

**THE ADVENTURE NOVEL – DEVALUATION AND
REVALUATION OF THE ADVENTURE:
*GALLANTS OF THE OLD COURT***

A literary survey initiated, in 2001, on the topic of the 20th-century Romanian novel by one of the premier Romanian literary magazines, *Observator cultural*, to which 102 literary critics and historians of diverse generations (of the 150 ones invited) responded, ranked Mateiu I. Caragiale's novel *Craii de Curtea-Veche* [*Gallants of the Old Court*] (1929) as the best 20th-century Romanian novel, much to the surprise of the magazine's editorial team (and not only). Such reports the editorial:

The winner of the contest is somewhat surprising, considering that *Craii de Curtea-Veche* is a marginal novel, rather than a very famous one. What may have contributed to this ranking is the fact that since his author had penned no other novels, the votes did not get "dissipated" as it happened with Camil Petrescu (in whose case the votes for *Patul lui Procust* [*The Bed of Procrustes*] and *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război* [*The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War*] together count for more than those for *Craii...*), Rebreanu and Sadoveanu¹.

Of course, this vote hardly ranks *Craii de Curtea-Veche* as a popular novel, at least because the relatively few (102) voters in the Republic of Letters do not aim at democracy. Rather, they are members of an exclusive interpretive community comprised of those who read so as to write about books or to study literature – anyway, of cognoscenti of the literary phenomenon with a culturally-informed literary taste. Accordingly, the survey results owed to the refinement of the literary elite. Even so, the surprise articulated in the aforesaid editorial, with its quantitative-speculative justifications, relates to an unexpected hierarchical relationship whose well-known logic of the literary canon – as articulated by luminaries such as G. Călinescu or Nicolae Manolescu – is challenged, to the effect that the "margin" replaces the "centre".

Yet, what is a widely famous novel? Is it also a popular novel? For a novel like Mihail Sadoveanu's *Creanga de aur* [*The Golden Bough*] (1933) is neither renowned, nor popular, whereas some others of his novels – such as *Frații Jderi* [*The Jderi Brothers*], I–III (1935–1942) and *Neamul Șoimăreștilor* [*The Șoimaru Clan*] (1915) – are both. Sadoveanu debuted with popular novels – historical

¹ ***, "Romanul românesc al secolului XX" ["The 20th-century Romanian Novel"], *Observator cultural*, 2001, nr. 45-46, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/romanul-romanesc-al-secolului-xx/>. Accessed November 25, 2024.

novels whose protagonists are virtually epic heroes – and thus with superior paraliterature. Likewise, can Camil Petrescu's *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război* (1930) be regarded as a famous novel? It wasn't in the age, as its author was by far outclassed by other two novelists, Ionel Teodoreanu and Cezar Petrescu, who enjoyed wide popularity. Notwithstanding, Camil Petrescu retains, in the title of his novel *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia nopate de război*, a melodramatic echo of the popular novel which suggests a two-pronged bias towards adventure through the heroic and the erotic enterprises. The popular novel of the 19th century forks into two subgenres, the mystery novel and the highwayman novel, the former an imported subgenre and the latter autochthonous to a large extent, despite the existence of prestigious models in European culture².

Anyway, the popular novel emerged on the stage of the Romanian novel as a precursor of the adventure novel. Although not clearly defined, the “marginality” of Mateiu I. Caragiale's novel as identified by the anonymous article published in the *Observator cultural* may also be reappraised in the novel in a special way: that of opening up the horizon of possibility within this novel in relation to other types of novels which it foreshadows. Such are the decadent novel³, the novel of manners, the mystery novel, the bohemian novel and so on. G. Călinescu could barely classify Caragiale's novel within the plethora of interwar novels and ascribed it to surrealism⁴ – even as surrealists detested it – after having noticed, nevertheless, the authenticity of its *écriture* and its use of typologies. If anything, the latter feature, however, is peculiar to the realist and popular novels.

In the footsteps of G. Călinescu, Nicolae Manolescu writes, in *Istoria critică a literaturii române* [*The Critical History of Romanian Literature*], on the aesthetic pose peculiar to the writer's counterfeit nobility, but also on how this aspect pervades the novel proper as a stylistic feature. Manolescu regards *Craii de Curtea-Veche* as “a novel of imagination” having its roots in symbolist-decadent aesthetics, where decadence is actually poised polemically against the classicism of Mateiu's father, playwright and prose writer I.L. Caragiale, against the background of an unresolved oedipal conflict⁵.

² See Roxana Patras, “CARTA ALBĂ a proiectului POPLITE” [“White Paper of POPLITE Project”], *Zenodo*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7360195>. See also Roxana Patras et al., “Corpus Pop-Lite”, *Zenodo*, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13771810>. Accessed November 25, 2024.

³ I addressed this aesthetic feature of the novel *in extenso* in *Mateiu I. Caragiale: fizionomii decadente* [*Mateiu I. Caragiale: Decadent Physiognomies*], București, Editura ICR, 2007, and in *Decadență și decadentism în contextul romanului românesc și european* [*Decadence and Decadentism in the Romanian and European Novel*], București, Curtea Veche Publishing, 2011.

⁴ G. Călinescu, *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* [*The History of Romanian Literature from Its Origins to the Present*]. Edited by Al. Piru, București, Minerva, 1988.

⁵ Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române. 5 secole de literatură* [*The Critical History of Romanian Literature: Five Centuries of Literature*], Pitești, Paralela 45, 2008.

The term “adventure” – “high life adventure” – appears in relation to his letters to N.A. Boicescu and the bohemian lifestyle of the young Mateiu⁶. He relished sharing, in minute tantalising detail, his erotic conquests and also his ambitious ploys typical of a young arriviste who emulated the protagonist of Félicien Champsaur’s novel *L’Arriviste*⁷. To revert to G. Călinescu and his monumental history, the term “adventure” appears in another chapter, “Momentul 1933. Filozofia ‘neliniștii’ și a ‘aventurii’. Literatura ‘experiențelor’” [“The Year 1933. The Philosophy of ‘Unrest’ and ‘Adventure’. The Prose of ‘Experiences’”]⁸, and names, particularly with regard to Mircea Eliade, the “experimentalism” of Gide-inspired protagonists beyond good and evil. The scare quotes used by Călinescu indicate the re-signifying of the term within the context of modernity, but also within that of a generation eager to explore new intensities. For this generation, any hubris, eroticism, misfitting, revolt could foster adventure.

In the novelistic genre, the meaning of adventure shifts permanently: from libertine adventures to chivalrous, picaresque and swashbuckling ones, to exploration adventures, mystery-ridden adventures and detective ones, among many others. Every age has its novelistic subgenres which redefine or merely recycle the notion of adventure and propose a new series of emblematic, memorable characters, as well as ephemeral ones. All of Mateiu I. Caragiale’s oeuvre, but in particular his only novel, *Craii de Curtea-Veche*, includes the novel of adventures within its horizon of possibility, in concentrated, embryonic-synthetic form, and thus suspends its elaboration. In his short story *Remember* (1921), in the stories published collectively as *Sub pecetea tainei* [*Under the Seal of Mystery*]⁹ and also in *Craii...* the memory of the adventure novel is retained in the form of typical formulas; there is also an indirect reflection on the relationship between adventure and the novel, about the latter’s creation through the selections from both life and history made by the author. Thus, Caragiale’s works offer a new perspective on the adventure novel as exhaustless resource and also on moving up to a new level where adventure gains an ontologic and identity-related dimension – of knowledge – as Georg Simmel¹⁰, Vladimir Jankélévici¹¹ and Giorgio Agamben¹² propose.

⁶ See Mateiu I. Caragiale, *Opere* [Works]. Edited by Barbu Cioculescu, preface by Eugen Simion, București, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 2001, pp. 522-525.

⁷ Félicien Champsaur, *L’Arriviste*, Éditeur Albin Michel, Paris, 1902.

⁸ Călinescu, *Istoria*, p. 947.

⁹ Mateiu I. Caragiale, *Sub pecetea tainei* [*Under the Seal of Mystery*]. Edited by Marian Papahagi, preface by Nicolae Manolescu, postface by Ion Vartic, Cluj-Napoca, Echinoc, 1994.

¹⁰ Georg Simmel, “The Adventurer”, in James F. Cosgrave (ed.), *The Sociology of Risk and Gambling Reader*, New York–London, Routledge, 2006, pp. 215-224.

¹¹ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *L’aventure, l’ennui, le sérieux*. Présentation et bibliographie par Laure Barillas, Pierre-Alban Guinfolleau et Frédéric Worms, Paris, Flammarion, 2017.

¹² Giorgio Agamben, *L’aventure*. Traduit de l’italien par Joël Gayraud, Paris, Rivages Poche Petite Bibliothèque, 2016.

Reading Adventure: Between Mobility and Immobility

The adventure novel, with its subgenres such as the swashbuckler and the mystery novel, evokes the paraliterature accrued in thick layers and offers each generation of readers a fictional range of infinite possibilities of existence beyond the predictable confines of a monotony derived from the bourgeois desire for advantageous social status. On the other hand, it also evokes a space–time of entertainment, easy escapism, consumerism, a holiday-like suspension of responsibility which also integrates the very act of reading. Adventure is always elsewhere, far away, and the act of reading establishes a delightful contrast between carefree immobility and danger, between the reader’s assumed relaxation and the excessive mobility of adventure as the tireless force which drives the characters from one event to another.

Accordingly, reading an adventure novel engenders the coexistence of this comfortable passivity and breathtaking dynamic, hence the peculiar feel of the adventure that is read about rather than lived – the “aesthetic adventure”, in Vladimir Jankélévich’s terms. Anyway, adventure belongs to a delightful, if minor, register that is related, at the same time, to impossibility and to a dissociation from reality; this is so not because adventure belonged to the fantastic, but rather because it seems to belong pre-eminently to fiction, more so than anything else does. To live “an adventure”, or, to state it otherwise, “a novel”, places us in a special niche of the unfamiliar, the exceptional, the extraordinary.

Thus, existence encounters this aesthetic sublimation characteristic of fiction, shares in its contradiction, impossibility and unpredictability. Paradoxically, though, the valorisation of an existence lived as adventure-qua-exceptional-living indicates a devaluation of adventure as an event severed from the everyday, from reality, from truth. Only some lives are set apart as exceptional in this respect; this badge of the extraordinary is reserved for professional adventurers and “heroes”. The majority “lives” the adventure by proxy, through the mediation of fiction – where adventure now dwells, in a space of the. Accordingly, adventure can only be recovered from the particular world of fiction; it *is* fiction in a sense which actualizes simultaneously its peculiar implausibility and a horizon of improbable possibilities which can nonetheless be visited in the play of the mind and of imagination. Adventure is pre-eminently of the book: it unfolds within the book as a play of an imagination freed from any constraint. It also indicates the full-fledged mobility of the novel, its freedom to distance itself from the goal assumed in the 19th century, by the great realist novelists, to reflect the world as it appears, a notion best encapsulated in Stendhal’s metaphor of the mirror carried along the road.

This study offers a perspective on the valorisation and devaluation of adventure and of the adventurer in modernity by analysing some reflections on adventure by philosophers – not literati – such as Georg Hegel, Georg Simmel,

Vladimir Jankélévich and Giorgio Agamben. Except for Georg Simmel, all the others resort to literature to deduce various meanings of adventure: they regard it, due to its fictional re-emergence, as “the event of the word” (Giorgio Agamben), as “aesthetic adventure” (Vladimir Jankélévich) and as an expression of romanticism (Georg Hegel). The second part of this study examines the condensation of adventure to its essentials in Mateiu I. Caragiale’s novel *Gallants of the Old Court* by recourse to, and adapting, some of the above-mentioned philosophers’ observations.

Adventure and the Adventurer: The Radiography of Devaluation and Revalorization

In his essay *L’Aventure*, Giorgio Agamben examines the etymology of the term “adventure” in the context of the Occitan poetry of troubadours and trouveres: the term derives either from *adventus*, which in Christian Latin names the arrival of a prince or even of the Messiah, or from *eventus*, which refers to an unusual fact, a mysterious or miraculous happening, whether positive or negative. Thus, the meaning of “adventure” relates it to chance and fate, to that which occurs unexpectedly and which thereby places the adventurer on a fate-driven trajectory. Adventure paves the way for knowing the world in its arcaneness, yet this knowledge ultimately leads to self-knowledge, which is the ultimate goal of any adventure. Chance and fate work in the unexpected event that confronts the knight with a trial. In Occitan poetry, the verb “trover” is not only the archaic form of the verb “trouver” (to find), but also an element of the Roman poetic jargon, which means “to compose poetry”. The poets call themselves *trobadors* in *langue d’oc*, *trouveres* in *langue d’oil* and *trovatori* in Italian.

Drawing on this polysemy, Giorgio Agamben notes that *adventure* names equally the events that structure it and their translation into words. Accordingly, adventure constitutes an “event of the word” (*événement de parole*): there are no separate “adventure–event” and “adventure–story”; rather, the truth of adventure is adventure itself, which represents the very arrival of the truth. In his own words: “Aventure et vérité sont indiscernable parce que la vérité advient et que l’aventure n’est que l’advenir de la vérité”¹³.

Thus, starting from the poetry of the medieval troubadours, trouveres and minnesinger, Agamben demonstrates that adventure is always also an adventure of poetry, where the event and the story coincide. In other words, the adventure belongs neither fully within a text, nor fully in a series of extratextual events, but rather in their coincidence. Beyond the poetological value which the Italian philosopher highlights in his medieval corpus, there is also an ontological valorisation of adventure:

¹³ Agamben, *L’aventure*, p. 33.

En tant qu'elle exprime l'unité indiscernable de l'événement et du récit, de la chose et du mot, elle ne peut pas ne pas avoir, au-delà de sa valeur poétologique, un sens proprement ontologique. Si l'être est la dimension qui s'ouvre à l'homme dans l'événement anthropogénétique du langage, si l'être est toujours, selon les mots d'Aristote, quelque chose qui 'se dit', alors l'aventure a certainement à faire avec une expérience déterminée de l'être¹⁴.

Giorgio Agamben dedicates another part of his book to examining the devaluation of adventure in modernity: here adventure loses its value as truth, once it is ascribed exclusively to fiction, namely the arena of the improbable, of uninhibited imagination and of the superficial. Agamben interprets as symptomatic of this devaluation of adventure the chapter dedicated to it by Georg Hegel in his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst* [*Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*] (1823) and the essay "Philosophie des Abenteuers" ["The Philosophy of Adventurers"] (1910, titled "Das Abenteuer" in *Philosophische Kultur*) by Georg Simmel, where the latter relativizes Hegel's point of view.

In his *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, Hegel allots an entire subchapter ("Adventures") to adventure. He deduces the meaning of adventure from the examination of romantic art, if by referring to medieval poetry and romance, and identifies Cervantes and Arisophanes as emblematic for such devaluation of chivalric ethos and implicitly of adventure. I will use here the same quotation Agamben offers:

a fundamental characteristic of romantic art is that spirituality, the mind as reflected into itself, constitutes a whole and therefore it is related to the external not as to its own reality permeated by itself, but as to something purely external separated from it, a place where everything goes on released from spirit into independence, and which is a scene of complications and the rough and tumble of an endlessly flowing, mutable, and confusing contingency. For the fixedly enclosed mind, it is just as much a matter of indifference to which circumstances it turns as it is a matter of accident which circumstances confront it¹⁵.

Accordingly, for Hegel adventure is non-spiritual, it is simply external to life, an expression of chance, a series of accidental events which are not structured into and converge on a superior sense. Adventure describes another order of existence, one lacking access to interiority and profundity, severed from domestic routine – a pure expression of the exotic and the extravagant:

Adventure, which provides for the form of events and actions the fundamental type of the romantic, is constituted by this relativity of ends in a relative environment, the specific character and complication of which do not lie in the individual person but are

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

¹⁵ Georg Hegel, "Adventures", in *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, vol. I. Translated by T.M. Knox, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 586.

determined from without and accidentally, and so lead to accidental collisions as the extraordinarily intertwined ramifications of the situation¹⁶.

The decline occurs as much in generic epic terms as in affective terms, since adventure is reported as erotic adventure and characterized by everything peculiar to drama and to the lady's whims, to the moment's moods and to external accidents. For Hegel, erotic adventure remains external to the subject and, if pushed to great lengths, it ends up in debased comic. Such pronouncements bear the authority of the philosopher who erects a system of values, and therefore Hegel represents the turning point of a clear devaluation of adventure, which is now relegated to the position of an eccentric, extravagant deed, outside the pale of ordinary life.

In the essay he dedicates to adventure, "The Philosophy of Adventurers" aka "The Adventurer", Georg Simmel excludes adventure from "the continuity of life"¹⁷ by deeming it something exceptional, different, out of the ordinary: "the most general form of adventure is its dropping out of the continuity of life"¹⁸. Adventure breaches the linear course of life by delimiting its own space through a beginning and an end, or a before and an after, clearly marked off, if not through "reciprocal interpenetration with adjacent part of life"¹⁹, thus, adventure gains an autonomy of sorts in relation to the other events. Nonetheless, through a dialectical move, Georg Simmel repatriates adventure to "the whole of our life" or "life-as-a-whole"²⁰, for adventure is "felt as a whole, as an integrated unit"²¹, to the extent to which it is adventure which reorganizes the meaning of life.

Georg Simmel makes two crucial remarks: first, he dissociates adventure from the extraordinary event, with its unfamiliarity and spectacularity. Adventure consists in intensity, rather than in its separation of the ordinary and the extraordinary. Hence two important consequences derive: (1) An extraordinary event cannot constitute an adventure unless it is animated by intensity, by "a certain experiential tension"²², for "the adventure, in its specific nature and charm, is a *form of experiencing*"²³; (2) Contrariwise, a banal, seemingly insignificant event may evolve into an adventure if it is driven by intensity, for the content proper is not decisive: "The *content* of the experience does not make the adventure"²⁴. Adventure is undergirded by intensity, Simmel argues; it does not

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 587.

¹⁷ Simmel, "The Adventurer", p. 215.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 215.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 217.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 215, 216: "While it[adventure] falls outside the context of life, it falls, with this same movement, as it were, back into that context again".

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 217.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 224.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

consist in the event proper, as in the engagement, in a tense dynamic, in what I call a *principle of accentuation*²⁵.

This *principle of accentuation*, and here is Simmel's second major insight, is peculiar to youth. To state it otherwise, the specific regime of adventure is youth, the age which fuels passions, desires, the imagination with all its projections:

In general, only youth knows this predominance of the process of life over its substance; whereas in old age, when the process begins to slow up and coagulate, substance becomes crucial; it then proceeds or perseveres in a certain timeless manner, indifferent to the tempo and passion of its being experienced²⁶. This is how a passion or affections can foster adventure, and a particular age affords the most appropriate context for its completion.

Vladimir Jankélévitch associates adventure, due to its etymology, to the future. Yet, the French philosopher addresses a special question: that of what is the infinitesimal adventure (“l’aventure infinitésimale”) or “l’aventure minute” – which he distinguishes from adventure as narrative, as a succession of episodes across a long-time span –, the adventure as advent, in a religious sense, of a mysterious event, “l’avènement d’un événement”, “l’avent d’un mystère”. However, although he mentions them, Vladimir Jankélévitch does not pursue the religious significance of adventure and the notion of mystery associated to the event, which, as we have seen, Giorgio Agamben focuses on. Jankélévitch analyses exclusively the relationship between adventure and time and the way in which adventure is driven by passion, by pathos. In effect, Jankélévitch returns to the relevance of the religious dimension to adventure when he defines the pathos of adventure in the terms in which Rudolf Otto defines the numinous, in his book *The Idea of the Holy*, as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*²⁷. Writes Jankélévitch: “Par l’aventure l’homme est tenté; car le pathos de l’aventure est un complexe de contradictoires; [...] La tentation de l’aventure est donc la tentation typique”²⁸. Thus, adventure exists outside a life marked by its routine, in an experience of the “sacred within the profane” to use Mircea Eliade’s phrase which transpires thanks to its intensity. Anyway, the philosopher focuses his attention on the psychology of the adventurer who starts on an adventure, who experiences the “temptation of adventure”. Like for Georg Simmel, for Jankélévitch too adventure generates an intensity – a *vertige*, as he calls it. Jankélévitch proposes an understanding of adventure as a zone of liminality, “être *sur le seuil*”, between play and earnestness, between ethical engagement and aesthetic detachment, between tragedy and – although he does not use the term – comedy, between “without” and “within”,

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 224.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*. Translated by John W. Harvey, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1950, pp. 12-65.

²⁸ Jankélévitch, *L’aventure*, p. 14.

where the *aventureux* is outside drama, like an *actor*, and also within it as an *agent* “inclus dans le mystère de son propre destin”²⁹.

The regime of adventure is one of vacillation between opposing poles, of moving the “cursor” along the scale of different degrees of intensity. Adventure gets devalued as this cursor slides towards the ludic pole, the pole of the aesthetic, of the “outside” of comedy. In a manner of speaking, adventure depends on the degree of engagement with it, of moving with it; it is not accidental, but the expression of a “decret autocratique de notre liberté” and thus gratuitous. Jankélévitch establishes a typology of adventure starting from the criterion of the proximity to one of the poles: mortal adventure, aesthetic adventure and erotic adventure. Each type is premised on one dimension of adventure: mortal adventure on risk, danger and the foreseeable possibility of death; aesthetic adventure on its transformation into story, into recounted, retrospective adventure; and erotic adventure on a second, more intense life, an “oasis of romance” in stark contrast with the routine of domestic life. Mortal and erotic adventure share in common an intensity, the former of death and the latter of affects. By contrast, aesthetic adventure is one in the past tense, one of contemplation, which, paradoxically, has ceased to be adventure, for it no longer entertains any change, a future or uncertainty. Comparing the three types, it appears that authentic adventure is a work of art which is getting written as it is occurring, with no closure.

Gallants of the Old Court: *Adventure Lies Elsewhere*

I am interested here in identifying the lowest common denominator which reinvests adventure in accordance with its fiction-making potential, its ontological proteanism. This is why I have chosen a special novelist, Mateiu I. Caragiale, the author of only one novel, *Craii de Curtea-Veche*, published in 1929, where adventure occurs in relation not to action, but to fiction, not to the present, but to nostalgia. The novel stages this protocol of the unfolding of adventure, from the standpoint of complete and assumed immobility, not interested to foster any energies which could project the characters beyond the static frame of nocturnal frequenting of restaurants in Bucharest. Not only life, but also adventure, now lies elsewhere. Adventure compensates for the real, yet not through the reading of an adventure novel, nor through the writing of one, but through the construction of an adventure fiction couched in terms of no more than a discursive act.

Craii de Curtea-Veche is one of the most “static” novels of Romanian literature, one with no plot, which focuses on a group of bohemians who spend their time in pubs, watching the people and talking. Two of them, Paşadia and Pantazi, with their aristocratic bearing, are representative of local intellectual elite, yet they are lonely figures, no longer involved in any social interaction; the third

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

one, but for declaring his intention to become a writer, remains incognito; and the fourth one, Pirgu, is typical of the degraded and degrading world of metropolitan bohemians. The fourth one seems to bring some dynamism to this “novel of Bucharest manners” which the third one intends to write, since Pirgu guides them into the morally polluted places of night-time Bucharest. The novel unfolds descriptively as a genre painting qua painting of manners, whose elaborate portrayal of the characters is cognate to portraiture in the visual arts, and which resorts to the memoir to evoke the characters’ biography. There is room here also for a little adventure, if degraded as *arrivisme*, like in the mystery novels of the 19th century, where the mystery is unravelled at the most opportune time and where there is also the possibility of likely adventure, if, for the time being, concentrated in a very thick core.

Adventure in *Craii...* does not have the force of an event, for it exists beyond that which “happens” – basically not much – to the bohemian characters of this novel set in the year 1911; yet it expands, through the characters’ bearing and mindset, *la belle époque* and *fin de siècle*. Adventure is not that which happened; nor that which would likely happen or happen again. Two characters, Paşadia and Pantazi, are perfectly aware of the closure of this horizon of possibility of adventure; hence their contemplative mood, associated with *passéisme* and resignation. Adventure names here a nostalgic drive, where, however, nostalgia becomes a form of anamnesis which evokes not an idealised actual landmark, one ennobled through distancing, but a fictitious landmark. Adventure has been replaced by the yearning for adventure, yet even the latter does not open up any future possibility, nor does it evoke anything retrospectively; rather, it is sublimated aesthetically and raises the possibility of adventurous fiction. Using a highly significant archaic word, the author calls it *hagialâk*. The term was typically used in the Balkans, in oriental vein, to denote the pilgrimage either to Jerusalem, in the case of Christians, or to Mecca, in the case of Muslims. Accordingly, such *hagialâk* is also an initiation journey, one of affirmation of faith, as well as of cleansing and spiritual uplifting, undertaken by the faithful, hence it is coterminous with adventure in its spiritual sense, as Giorgio Agamben identifies adventure in medieval poetry. Quite predictably, this journey is not dangerless for those living in the 19th century; its symbolism, moreover, points to the supreme form of validation: redemption. Mateiu I. Caragiale chose the term *hagialâk* to name his fiction and implicitly adventure, so that the adventure fiction orientates adventure, from the outset, towards a higher, esoteric meaning, where the adventure can become a form of consecration, like an inner journey heading for that which lies deepest within the human being.

As such, adventure as *hagialâk* turns its back on the realm of the superficial, of frivolity, of the derisory and the accidental. In fact, two instances of *hagialâk* as a synthesis of the adventure novel can be identified in relation to two of the protagonists. Paşadia and Pantazi are the primary authors of these oral novels; the

third, unnamed protagonist becomes the secondary author – as he is the go-between, the only one who assumes the condition of the writer and who refers to a text, the short story *Remember*, actually written by Mateiu I. Caragiale himself.

The title of the novel we are reading is itself chosen in relation to an event witnessed by these bohemians, including the intradiegetic author (the unnamed protagonist), at the time in search for a suitable topic and characters for his novel. The two oral novels, the *hagialâk*-adventures of Paşadia and Pantazi are neither recounted, nor retold by the anonymous writer, but they are processed – as testifies their condensation into a core with the thickness of a poem written in prose. Such compression might seem to run counter to how adventure, in a typical adventure novel, unfolds by taking space, gets dilated and diversified, and grows like dough. This is precisely what Hegel objects to adventure: its boundless spreading. In Caragiale's novel, the narrator runs counter this propensity of adventure for expansion; rather, he retains the essence of adventure, which is not its summary, but the postulation of its condition. Another feature of the two *hagialâk*-adventures is the absence of the centre: neither adventure envisages a stable point, either with respect to the quest for the centre (peculiar to any initiation journey) or to the recovery of the self (as Agamben postulates starting from the medieval poetry of the troubadours and minnesinger). One type of journey concerns a history, the other a geography, and both concern a world, the entire world.

For Paşadia, adventure is projected into a remote past, the 18th century, where he would have liked to live, for he has that century's bearing, its sensitivity, its way of being. It is not the 18th century of the Danubian principalities (namely, Wallachia and Moldavia), then living under Phanariot rule, though, but the 18th century of the great European courts during the Enlightenment, with its thirst for knowledge, for the arts, yet also with its pleasure-seeking libertine philosophy, as evoked by the scenario proposed by its author, Paşadia. The adventure as *galanterie* – as is peculiar to the libertine novel, which pioneered it, and is illustrated by Pierre Chardelot de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* – opens up the endless possibility of delight. The heroes of this condensed adventure novel are somewhat cognate to Sade's, though free from the latter's radicalism; they are libertine in tastes, manners and principles, they move from one court to another and are the licentious 'rulers' of this age, who seek delight as their sole purpose in life and champion superior hedonism as a *modus vivendi*. Politics, with its imbroglions, and *l'amour libre* are on an equal footing with Mozart's art and the rococo, for the 18th century is a century of "good taste". It all ended abruptly with the French Revolution and its bloodthirsty brutality.

Adventure creates here a paradox: it works through superficial accumulation, whose most apt expression is the libertine adventure, with its culturally informed eroticism; yet, on the other hand, it endeavours to assimilate the great works of the century, from painting to music, and the sciences too, from the esoteric to the great scientific discoveries. Notwithstanding, not merely an illustration is the evocation

of adventure as exclusively hedonism, which Antoine Watteau renders emblematically in his famous painting *Pilgrimage to Cythera* (1717), an allegory of the age's pleasure-seeking *hagialâk*: a *fête galante*.

Rather, there is yet another, subtler layer towards which adventure opens: utopia. It is not adventure proper which matters – for the intensity is equally strong, since it concerns not so much the affects as delight and curiosity –, as it is the possibility of its exquisite attainment. This entails an ideal attainment and actualization of all possibilities which the century affords, of the synthesis which captures the *Zeitgeist* by experiencing everything that can be experienced, each taste, each sensation: being present in all the events that truly matter, being familiar with all the important personalities, knowing all secrets, sharing in the outcome of knowledge in the century of encyclopaedism, a.s.o. The key to understanding adventure refers not to the sum total, but to the wholeness of adventure. What Hegel objected to adventure, its depthlessness, the absence of the spirit, here is fully assumed and compensated for through the totalizing expansion of its possibilities. Adventure is here a projection of adventure as saturated, total experience – because totalizing. This is not a journey back in history, but the examination of the essence of adventure – which is imaginary, bookish – through its setting in fiction, in novel form: the adventure novel. The *hagialâk*-adventure constitutes a type of anamnesis, cultural anamnesis, one capable of capturing the *zeitgeist* and of rendering the whole of it in a unique painting.

The other *hagialâk*-adventure, heralded by Pantazi, also follows a pattern, namely, that of exploration, of the travel around the world, *en sage citoyen du vaste univers*. It champions a sensuous take on Enlightenment encyclopaedism by offering a vision filtered through romantic sensitivity, one which the character expresses both through his looks and through his affective bias: day-dreaming, melancholy and *passéisme*. The dangerous travel has become a model of the adventure of knowledge superimposed onto the adventure of the eye's delight through the discovery of an exotic version of *terra incognita*.

This model of saturation of life experience concerns a geography that includes a large diversity of cultures and civilizations, of all forms of humanity and all alterities too, of all landscapes and exotic worlds, situated far away from the European centre, in a comprehensive whole. It is an adventure of knowledge with a solitary strain, even though it is depicted framed by friendship. The series of places explored by Pantazi tracks no itinerary; rather, it shows a disposition, an emotion which resonates against a landscape chosen at times for its distance, its alienation, and whose human inhabitants, so diversified, nonetheless are perceived as somewhat familiar, due to his keen curiosity and delightful detachment.

This adventure novel too unfolds within the horizon of utopia: the travellers seem to exhaust, in an erratic itinerary, all possibilities; they map out everything worth seeing, get to know everything worth knowing, the whole world. There are no events; all that is spectacular never appears in the guise of an accident or a level

break, it never “happens” as a turning point in a fate-driven course. This life adventure earmarks one’s existence not through any unavoidable intensity, but through the openness to being amazed, where one such instance of amazement is immediately replaced by another one in quick, seemingly endless succession. In both cases, the adventure is premised on paradox: it reaches closure in the aleph of the journey-adventure by realizing all its possibilities; at the same time, though, it remains open, for this condensed adventure never unfolds fully, never actualizes as a series of variants, of chapters, but rather evolves as an order of suggestion qua potential which can be actualized, yet never be exhausted.

Arrivisme as Adventure hic et nunc

The third version of adventure, proposed by Pirgu, conjures as much modernity as a degraded world. The modern adventurer is the arriviste, who assails high society, intent as he is to attain a privileged position. He is precisely the one whom Vladimir Jankélévitch names, in the above-mentioned study, the *aventurier* (“adventurer”) – a distinct type from the *aventureux* (“adventurous”). The adventurer is “un professionnel des aventures”, one who cares nothing for the adventure proper, for his sole aim is financial profit: he is “en marges de scrupules qu’en marge de la vie prosaïque”, “un bourgeois qui triche au jeu bourgeois”. By contrast, the *aventureux* makes adventure “un véritable style de vie”. Through the latter, Jankélévitch pits genuine adventure qua lifestyle, adventure for adventure’s sake, against degraded adventure, the kind of adventure which lacks the spirit of adventure and its gratuitousness because of its sole aim: money. Writes Jankélévitch: “Les basses aventures aventurières ne sont qu’une caricature de l’aventure aventureuse”³⁰. It’s worth noting that unlike Hegel, who denigrates adventure completely, Jankélévitch redeems adventure, even as he notices the advent of a new type of adventure, which entails the devaluation of the ideal type. This latter type of adventure emerges in the realist novel of the 19th and early 20th centuries and its implicit adventurer is better known as the arriviste.

It is worth noting that the text whose type of protagonist inspired Mateiu I. Caragiale’s characters is Félicien Champsaur’s *L’Arriviste* (1902), a novel recommended to Mateiu by his history teacher in high school, Anghel Demetrescu. Champsaur’s protagonist is one of a long series of characters featured in the realist novels of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola or Dickens. Likewise, the first important Romanian novel of the 19th century, Nicolae Filimon’s *Ciocoii vechi și noi* [*Old and New Parvenus*] (1863), whose protagonist belongs in this class, in fact offers a typology of the arriviste, which it illustrates in a two-pronged approach: the traditional and the modern arriviste. Filimon’s novel only features the first kind, though, for it is set in the 18th century, at the time of the Phanariot regime in the Danubian

³⁰ Jankélévitch, *L’aventure*, p. 10.

principalities. The second type will be of interest to later writers, such as Duiliu Zamfirescu, G. Călinescu, Ion Marin Sadoveanu and Camil Petrescu.

Be that as it may, arrivisme is the degraded version of adventure; in Caragiale's novel, it can contaminate somehow even the virtues of the characters praised for their genuine intellectual and cultural prowess. In fact, both Pașadia and Pantazi may behave like parvenus at certain moments in life. After an unimpeachable early formation that has fostered constructive, principled efforts and values, Pașadia discovers the shortcut of social emancipation via libertine adventures – Balzac and Stendhal could easily supply exemplary models –, while Pantazi discovers the power of money to reconfigure the course of his destiny and even the possibility of committing murder, as in Champsaur's novel.

The very term used by Mateiu I. Caragiale, "crai" ["gallants"], speaks volumes. On the one hand, "crai" names the dynastic inheritors in Pașadia's narrative; there is also an esoteric-soteriological strain here, for a premonitory dream features the gallants participating in the last vespers, which heralds their exit. Other two meanings of the term refer to adventure in devalued form: "crai" indicates a Don Juan, while in slang – as taught by another character, Pena Corcodușa –, "crai" names the criminals of all stripes – hence the novel's title – who dwelt in the area known as "Curtea Veche" ["the Old Court"], namely the ruins of the former princely residences in Bucharest.

Simply stated, Caragiale's novel juxtaposes a haughty and a devalued register of adventure in perfect harmony. It is noteworthy, though, that the modern sense of adventure appears in the novel only in embryonic form, as a biographic core, namely the novel of the "rise and fall" of Pașadia, while Balzac actually wrote one in *Grandeur et décadence de Cesare Birotteau*. Nor is Pantazi's decadent novel of the fall of his family any more elaborated, for all its vast array of bourgeois "adventures": legacies, disownings, bankruptcy and spectacular reversals. The only novel that truly features a parvenu-adventurer is that of Pirgu, the character who makes the most of all possibilities of his world. We can notice here the same tendency – however subtle – to a totalization of adventure, if translated in the logic of the realist novel, when Pirgu claims emphatically that he knows everyone. This kind of adventurer – the arriviste – is a genius at making relations, and Pirgu is an exemplary representative thereof. As he asks rhetorically:

Think there's anyone doesn't know me here or wherever? Think there's a place around I wouldn't hang my hat like home? [And as the narrator muses:] I could hardly make a secret of my bewilderment at Pirgu's amazing social scope. There were people from all walks of life, hosts of them – nay, all of them, for all I knew... Indeed, I was wondering if there was a soul he didn't know, or a door but would open for him³¹.

³¹ Mateiu I. Caragiale, *Gallants of the Old Court: A Novel*. Translated by Cristian Baciu, București, eLiteratura, 2013, no pages. See Caragiale, *Opere*, p. 65: "Cine nu mă cunoaște aici și oriunde, cine

Pirgu is the connection between the three bohemians and the (under)world he frequents and knows like the back of his palm, between high society and the scum of the earth; he reconciles the contraries and fosters cheerfulness. Mateiu I. Caragiale may have heaped upon Pirgu all vices ever, yet he also bestowed on this character the unique capacity, indeed virtue, to act as the connector, the creator of social bonding.

“Genuine” adventure belongs to the register of actualizable possibilities only in fiction: novels not yet written, if writable at any moment, virtual, but never actually attained. Adventure shares in what Horia-Roman Patapievici, in his introduction to the Romanian translation of *Corto Maltese. Departe, tot mai departe* [*Corto Maltese. Far, Far Away*], names “the imaginary of all imaginations”³² a world library of all the adventure books not yet written.

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nu mă iubește, unde nu sunt la mine acasă?”; p. 66.: “Nu-mi ascunsei admirarea de câtă lume cunoștea Pirgu. Lumea de tot soiul și de toată teapa, lume multă, toată lumea”.

³² Hugo Pratt, *Corto Maltese. Departe, tot mai departe* [*Corto Maltese. Far, Far Away*]. Translated by Tudor Călin Zarojanu, preface by Horia-Roman Patapievici, București, Cartea Copiilor, 2018.

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THE ADVENTURE NOVEL – DEVALUATION AND REVALUATION OF
THE ADVENTURE: *GALLANTS OF THE OLD COURT*
(Abstract)

The article aims to illustrate that the entire work of Mateiu I. Caragiale, particularly his only novel, *Gallants of the Old Court*, recuperates as a horizon of possibility the adventure novel in an embryonic-synthetic, concentrated form, with its progression remaining in a state of suspension. Within the novel lies an inscription of the adventure novel through various established formulas, alongside an implicit reflection on the interplay between the adventure genre and the novel, regarding the trajectory and the selection enacted by the author in the matters of existence, as well as history. Thus, the literary contribution of Mateiu I. Caragiale facilitates a perspective on the adventure novel as an inexhaustible resource and its transcending towards a higher level where the adventure attains an ontological-identity dimension of epistemological significance, as posited by Giorgio Agamben for our consideration.

Keywords: adventure, decadentism, libertinism, mystery novel, novel of manners.

ROMANUL DE AVENTURI – DEVALORIZAREA ȘI REVALORIZAREA
AVENTURII: *CRAII DE CURTEA-VECHE*
(Rezumat)

Articolul își propune să demonstreze că întreaga operă a lui Mateiu I. Caragiale, dar cu precădere singurul său roman, *Craii de Curtea-Vechă*, recuperează ca orizont de posibilitate romanul de aventură într-o formă embrionar-sintetică, concentrată, dezvoltarea acestuia fiind lăsată în suspensie. În roman este înscrisă o memorie a romanului de aventuri în câteva formule consacrate, dar și o reflecție indirectă despre raportul dintre aventură și roman, despre regia lui și selecția pe care autorul o operează în materia vieții, precum și a istoriei. Astfel, opera miteică face posibilă o perspectivă asupra romanului de aventuri ca resursă inepuizabilă și a depășirii sale către un etaj superior unde aventura dobândește o dimensiune ontologic-identitară, de cunoaștere, așa cum ne-o propune atenția și Giorgio Agamben.

Cuvinte-cheie: aventură, decadentism, libertinism, roman de mistere, roman de moravuri.