

SOCIAL BANDITRY AND FEMININITY IN THE 19TH CENTURY HAJDUK NOVEL

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Abstract In the volume titled *Bandits*, Eric Hobsbawm associates women with banditry in three hypostases, determined by their “accepted sexual role:” the first situation concerns passive participation in “the wandering life of men,” the second is the hypostasis “of supporters and liaisons with the outside world,” while the last, and least common, role “is that of bandits themselves.” In *Mina Haiduceasa. Fata Codrilor*, the role of the hajduk-novel that the novelist George Baronzi assigns to his heroine, also entails a shift in the collective imagination since it implies ignoring the biological determinants. Baronzi's innovation lies in the reconfiguration of the image of the social bandit, since the heroic outlaw no longer appears as an exclusive juxtaposition of masculinity and protective aggression.

Keywords Social banditry, heroine, femininity, hajduk, novel.

1. The hajduk novel and the historical setting

The fascination of the first Romanian novelists with the symbolism of the noble revolts of the outlaws can also be explained by the sovereignty of the Romantic imaginary, under whose influence the beginnings of Romanian literary modernity are materialized. As life overlaps with the projections of fantasy in a relationship in which the two are never sufficiently clearly demarcated, the Romanian archetypal insurrection can only take the popular form of rural banditry, widespread in the Balkan area. The specific shape of this regional sub-genre is due to unfavourable historical circumstances and the limited autonomy of the countries in which it developed, aspects against which “literature attempts to make a compensatory effort, be it

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fictional.”¹ The structural and thematic complexity of the hajduk novel allows the crystallization of the moral stakes of the early Romanian novels of the 19th century because the act of the hajduk's revolt has social implications, being oriented towards challenging the existing social-political order. As Kir Kuiken points out, the relation between the Romantic imagery and politics is a complex matter, involving both the relationship between imagination and rhetoric and the ideological stakes that concern the relationship between the individual and the society:

“More recent attempts to understand the relation between the imagination and the political as something other than a mystification of history have tended to emphasize connections between the imagination and rhetoric, or the power of figurative language to engage a host of problems such as the integration of the individual with the collective, or the relation between politics and form.”²

The nation itself, as Benedict Anderson explains in *Imagined Communities*, is a construct of the imaginary, a sign that representations of the collective self are directed by the productions of the imagination.³ Although the anthropologist's theory concerns the 19th century West, it can also be extended to the early modernity of modern Romanian culture, whose literary morphology faithfully reflects the construction of national myths. The hajduk novel, as a printed text, begins to provide a tangible body to the tribulations, claims, and hopes of a society that sees itself as a nation.⁴ The outlaw becomes a representative of the oppressed masses, from whom he claims his rights and for whose benefit he acts. In *Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Eric Hobsbawm introduces the concept of social banditry into the discussion of this type of rebellion to explain the nature of banditry as a form of community claim, sustained by the solidarity of the extended social group from which they come and which they protect:

“It is important that the incipient social bandit should be regarded as ‘honourable’ or non-criminal by the population, for if he was regarded as a criminal against local convention, he could not enjoy the local protection on which he must rely completely. Admittedly almost anyone who joins issue with the oppressors and the State is likely to be regarded as a victim, a hero or both. Once a man is on the run, therefore, he is naturally protected by the peasants and by the weight of local conventions which

¹ See Lucreția Pascariu, Alexandra Olteanu, Manuela Tican, Oana Ionescu and Raluca Babii, “Romanul haiducesc al lui N.D. Popescu,” *Meridian Critic*, XXXIX, No. 1 (2022): 121-136.

² Kir Kuiken, *Imagined Sovereignities: Toward a New Political Romanticism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 26.

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006).

⁴ See Alexandra Olteanu, “De la ‘memoria’ folclorului la arhetip cultural și mit național în romanul haiducesc,” *Glose. Revistă de studii românești*, No. 7-8 (2022): 293-304.

stands for 'our' law-custom, blood-feud or whatever it might be – against 'theirs', and 'our' justice against that one of the rich."⁵

The 19th-century Romanian novelists understood the artistic potential and popularity of such a narrative subject. Seduced by the moralizing and critical aspect of the writing, the writer would combine the romantic account of brave deeds with reflective, essayistic passages in which echoes of the tradition acquired through translations of French novels are recognizable. These first craftsmen of the Romanian novel practised their hand first as translators and then as authors of original texts, an aesthetic aspect that is also reflected in their literature. The hajduk novel is an indigenous illustration of the *historical romance*, a literary form perfected by Walter Scott, which romanticizes historical episodes, "relativizing the question of documentary accuracy in favour of the artistic liberties of fantasy."⁶ The investigation of literary politics, those aesthetic and expressive strategies employed by writers to juxtapose the adventures of the social outlaw, will reveal a complex literary dynamic, in which the rise of the outlaw novel's popularity and the evolution of the Romanian novel are transcribed in the symbolic battles and romanticized fates of the outlaws who acquired fame, heroic reputation and the sympathy of society.

At the same time as the first original Romanian novels appeared, three novels written by Walter Scott were translated and published in 1856. *The Trustee of Lamermoor* and *Richard the Lionhearted* appeared in G. Baronzi's translation, and *Piermen's Fiancée* in that of Alecu Minescu. Inspired by Aimé Martin's initiative to publish the works of the great writers of world literature in a collection, Ion Heliade-Rădulescu aspired to compile a library representing the world's great writers, Scott being included in this ambitious programme, published in 1846 in the *Curierul românesc*. Walter Scott's significant influence on the first decades of modern Romanian literature and, implicitly, on the historical novel is also noted by B. P. Hasdeu in his article "Mișcarea Literelor în Eși," published in 1863 in the journal *Lumina*.

Although the literary qualities are not dazzling, the first Romanian novelists never manifest the intention to deliver a flawless aesthetic monument. N. D. Popescu admits in his prefaces that he is writing for an audience he seeks to delight with the real and fictional adventures of a legendary outlaw. For this reason, he returns to the texts, develops them, polishes them, and publishes them in many editions. He achieved publishing success with his *Iancu Jianu* novel series, which went through no less than seven editions, the last of which had an impressive print run of no less than five thousand copies. In his doctoral thesis, Dinu Pillat considers N. D. Popescu's literature to be the most aesthetically evolved form of the hajduk

⁵ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), 16.

⁶ Lucreția Pascariu, Alexandra Olteanu, Manuela Tican, Oana Ionescu și Raluca Babii, "Romanul haiducesc al lui N. D. Popescu," *Meridian Critic* XXXIX, No. 1 (2022): 134.

novel in the rich production of the second half of the 19th century. The literary historian attributes to it as a compensatory peculiarity the naivety specific to the folk tale.⁷

George Baronzi familiarizes himself with the formula of the sensation novel by translating popular novels of the period. He established himself as one of the most productive translators, offering Romanian versions of the works of fervently read writers such as George Sand, Eugène Sue, Walter Scott and Al. Dumas or Al. Dumas-son. Although he is accused of lacking originality and of making a half-hearted attempt to borrow the plots, atmosphere, and characters typical of the Western novel, Baronzi writes a historical novel in which the protagonist “converts” to outlawry. *Mina haiduceasa* (1894) takes up the same “winning formula”⁸ of the patriotic narrative in which national myth merges with sensationalist gesticulation, but it is the first hajduk novel to hypostatize a different kind of hajduk, a woman dressed in the garb of the social bandit. Hajduk-women are rare in novelistic texts and Baronzi's plot, though stereotypical, is triggered by a love drama, a sign that the novel is also placed under the zodiac of the sentimental romantic model, not just the historical, social, or sensational one. The writer uses the conventions of portraiture and narrative clichés typical of the hajduk novel to effect a fundamental change in the ideology of the portrayal of the noble bandit. The ontology of the outlaw is now more comprehensive and accepts a female character in the role of the vigilante hero.

2. The outlaw and the challenge to the state authority

In the third volume of *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, coordinated by historians Roumen Daskalov and Alexander Vezenkov, the historical causes of the spread of narratives centred on the hero-bandit figure are presented, explaining the significant share of this type of fictionalised narrative in 19th century literature. With the spread of the Ottoman Empire's authority in the Balkans, literary discourse intensified its tragic-heroic fibre and increased the importance of resistance to the occupiers. The states under Ottoman suzerainty thus developed a heroic model to hypostatize the struggle with the occupiers and the injustice they promoted. The noble outlaw becomes the central actor of the rebellion, and the retreat into the mountains and the fight with the enemy takes on epic proportions. The authors of the volume point out that there were no uprisings or conspiracies in the pre-19th century Balkans that are recorded in popular memory. In this context, the outlaw becomes a historical archetype that has long been refined by the collective imagination, but whose contours are sufficiently elusive to acquire historical and scientific consistency:

⁷ Dinu Pillat, *Romanul de senzație în literatura română din a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea* (Bucharest: Imprimeria Talazul, 1947), 39.

⁸ See Dragoș Varga, “The winning formula. Convenții și stereotipuri ale romanului haiducesc în *Mina Haiduceasa, fata codrilor* de George Baronzi,” *Transilvania*, No. 11-12 (2021): 49-52.

“The *hajduk*, the *klepht* and the *uskok* are historical characters that are particularly prominent in villager or regional memories. These characters are known mostly through oral traditions, conveyed by a large body of popular songs and legends, that started to be collected from the nineteenth century onwards. The attempts made to give the *hajduci* a documented historical and scientific consistency have, generally speaking, been disappointing.”⁹

The negative and at the same time superficial image that the hajduk gets in the official historiography is easy to understand. The Ottoman archives could not invest a form of rebellion and looting directed against the authority of the empire with the attribute of heroism. The frameworks of interpretation of historical events are never completely objective or definitive projections of the factual, but are shaped by the ideological, social and political motivations of the historiographer who, in a conflict, is by default on the side of the victor. The literature highlights the contrast between a romanticized view, nourished by oral traditions, which portrays Ottoman expansion as a forced and violent process, and the view of historians who use Ottoman sources to portray the hajduks as enemies of civilization.

3. George Baronzi and the feuilleton model of the hajduk novel

George Baronzi is another prodigious writer of the 19th century, but one who also displays an extraordinary capacity for synthesizing literary formulas. Unlike the other authors of outlaw and outlaw novels, Baronzi made his debut in the pre-modern cultural moment with the drama *Eleonora* (1844) and contributed to various journals for half a century, publishing poetry, drama, prose and articles. Historically, he is situated in three cultural periods, pre-pasoptism, pasoptism and post-pasoptism, which he combines in his literature. He was editor of the publications “România” (1848), “Moş Ion” (1866), “Presa română” (1866), “Vocea Covurluiului” (1873) and director of “Vocea poporului” (1870). In 1859, he published, together with G. Sion, the gazette “Zioa”. A professional journalist, he also worked for “Patria” (1855), “Concordia”, “Românul”, “Naționalul”, “Dâmbovița”, “Unirea”, “Revista Carpaților”, “Constituționalul”, “Buciumul”, “Trompeta Carpaților”, “Ghimpele”, “Literatorul” and “Revista literară”.¹⁰ The pages of these periodicals fixed the literary practices of the time in the attention of the reading public.¹¹ George Baronzi, in a purely romantic spirit, took up the nationalist-patriotic militancy of the 19th century revolutionary literary discourse, which he moulded into grandiloquent projects. The design of an epic, *Daciada*, mirrors the writer’s fascination for a heroic,

⁹ Roumen Daskalov, Alexander Vezenkov (eds.), *Entangled Histories of the Balkans, III* (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2015), 362.

¹⁰ *Dicționarul Literaturii Române de la Origini până la 1900*, (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1979), 80.

¹¹ In 1830, the journal “Romania” reported the success of the translation of a novel by E. Sue, *Arthur*, and praised the author’s intentions in presenting the mores of society.

resplendent literary imaginary, which would defend the legendary national past, bathed in the glory of the ancestors.

In the gallery of authors of popular literature, George Baronzî is mentioned as a writer specialized in mystery novels. The Romanian propensity for the mystery novel is generated by the abundance of translations enthusiastically received by readers. As a versed translator of writers such as George Sand, Al. Dumas, E. Sue or Walter Scott, the author of *The Mysteries of Bucharest* appropriates, through his efforts at translation, narrative templates and character typologies that he will transplant onto a Romanian background. The first step in the development of a young literature is represented by translations, so that the consubstantiality that is established between translation and the production of original texts energizes the cultural field and polarizes it. The reproaches levelled at 'novels' are aimed precisely at their inability to develop as high literature, overlooking the fact that artistic perfection does not come out of nowhere, but is based on a series of stages. *The Dictionary of Romanian Literature from the Origins to 1900* will maintain the discursive line of interpretation of George Baronzî's conformism to the pressure of the feuilleton tradition, stating that "The novel *The Mysteries of Bucharest*, however, is strikingly similar to *The Mysteries of London* by Paul Féval, appropriating to the last detail the plot, the characters, the atmosphere, specific, incidentally, to the Western feuilleton novel."¹²

The emergence of the theoretical binomial literature – paraliterature deepens the value gap between literature intended for consumption by a public and literature written for *connoisseurs*, for the elite. In *The Popular Novel in Romania: Literary and Paraliterary*, Ioana Drăgan devotes a scholarly research to the phenomenon of paraliterary, structured around two complementary axes. The first axis theorises the general frameworks, forms of manifestation and contents specific to the popular novel, while the second traces their evolution in Romanian literature, with examples and striking observations. The distinction on which the approach is based aims at a dualistic structuring of the levels of literature, a phenomenon common to any culture. The first level is the literary one, "elitist, intellectual, scholarly", produced by "high" literature, professional, approved by literary critics, with the plus sign of recognized value, while the second, parallel level belongs to "mass" writing, defined by a "popular" circuit, a literature that is never the object of interest and consideration by literary critics, to which, for lack of any other definition, a label has been applied that bears the mark of exclusion, paraliterature.¹³ Along the lines of vilifying popular novels in the name of the aesthetic quality they defy in favour of commercial success, novelists like George Baronzî cannot get favourable critical verdicts. Al. Piru retains, from the numerous literary pieces

¹² Original quote: "Romanul *Misterele Bucureștilor* seamănă însă în mod izbitor cu *Misterele Londrei* de Paul Féval, însușindu-și până la amănunte intriga, personajele, atmosfera, specifice, dealtfel, romanului-foleton occidental," in *Dicționarul Literaturii Române de la Origini până la 1900* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1979), 81.

¹³ Ioana Drăgan, *Romanul popular în România: literar și paraliterar* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2007).

written by Bujoreanu, only a “fantasy pushed to the point of phantasmagoria, conventionalism and bombasticism,”¹⁴ which seems to define George Baronzi’s novels.

The commonplaces in literary history seem to completely ignore the careful reading of Baronzi’s novels and the specificity of his prose, being received mainly from “the position of poet forerunner (of Eminescu) and challenger of the pre-modern pleiad (Alecsandri-Bolintineanu-Eliad-Bolliac), but bitterly sanctioned as a prose writer.”¹⁵ Baronzi’s interest in the social novel manifests itself as an extension of the Romanian prose tradition and, at the same time, as an essential attribute of the imported sensational novel’s formula. Ideological ossification and community claims coagulate in Baronzi’s novels, what Clive Bloom calls “the imaginative history of a nation.”¹⁶ The hybridity of the popular novel, the allure of the *bestseller*, lies in the possibility of endlessly “recycling” formulas, in which the writer finds an attribute of modesty. In the midst of this commercially negotiated modernity, Baronzi’s novels can be seen as an innovator, especially if we consider the new type of hajduk novel he proposes. Vasilica Tudoriu Grunwald takes the conventionality of the literary strategies employed by the novelist in the elaboration of the historical novel as a point of convergence, and her observations rely on the relationship established in mystery literature:

“The subject is gradually and naturally built up by adding new facts that deepen the story rather than branch it out. The characters are the same, good and bad, but without the props procured by mystery novels. They don’t have saccharine looks, they don’t turn blue with emotion, they don’t bite their lips betraying inner feelings. They react verisimilently and the writer notes their reactions with the sensitivity of a romantic. They love with purity and poetry, or they are mean and cowardly without a dramatic blow.”¹⁷

Tudoriu Grunwald considers the narrative ensemble constructed in the mystery novel a prop that gives drama to the situations and characters. The absence of the mystery vein flattens the plot and the heroes’ manifestations, implying recourse to romantic improvisation and the expressive virtues of poetic prose. Of course, the lack of narrative dynamism induced by the

¹⁴ Original quote: “[...] fantezie împinsă pînă la fantasmagorie, convenționalism și bombasticism,” in Al. Piru, *Istoria literaturii române de la început pînă azi* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1981), 100.

¹⁵ Original quote: “[...] ipostaza de poet-precursor (al lui Eminescu) și de challenger al pleiadei pașoptiste (Alecsandri-Bolintineanu-Eliad-Bolliac), dar amarnic sancționat ca prozator,” in Roxana Patraș, “George Baronzi și literatura haiducească,” *Convorbiri literare*, No. 9 (2019): 117-120.

¹⁶ Clive Bloom, *Bestsellers. Popular Fiction Since 1900* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 72.

¹⁷ Original quote: “Subiectul se constituie treptat și firesc prin adăugirea de fapte noi care adîncesc povestirea și nu o ramifică. Personajele sînt aceleași, bune și rele, dar fără recuzita procurată de romanele de mistere. Nu au priviri sacrcastice, nu se învinețesc de emoție, nu-și mușcă buzele trădînd trăiri interioare. Reacționează verosimil și scriitorul le notează reacțiile cu sensibilitatea unui romantic. Ei iubesc cu puritate și poezie sau sînt răi și lași fără lovituri de teatru,” in Vasilica Tudoriu Grunwald, *Precursori ai poeziei eminesciene. G. Baronzi* (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 1988), 147.

expectation of the revelation of the mystery will be compensated by melodramatic sentimentality and reflective passages that camouflage social-political claims and contestations. Discussing the novel *Mina haiduceasa, fata codrilor* (1894), Baronzi's monographer identifies in the novel a "return to the older instruments of the novel of sensation", infused with "revolutionary ideas, a Romanian setting, hajduks heroes" that "create a national climate."¹⁸ With this brief analysis, the critic returns to the role of the hajduk literature written by George Baronzi as an ideological support, but diminishes the novelist's contribution to enriching the literary representations offered by this subgenre. The heroic category of the social bandit receives some significant variations, determined by the inclusion of the female hypostasis of the vigilante bandit. The angles of interpretation opened up by such a restructuring of the imaginary of the outlaw novel require a test of the compatibility of this unusual character with the popular novel formula established in the literature of the second half of the 19th century.

4. Polarization of the literary tradition in the representation of the social bandit

The innovative drive of the author of *Misterele Bucureștilor* is representative of the whole evolution of the sub-genre and for understanding the literary dynamics established between translation and the production of original texts. Roxana Patraș notes, in Baronzi's hajduk literature, the introduction of a new type of outlaw-hero, the woman, and links this evolution of the hajduk novel with the translator's interest in the literary imaginary configured in the prose of authors such as Madame de Thellusson, Madame Charles Reybaud and George Sand, intended to prefigure an "emancipatory, if not 'feminist', agenda for women."¹⁹ This perspective convincingly illuminates the relationship between emerging national literature and the material provided by the importation of literary forms through translation. Dragoș Varga identifies in the heroine of the novel a cumulus of "conventions and narrative invariants specific to the hajduk novel, but also to the sentimental novel."²⁰ The mixing of different narrative formulas is an inherent feature of the literature of the period, which is subordinated to the novelist's intention to cover as many different spheres of interest as possible, and the "multiplication of stories," by which Moretti justifies the success of adventure novels, reflects the attempt to systematize the epic material in a way that is as captivating as possible for the reader. Dragoș Varga insists on the mixture of formulas specific to different sub-genres, which would diminish the effects of the narrative as a whole. As Clive Bloom highlights in *Bestsellers. Popular Fiction Since 1900*, stylistic compromises are made in favour of shifting the emphasis to narrative, story, content, and convention:

¹⁸ Tudoriu Grunwald, *Precursori ai poeziei eminesciene*, 148.

¹⁹ Patraș, "George Baronzi," 118.

²⁰ Varga, "The winning formula," 51.

“A literature whose elegance of style closes it within its own gemlike facets can only ever have a minority audience. Its tendency moves towards the minimalism of *belle lettres*, the essay or the *bon mot* turning it into an anecdote for masonic recognition amongst an elite group, whose gaze is marked by a type of refusal of historical movement. [...] Art fiction highlights its style, delights in it and makes of style a fetish. Popular fiction neutralises style, seems only interested in narrative, content and convention, and delights in making language invisible in order to tell a tale. Yet popular fiction may still make a fetish of one aspect of its style.”²¹

For Bloom, simplicity of narrative and minimalism, together with veracity, become the criteria of literary elitism, which shapes a select and timeless code that refuses to reflect the movements of history.²² In opposition to the elitist refinement of high literature, we can extend this set of observations to Baronzi’s popular novel, which mystifies the irrelevance of the language chosen in the telling of a gripping story. Discursive conventionalism and the standardization of rhetoric become “fetishized” attributes designed to streamline the story’s construction without overshadowing it with stylistic refinements. The portrait of the leader of the band of outlaws, Mina, the daughter of the forests, obeys the pattern directed by the conventions of romantic prose, but allows itself to be drawn into sensational plots that branch off in unexpected directions, by virtue of the same principle that governs consumer literature. The hero-hajduk no longer appears as an exclusive juxtaposition of masculinity and protective aggression, but borrows the spectrum of representations attributed to romantic heroines. The emancipatory role that Mina earns for herself, however, separates her from the gallery of protagonists in the sentimental novel, bland projections of simplistic moral schemes, as it gives her the opportunity to assume the freedom of decision. The disappointment she suffers at the news that her lover has married precipitates her end, her exit from the scene a consequence of a voluntary act. Roxana Patraș interprets the suicide of the hajduk-woman not as a yielding to the pressure of tradition, but as a liberation from it, the fatal gesture marking her departure from the patterns of melodrama and allowing her to keep her heroic, hajduk aura, linked to that topos of daring.²³ Dragoș Varga, sees in the suicidal gesture an alignment with the requirements of the scenario of the melodramatic novel, building his argument on “the despair in her final words.”²⁴ Considering the entire hajduk novel, George Baronzi has not created a conformist drama character, but has sought a way to wrap his heroine in the projections of a role that has been hitherto held back from her, that of leader of an alternative community and representative of social banditry.

²¹ Bloom, *Bestsellers*, 86.

²² See Loredana Cuzmici, Alexandra Olteanu, Roxana Patraș, “Prolegomenele unui proiect. Romanul de consum în spațiul cultural românesc,” *Studii și cercetări științifice. Seria Filologie*, No. 47 (2022): 67-82.

²³ Patraș, “George Baronzi,” 120.

²⁴ Varga, “The winning formula,” 51.

5. Banditry and femininity. Restructuring the romantic physiognomy of the heroine

In the chapter “Women and Banditry” from the volume *Bandits*, Eric Hobsbawm associates women with banditry in three hypostases, determined by their “accepted sexual role”: the first situation concerns passive participation in “the wandering life of men”, the second is the hypostasis “of supporters and links to the outside world”, while the last and least common role “is that of bandits themselves.”²⁵ Although this last type of women's relationship to banditry is seen rather as an exception, the historian admits that the frequent appearance of female outlaws in Balkan ballads confirms the generalization of a phenomenon that is beginning to gain recognition. The role of the female bandit also entails a shift in the collective imagination, since it implies ignoring the biological datum, so that women bandits “in terms of sex, nothing else seems to distinguish them from other bandits.”²⁶ Hobsbawm's theory fixes love and revenge as the main causes of women's banditry, overstating the importance of the relationships they establish with other bandits. Accordingly, although we admit that the practice of social banditry is triggered by vindictive or amorous goals, the banditry theorist downplays, if not excludes, the role of vocation and the singling out of the voluntary acts of female bandits.

In Baronzi's novel, Mina is endowed with a natural rebellious spirit, even before she becomes a hajduk. If Ighel's character, the outlaw Simion Licinski,²⁷ was followed by his father's violence and cruelty, which shaped his personality and accentuated his demonic side, the heroine of Baronzi's novel inherits individualism and the moral strength to defy dogmas and conventions, but not wickedness, as she is the “only daughter of a repentant priest who had been hanged for the misdeeds of his life.”²⁸ For Mina, loneliness becomes independence, and, in eight years of solitude, it is matched by an enterprising spirit, strengthened by the ingenuity with which she manages her small fortune: a house with a room and a tent, a garden with flowers and vegetables, a red goat, some chickens and a dog. Turning twenty, the future chieftain of the outlaws feels the need for sentimental fulfilment, at which point we can locate the source of the identity metamorphosis. The novelist is also innovative in restructuring the representation of women. George Baronzi renounces the conventional portrayal of romantic heroines, blond, blue-eyed, pale-skinned and with a vaporous, angelic physiognomy, preferring a rather disharmonious, but tangible, common beauty, ennobled by its virtues:

²⁵ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 135.

²⁶ Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 136.

²⁷ Ilie Ighel, *Banditul Simion Licinski* (București: Tipografia Dor. P. Cucu, 1890).

²⁸ Original quote: “[...] fiica unică a unui popă respopit, care fusese spânzurat pentru fără-de-legile ce făcuse în viața lui,” in George Baronzi, *Mina Haiduceasa. Fata codrilor* (Bucharest: Editura Tipo-Litografiei Dor. P. Cucu, 1894), 3.

"[...] the lady who was so beautiful, with eyes that were black, with thick, tightly woven sprouts, with hair that, when she unfurled it, covered her all over like a black silk cloak!... But who had the smallest mouth, the rumbliest lips, the most pleasing face, a nose as curved as hers, and a forehead as arched and smooth as hers? The hand was full, full, but the middle of it could be caught between two manly hands, and no man had yet touched it, but only with his eyes."²⁹

Such "worldly" beauty will not lack for suitors, so Mina will become part of a love triangle. Orodel and Călin are rivals looking to win the hand of the lonely girl. Baronzi is careful to construct sketchy but contrasting portraits of them, a sign that the writer is not completely departing from the patterns of sentimental prose. One is blond, "with yellow hair and blue eyes, thin and with a gentle, serene face," while the other is "dark, with slanting eyes, dark brown hair, with a cruel scowl."³⁰ Both men are captivated by Mina and react according to the personality traits "ingrained" in their physiognomy. Orodel confesses to Călin, in pathetic and ecstatic terms, the catastrophe of having fallen prey to a tormenting love. His adoration of Mina is externalised in a string of eulogies of the girl's beauty and dramatic ruminations. Călin reacts with stoicism, makes a plea for self-control, and secretly hatches a daring plan to win Mina. He wants to prove his worthiness by gaining glory, wealth and nobility by embracing the life of an outlaw. In the narrative economy, the would-be outlaw plays the role of a schemer, who resorts to various tricks to thwart Mina's closeness to Orodel. However, it is Călin who introduces the girl to the specifics of the banditry as an act of social revolt aimed at eradicating injustice, explaining the difference between "hajduk" and "robber". The passage can also be read as an irony against the character who is rashly dwelling on a distinction that he himself, by his actions, has annulled:

"The thief steals in order to steal... he steals for his own sake..., he steals because he is lazy to work or doesn't have a job to live from... he often steals only out of the habit of stealing... He is cowardly with what is stronger than the devil and cruel with what is weaker... the outlaw, if he goes into the outlawry, doesn't do it because he can't live any other way or because he doesn't like to work, but he does it because he can no longer suffer the injustices that are done."³¹

²⁹ Original quote: "[...] dânsa care era așa de frumósă, cu ochii ei cei negri, cu sprincenile ei cele dese și îmbinate, cu părul ei care, când îl despletea, o acoperea peste tot ca uă mantiă négră de mătase!... Dar cine avea gurița mai mică, buzele mai rumene, fața mai plăcută, un nas așa de încondeiat ca al ei și uă frunte arcuită și netedă ca dânsa? Mina era răsărită la stat, plină, dar mijlocul ei se putea coprinde între două mâini bărbătesci, de și nici un bărbat n' o atinsese încă, ci numai cu ochii," in *ibid.*, 5.

³⁰ Original quote: "cu părul galben și cu ochii albaștri, subțirel și cu chipul blând și senin", "ócheș, cu ochii crăpuți, cu părul castaniu închis, cu uă căutătură cruntă și cam ciupit de vërsat," in *ibid.*, 6.

³¹ Original quote: "Hoțul fură pentru ca să fure... fură pentru dânsul..., fură pentru că'i e lene să muncească să uă n' are nici o meserie din care să pótă trăi... de multe ori fură numai din deprindere de a fura... El e mișel cu cei mai tare de cât dânsul și crud cu cei mai slabi... haiducul dacă se duce în haiducie,

The character's rhetoric has a solemn effect on Mina, who ponders the outlaw's noble mission and assumes it. Caught between the impetuous Călin, ready to claim the woman she loves even against her will, and her love for Orodel, Mina, the daughter of the forests finds sufficient resources of courage and ingenuity to evade a situation that objectifies her, turning her into a mere object of male passion. After managing to shoot Călin by trickery, Mina uses his whistle to claim the leadership of the group of outlaw for herself. The woman's gesture is not a usurpation, but an assertion of a natural right. Unlike the men who fought for her heart and could not rise above petty self-interest, proving themselves incompatible with the status of outlaw, Mina demonstrates that the essence of social banditry lies in a broader world-view and an aristocracy of spirit that femininity can as well hypostatize as the cultural archetype already fixed in the literature of the era. The captainess gets the chance to show those she leads that the proverbial strength of the outlaw springs from nobility of character and wisdom.

George Baronzi thus breaks the patterns of conventional representations of the hajduk-hero and repeatedly highlights the strategic superiority of the group of social outlaws, which is headed by "a woman captainess, who is only the naked devil, full of wisdom, foresight and manliness."³² The confrontation with Călin, returned to lead those who wanted to capture the outlaws to bring them before the state authorities, only serves to actualize the emancipatory effervescence of the independent spirit of the hajduk-woman, which excludes any involvement of divine forces in shaping their own destiny and proclaims the sovereignty of free will, for "each man is master of his own will."³³ The two men who aspire to Mina's love fail to grasp this fundamental truth underlying existence, so that a domestic amorous fulfilment becomes impossible for the chieftain of the outlaws. Mina no longer hypostatizes the 'female banditry' illustrated by Hobsbawm's theory, as her identity as a hajduk is not defined by her relationship with a man who plays the dominant role in her becoming one. Orodel proves passive, easily influenced, incapable of remaining faithful to any high ideal, while Călin is touched by a petty pragmatism incompatible with the noble allure of the outlaw. Only Mina understands her mission and chooses to make a mockery of her name, her disillusionment with love merely a pretext for demonstrating the strength of her will.

nu o face pentru că nu póte trăi altf-fel saú că nu'í place să muncească, ci o face pentru că nu maí póte suferi nedreptăţile ce'í se fac," in *ibid.*, 33-34.

³² Original quote: "[...] o femeie căpităneasă, care e numai dracul gol, plină de deşteptăciune, de prevedere şi de bărbăţie," in *ibid.*, 75.

³³ Original quote: "[...] fiecare om e stăpân pe voinţa sa," in *ibid.*, 126.