantic historical narrative, with both mutually engaging in a reciprocal exchange of discursive strategies and expressive

techniques. The tensions of their cultural contradictions undoubtedly fueled the change in national aesthetic taste. If the tales that Boerescu declares to be dictated by “feeling” are mediated by the amalgamation of several successful formulas, the type of hajduk he proposes becomes relevant in light of the genre’s evolution. The societal models presented by the outlaw novel and the dynamics of the relationship between authority and the people emphasize critical social aspects, allowing us to integrate outlaw prose into the generic configuration of the social novel.

The Hajduk Novel and The Portrayal of an Ideal Societal Model

C. Boerescu’s hajduks fall more into the category of dilemmatic spirits, destined for meditative excesses, rather than warriors seeking glory on the battlefield. Their portraits are stereotypical, composed of romantic clichés that metaphorically emphasize moral and physical superiority. The leader of the hajduk gang and fatherly figure, Captain Brav, distinguishes himself through his “noble spirit and physique, bearing a grand forehead, surpassing his companions, and in his penetrating eyes, one could see the fire that animated the free man”⁴ (Boerescu 1855: 10). The plot disperses in a few inadequately defined directions, lacking a coherent escalation of conflicts, but the “preeminent” hajduks dominate the action with their profound musings, enhancing the implausibility of the construction. The collective portrait of the hajduk gang is also articulated on the thanatic physiognomy of the romantic hero for whom death represents a primary dimension of existence.

The natural society that the hajduks construct in the mountains serves a compensatory function, counterbalancing the evil produced by the corrupted community from which they have withdrawn, a community that only caused them suffering. Escapism is the consequence of the persecution complex that the noble bandits seek to nullify by forming an alternative societal model. Here, we find echoes of J. J. Rousseau’s theory, quite popular in the era, about the original purity and the harmful tendencies of society that corrupt the “noble savage”. The hierarchy within the hajduk gang reflects the nobility of their spirits and their spiritual tribulations. The captain has a name that leaves no room for ambiguity, Brav, and seems perpetually haunted by abstract sufferings, yet he regards his “companions” with paternal care, encouraging and leading them to victory or death. Aldo, Brav’s second-in-command and secretary, is an “unfortunate youth” who becomes a hajduk following a romantic disappointment. His portrait is one of the most expressive in the novel, blending the demonic aura of the patriotic rebel with the innocence of the young man with a penchant for ideals:

Barely twenty years old, he had forsaken everything to become a bandit. But his goal was noble, not a desire for vulgar passions; a true son of Pain, he had come to find a more certain death and to cast his past, future, and whole being into the black abyss of Forgetfulness. His face was consumed by suffering, barely preserving the freshness of youth; his black eyes, laden with lashes, were directed more often towards the sky, as if

⁴ Original quote: “nobilul său corp, ce purta o frunte măreață, întrecea p’alū soților săi, și în pătrunzătorii săi oîkî se vedea focul ce anima pe omul celū liberū”, (Boerescu 1855: 10).

he wanted to pray, and then they seemed to wander deliriously; a mysterious and sublime fire burned in his gaze: piety and vengeance, pride and pity seemed to be the extremes he grappled with.⁵ (Boerescu 1855: 12)

Aldo, the contemplative spirit torn by contradictory feelings, lies at the core of the intrigue. The love story that makes him withdraw from corrupted society continues to haunt him, and the lost beloved also finds herself in the mountains, attracting the hajduk band with her melancholic song. The reunion between Aldo and Aminta adheres to the conventions of melodramatic scenography: the girl's appearance on a mountaintop, the postponement of the meeting between the captain's secretary and the rescued woman, the encounter that evokes powerful emotions and physically destabilizes the heroes. One of the prominent hajduks in Brav's gang is the old adviser, who advises Aldo to escape the troubling memory of his unhappy love. The lives of the noble bandits are consumed in harmony, in meditative exercises and contemplative outbursts directed towards nature or the human soul. The action lacks triggers, and the battles are attritional, directed towards a general enemy, a negative principle threatening the people on whose behalf the hajduks fight. When representatives of official authority appear in the series of narrative episodes, they are endowed with an imposing physiognomy, adorned with wealth and precious garments. Their capital traits are cunning and cruelty, but also a kind of delirious sensuality. The tax collector, a man of "terror", is prepared to punish the hajduks' accomplice but is seduced by the beauty of Aminta and abandons his punitive intentions in exchange for a promise of a meeting with the beautiful young woman.

The ending only accentuates the moralizing dimension of the narrative discourse. The heroes meet a tragic fate that enhances the romantic stance of life as an endless source of suffering. Aldo gives up his hajduk vocation in exchange for sparing his own life and acquiring wealth. Aminta falls into despair upon hearing the news of Aldo's death, taking the path of solitude. Boerescu concludes his novel with a meditation, associating the image of the hajduk with that of the tragic hero who reveals the essence of the world's evil and sacrifices himself to make this ultimate truth known: "Sad and full of anguish, a life that finds peace only in the grave; here, at least, is the last refuge of our despair, and the last hope that consoles the unfortunate!"⁶ (Boerescu 1855: 163). The novel *Aldo și Aminta* proposes romantic character categories and relies on facile strategies derived from the Western model. Boerescu's heroes do not have folkloric origins, yet they identify with the cultural archetype

⁵ Original quote: "Abia de două-zeci de ani, și-și abandonase totu ca să se facă banditu. Dar scopul lui era nobil, iar nu o dorință de patimi vulgare; adevăratu fiu alu Durerii, el venise să-și găsească o moarte mai sigură, și să arunce în negrul Uitării trecutul, viitorul și teția sa. Fața lui era consumată de suferințe, abia mai conserva freskeța. tinereții; negri săi oiki, încărcați de gene, se îndreptau mai de multe ori către ceru, ca cum ar voită să se roage, și apoi păreau delirați îneregaosul lor; unu focu misteriosu și sublimu ardea în căutătura sa: pietatea și răsbunarea, orgoliul și compătimirea păreau a fi estremitățile cu care se lupta." (Boerescu 1855: 12)

⁶ Original quote: "Viață tristă și plină de angustii ce nu-și găsi pacea de cit în mormintu; acilea celu puțin e ultimul refugiu alu disperării noastre, și ultima speranță ce consolă pe infortunat!" (Boerescu 1855: 163)

of the social bandit. This might explain why C. Boerescu is not remembered as the author who introduced the hajduk character into Romanian literature, but N. D. Popescu is.

(Re)Inventing the Hajduk Novel

N. D. Popescu is one of the most prolific writers of his time. His rich activity as a calendar author, spanning over forty years, allows him to popularize his historical-themed prose. The pages of the calendars reveal the work-in-progress nature of N. D. Popescu's texts, as he revisits them, refines them, and transforms them. Short stories become novels, and novels receive sequels or prologues, incorporating additional secondary conflicts. The work of *Iancu Jianu's* author is a homogeneous one, fully exploiting the sensational element and the novelty of surprising situations. In this case, there is a heightened sensitivity to the popularity of certain texts, which he consistently revisits, for the dynamics of his literary preferences and the tastes of his time. Public success with a particular subject or character leads to the creation of alternative or related narrative scenarios, which the writer carefully highlights within the text through insertions with a dual purpose: captatio and rememoratio. These insertions summarize the most captivating aspects of past adventures to glide towards future ones: "Those dear readers who have read the first part of Iancu Jianu's exploits, entitled 'Jianu Zapciu', remember his adventures in the abandoned mine, and the clever way he used to escape from it."⁷ (Popescu 2021: 5).

In his study *Le roman populaire*, Jean Tortel distinguishes three major periods in popular novels: the romantic or heroic period, the bourgeois stage, and, finally, the brief period of returning to the models proposed by heroic themes (Tortel 1970: 55). The popular novel, which centers around a hero responsible for upholding social order, develops in parallel with serialized fiction, eventually merging with it, a phenomenon solidified by the emergence of the "novel-feuilleton". The press assumes the role of a foundational agent of the public success that popular novels achieve. The second stage in the evolution of popular novels is the bourgeois moment, which reaches its peak in France between the 1880s and 1890s. Coalescing around major technological advancements and the rising tide of nationalism, the bourgeois popular novel brings significant shifts in perspective. Central characters no longer hail from the aristocratic class but are chosen from the ranks of ordinary people. Ideological stakes also change, leading to transformations in literary techniques. However, writers' sensitivity to readers' expectations eventually homogenizes the range of strategies employed, diverging from the physiognomy of the earlier heroic model:

Il marque pourtant une décadence sensible sur la période précédente. Complaisant, timide, stéréotypé et cependant emphatique et prolix, il est une espèce de revanche de la

⁷ Original quote: "Aceia dintre iubiiții lectori care au citit prima parte a isprăvilor lui Iancu Jianu, intitulată «Jianu Zapciu», țin minte pățaniile lui din ocna părăsită, cum și modul isteț ce a întrebunțat ca să scape dintr-însa." (Popescu 2021: 5)

mentalité conformiste sur la glorification de la révolte; la justification de l'encadrement social opposé à la solitude du hors-la-loi surgi des ténèbres. (Tortel 1970: 57)

The researcher captures the thematic conformity and revanchist motivations of bourgeois popular novels, emphasizing the stereotypical and stylistic prolixity that seeks to counteract social determinism by portraying the hero's solitude or, we can add, crystallizing an alternative societal configuration. The third moment in the development of popular novels is the restructuring of heroism. The new hero is the outsider, the stranger who no longer belongs to society. In the case of N. D. Popescu's hajduk novel, the heroic and bourgeois moments merge in hybrid Romanian texts, amalgamating the characteristics of each stage. N. D. Popescu's hajduks represent restructuring of the mythical hero, placed in a turbulent historical context that homogenizes their inner structure and imparts similar social, ethical, and national molds. For example, the hajduk group of Iancu Jianu configures itself as a micro-society governed by the democratic principle of representativeness, where outlaws unanimously choose a leader, whose word carries normative weight.

Beyond the apocalyptic scenes and the research effort he always mentions as a constitutive factor of the literary elaboration process, which justifies its classification within the patterns of historical novels, precisely this novelist's insistence on articulating an alternative society that symbolically annuls the authority of the state, exhaustively presenting the motives for such a rebellion, transforms the outlaw texts into social novels, where political claims are not incidental background elements but nuances that individualize the subgenre. In the Romanian space, the theorization of outlaw prose implies its classification as sensational novels, processing a specific imaginary taken from folklore sources, presenting the heroic struggle of the brave bandit against the abuses of the Phanariote era. Following in the footsteps of G. Călinescu, Dinu Pillat sees the outlaw as a picaro fighting against social injustices, emerging as a revolutionary symbol:

Indeed, the outlaw hero is a young man, handsome, or at least robust, son of a boyar but mainly a peasant, forced to adopt the life of a clandestine fighter with just intentions, out of revolt against the hardships suffered by his own family or the Romanian community in general, due to the Phanariote regime.⁸ (Pillat 1947: 31)

History becomes a pretext in the same pure romantic sense emphasized by the Junimea writers. The historical backdrop acts as a resonance chamber for the patriotic aspirations of the outlaws ready to overturn economic hierarchies in favor of the oppressed community. Society demands purification and reconstruction on "egalitarian" grounds, an anachronistic ideal aiming to eliminate the disparities between the boyars who obstinately enjoy the wealth and resources accumulated from the toil of the oppressed peasants. Such an

⁸ Original quote: "Deobicei, eroul haiduc este un tânăr frumos sau cel puțin voinic, fiu de boier dar mai cu seamă de țăran, silit să adopte viața unui luptător clandestin cu scopuri de justițiar, din spirit de revoltă față de neajunsurile suferite de propria familie sau de comunitatea românească în genere, de pe urma regimului fanariot." (Pillat 1947: 31)

interpretation fuels Marxist theories of social bandits, as proposed by Eric Hobsbawm. The very theory regarding the outlaw hero as a social bandit justifies the subgenre's classification as a social novel, and the interpretations offered about societal models are based on a series of oppositions between official authority and the alternative community created by outlaws under the protection of nature.

Exemplarity and Sensationalism

N. D. Popescu's work as chief archivist provided him with rich historical material to process according to the expectations of the public's taste. Although starting from historical documents, as is the case with most post-Revolutionary novels, N. D. Popescu's popular novel goes beyond the mere "romanticization" of the event. The novelist shows repeated concern for the core of the ballad-like myth of the outlaw, often succeeding in creating a timeless atmosphere, akin to the world of fairy tales. However, the cultural archetype of the outlaw proves to be remarkably effective in conveying nationalist principles, and its increased permeability to local specifics rapidly transforms it into a national myth. Romantic fantasy is susceptible to enveloping the conventional and mundane physiognomy of the bandit in the legendary aura of the perfect hero, whose appearance mirrors high moral qualities. The way the outlaw's figure evolves from the literary inglorious status of a man who does not stand out due to his appearance to the protector of the oppressed nation in need reflects the ascent of the Romanian imagination.

However, N. D. Popescu expresses a preference for epic portrayals, blending the image of the demon thirsting for deathly projections and that of the champion of justice rectifying the nefarious course of history. The ability to efficiently exploit the ideological stakes embedded in a narrative teeming with extraordinary events demonstrates the sagacity of these outlaw adventures. The documentary subtext of the sensational episodes in the outlaw narrative transforms N. D. Popescu's novels into mandatory "bibliography" for writers captivated by the symbolic power of the literary myth of the justiciary outlaw. In the preface to the volume *Der Haiduck/ Haiducul*, Bucura Dumbravă quotes the author of *Iancu Jianu Haiducul* as the primary source of historical information, a segment that complements the folkloric sources of the myth:

I gathered folk material from the writings of Mr. F. Marian and from Mr. N. D. Popescu's popular book about Iancu Jianu, where many historical and cultural details and peculiarities have been gathered with commendable diligence, details I couldn't have found elsewhere, because collecting works of this kind do not yet exist in Romania. I have kept the general outlines in the description of Jianu's outlaw life in broad strokes as Mr. D. N. Popescu described it; however, I deviated where history or my particular notes illuminated me differently.⁹ (Dumbravă 1908: 1)

⁹ Original quote: "Material folcloristic am cules din scrierile d-lui F. Marian și din cartea populară a d-lui N. D. Popescu despre Iancu Jianu, în care se găsesc adunate cu laudabilă sârguință multe detaliuri și particularități istorice și culturale, cari nu le-aș fi putut găsi în altă parte, fiindcă opere culegătoare de acest fel nu există încă în România. În liniile mari m'am și ținut, în descrierea vieții de haiduc a lui Jianu, de felul, cum a descris-o d-l. D. N. Popescu, m'am abătut însă acolo, unde istoria sau notițele mele particulare, m'au luminat într'altfel." (Dumbravă 1908: 1)

N. D. Popescu's primary profession remains that of a novelist, which overshadows his role as an archivist of historical documents. The character Iancu Jianu, whom he constructs and reconstructs in many of his prose works, becomes the hallmark of the subgenre, granting the writer hegemony over outlaw literature. For N. D. Popescu, folklore, along with history, is another essential resource for outlaw novels. The adoption and processing of folkloric imagery, extracted from outlaw ballads and protest songs, is justified by the symbolic force of the oral tradition. The novelist pays special attention to folk motifs and habits that outline the ideal conduct of a brave bandit, motivated by the same ideals as Robin Hood, the need to reinstate justice within a community whose values are endangered by the ruling Phanariote class. The appeal to folk traditions ensures the continuity of the literary myth, presenting the outlaw hero as a "legitimate heir" of the popular imagination. The way the notorious outlaws infiltrate the collective memory, turning into legendary heroes with allegorical functions, guarantees the intensity of the cultural archetype. N. D. Popescu manipulates the motifs extracted from hajduk ballads, attributing them new functions within the context of the late 19th-century society, thus endowing the old tale with a fresh content. Thus, the hajduk's skills, a true embodiment of the national spirit, constitute the outcome of a secret pact with nature. The adherence to the unwritten laws of the community, rejection of the official, and the acceptance of the alternative legal system, rooted in custom and tradition, embody the particularities of the heroic figure. Like other writers before him, such as Barbu Delavrancea, or contemporaries like Vasile Alecsandri, N. D. Popescu ensures that the outlaw hero fits seamlessly into the Romanian cultural landscape, making him an attractive literary character.

The hybrid nature of the popular novel, fusing together elements from various genres, emphasizes the outlaws' psychological characterization as representatives of a nation in search of its own identity. The exterior features of the outlaw hero gain relevance through their ability to convey the historical background, as presented by the historical novel. The post-Revolutionary Romanian society craved for figures that could articulate their aspirations and individualize the social struggles. The hajduk-hero's national romanticism comes into play here, embodying an exceptional social behaviour, caught between times and civilizations, facing the Phanariote oppression with bravery and ingenuity. The spirit of Romanian national character finds its expression through the figure of the hajduk, whose nobility lies in his fight against the injustices of history. In a society divided by deep cleavages, economic disparities, and ethnic tensions, the outlaw hero becomes the unifying symbol of an ideal state, free from the burdens of foreign domination and internal discord.

The hajduk-hero's transformative journey from an ordinary man to an extraordinary figure is emblematic of the nation's quest for identity and self-determination. This process of becoming, shaped by historical events and social struggles, elevates the hajduk narrative beyond mere entertainment, transforming it into a powerful allegory of collective aspirations and resilience. N. D. Popescu and C. Boerescu's contribution to the development of the hajduk

novels lies not only in his adept storytelling and captivating characters but also in his ability to infuse these narratives with profound socio-cultural significance.

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