

## CRITICISM BETWEEN 1906 AND 1915 ON THE GERMAN INFLUENCE IN THE WORK OF MIHAI EMINESCU

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### ABSTRACT:

*WE CONSIDER THIS STUDY IS NECESSARY, BECAUSE EVEN MANY RESEARCHERS POINTED OUT THE AFFINITY OF EMINESCU'S WORK WITH GERMAN LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE, THERE ARE STILL SOME LACKS IN THIS SENSE. THUS WE ANALYZED HOW THE GERMAN INFLUENCE IN EMINESCU'S WORK WAS PERCEIVED IN TIME, AND FOR THIS WE TOOK INTO CONSIDERATION THE PERIOD BETWEEN 1906 AND 1915.*

*THE PERIOD 1906-1915 IS OF MAJOR IMPORTANCE, FROM THEN THE CRITICS IDENTIFIED THE INFLUENCES OF GERMAN SOURCES IN EMINESCU'S WORK. IN THIS ARTICLE WE PRESENT THE OPINIONS OF SOME CRITICS AS: RADU MANOLIU, C. P. SALVIU ȘI G. IBRĂILEANU COMPARING BOTH OPINIONS, THE ROMANIAN AND RESPECTIVELY THE GERMAN CRITICS ONES.*

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**KEY WORDS:** ROMANIAN CRITICS, GERMAN CRITICS, EMINESCU'S WORK, INFLUENCE.

### INTRODUCTION

If before 1906 the focus was on highlighting Eminescu's superiority, the affinities with the representatives of the German Romantic period having just been mentioned, missing the analysis and exemplification based his work, thereafter, the philosophical ideas that originate in the meditation of the great German thinkers (Kant and Schopenhauer) obsessively return as the main or secondary themes of the studies, articles and lectures. As for the other elements common to Eminescu and the German Romanticism (themes, motifs or other affinities with the romantic representatives), they are almost ignored.

Considering the studies before this period, there can be observed a much more complex, structured and clearly argued discussion, and some articles, even get to become crucial in literary criticism for their objectivity and depth. A good example is G. Ibrăileanu.

In analyzing the critics who have discussed the German influence of the work of the great poet, we took into account the views of both the established Romanian contemporaries (Ioana Vasileoiu) and those of the German literary historians (A. B. Sorensen) to clearly identify the roots of some erroneous springs.

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## MAIN TEXT

On September 24, 1906, Radu Manoliu makes some critical Observations on Eminescu's volume of popular literature and also on its publishing. With the desire to criticize and complete the volume edited by Il. Chendi, R. Manoliu broadly alleges the negligence of not having remembered or detailed some influences especially from the German literature.

Thus, he also contradicts Gherea by supporting the influence of Lenau and denies Heine's influence which has also been identified. Alexandru Grama was the first who insisted on a wrong influence, that of Lenau, R. Manoliu comes up with another little founded influence, namely that of Goethe. The whole article makes reference to the work of Goethe comparing it with the Romanian writer's. Certainly, the vague arguments, just a few and sometimes even nonexistent, indicate us not to believe the information that the author himself did not consider to be certain: "Maybe reading Faust has particularly influenced Eminescu to study even more passionately the Pagan and Christian demonology ..."<sup>2</sup> The critic identifies some of Eminescu's lyrics as being similar to some of Goethe's. For example:

„Wir sind gewohnt, dass die Menschen verhöhnen  
Was sie nicht versteh'n”

„reminds us”, says the author, of:

„Thus diverted by any, they will help you,  
All is bad, they'll say, that is not understood”

Goethe's Faust verse is translated as follows: "We are used to people mocking / What they do not understand", but the fact that the lyrics contain essentially the same general truth about people unable to understand something higher - otherwise supported by Schopenhauer or La Rochefoucauld, as R. Manoliu mentions in a footnote - not a sufficient resemblance to label it as influence, the idea being recognizable as having diverse forms at many authors of different orientations. The mere discovery of similar or related ideas from many authors does not give us the right to assess an influence, disregarding the whole concept of each membership and literary currents of the respective ages. There are also mentioned connections with Th. Hoffmann, Hölderlin, Laube, Gützkow, Rückert and Platen (the latter two supported by Anghel Demetrescu) but they are undebated. The article is one of those which guides to erroneous ways of perceiving the German influence on Eminescu's work.

Also in 1906, a few days later, in November, C.P. Salviu publishes the article *Schiller - Alecsandri - Eminescu*. He joins three names in his article whose link would seem outdated and unapproachable to us, especially at first. However, the author does not wish to identify influences or similarities of the works, the only similarity being that he wants to establish the status within literature and culture: "Schiller, before being the entire world's harbour, he is the greatest German national poet. Alecsandri and Eminescu, by their tremendous influence on our national and literary renaissance, can be considered to us, the Romanians, as Schiller to the Germans, as the great Kogalniceanu once rightly said that, if Leonidas, Napoleon, Caesar, and so on, filled the whole world and all ages with their works, for us, the Romanians, Mihai Viteazul, Stefan cel Mare etc., are as important as they are and perhaps even greater because the first belong to the whole world, but Stefan and Mihai are only ours!"<sup>3</sup> It would be important to note this article, as through its simplicity it manages to set the key-term that could

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<sup>2</sup> Radu Manoliu, „Observări critice asupra volumului de literatură populară al lui Eminescu cum și asupra editării lui” in *Corpusul receptării critice a operei lui M. Eminescu*, ed. Romanian academy (București: Saeculum I.O., 2005), 193.

<sup>3</sup> C.P. Salviu, „Schiller – Alecsandri – Eminescu” in *Corpusul receptării critice a operei lui M. Eminescu*, ed. Romanian academy (București: Saeculum I.O., 2005), 252.

join the two names Eminescu and Schiller, even if other types of similarities between the two were tried to be traced.

Over the course of 61 lectures, G. Ibrăileanu tried to establish the connection with the German romanticism, within the discussions on various topics. Lecture XXIX entitled Pessimism and Optimism is devoted to explaining Eminescu's pessimism. If until now we have met so many options, so many points of view on this issue, Ibrăileanu explains the matter as follows: "See, we have to put together Eminescu and Schopenhauer. I said Eminescu was a student of Schopenhauer. That's not true. A man cannot win a temperament because he reads a certain writer, but one can go much further in the direction of his own. Schopenhauer had an influence, gave justification and of course, when you have a feeling, a concept and find a brilliant book in which this feeling is expressed, of course, our feeling comes more completely."<sup>4</sup> By analysing the poem *Mortua est!*, the author catalogs it as being „bad poetry, a literally vague composition”<sup>5</sup>, and with too many images. It also surprises an improperly pace of Eminescu's, but specific to Bolintineanu, and gives the impression that it would not be sincere. The critic states that this is about an insincere philosophy and doubt about Eminescu's pessimism. Therefore, he declares that it is an injustice placing this poem in anthologies alongside *Epigonii* and counting them as the most beautiful. And if they have not appeared at all representative, he chooses *Înger și demon*, *Împărat și proletar* and *Andrei Mureșanu* to highlight the balance optimism – pessimism, regarding them as typical to Eminescu's concern towards revolutionism, which would indicate a hesitation. The appearance of the demon in the three works (Satan in *Andrei Mureșanu*, the demon in *Înger și demon* and the revolutionary protester in *Împărat și proletar*) feels like a romantic influence. Contact with Schopenhauer, says the author, pushes him more and more towards pessimism and drops his patriotism as a pessimist cannot be a convinced patriot at all. Therefore, in *Andrei Mureșanu*, he believes in the happiness of the country, because it was written in 1869, before 1870 when Iacob Negruzzi sends him Schopenhauer's book, and in *Împărat și proletar* of 1864, although it conveys the same ideas, in the end, the pessimistic philosophy wins.

In Lecture XXXIV about the conception of human destiny he attempts again to clarify the issue of Eminescu's pessimism, assuming that it exists, but for Eminescu as a writer, not as a man, so he must be excluded from moral and social pessimism. Although he is pessimistic, the critic considers, our poet is active. Also in this lecture Ibrăileanu's attention is on the poem *Cu mâne zilele-ți adaogi*, in which he observed Schopenhauer's influence. The latter highlighted the feeling, what he calls will, being the engine of the human soul but also with the inability to make little progress.

In Lecture XXXV the critic exposes the conception of love, and here he also gets to Schopenhauer's theory. It is seen here as a kind of scream that, on one hand, offends the woman he loved, on the other hand it is the self consolation that "that love does not start from him, that the poet is a toy of nature."<sup>6</sup>

Lecture LXI is a closure, a conclusion of all other lectures, and this conclusion, after discussing the key elements of Eminescu's work, represents the inevitable noting of the influence of German Romanticism. The critic wants to explain again that the foreign influence does not mean the perversion of personality, but its strengthening, what is more, it constitutes just one more source of originality. Romanian literature is unthinkable without foreign influences, notes the author, but its originality is given by the national character.

<sup>4</sup> G. Ibrăileanu, „Epoca Eminescu” in *Corpusul receptării critice a operei lui M. Eminescu*, ed. Romanian academy (București: Saeculum I.O., 2007), 245.

<sup>5</sup> Ibrăileanu, „Epoca Eminescu”, 146.

<sup>6</sup> Ibrăileanu, „Epoca Eminescu”, 411.

The influence of German romanticism is captured in *Călin...*, *Povestea teiului*, the castle in *Luceafărul* and the one in *Scrisoarea IV*, texts which are not very representative in this case. Eminescu's work offers a wide range of more striking examples, to highlight affinities with the German Romanticism.

Still discussing Eminescu's feelings, he establishes two periods: the first between 1870 and 1879, when the poet is more objective in poems like *Venere și Madonă*, *Înger de pază*, *Egiptul*, *Înger și demon*, and the second from 1879 to 1883, period in which subjectivity prevails in *Floare albastră*, *Împărat și proletar*, *Crăiasa din povești* and others. This periodization, trivial here, will be more concise in the study *Eminescu – pe lângă plopul fără soț* published in *Viața românească* (1920) and reproduced in the volume *Scritori români și străini* (1926) when Ibrăileanu has the merit of being the first commentator to "bring Romantic Classicism of the poet in question, corresponding to the second creative period (1879 - 1883)"<sup>7</sup>. The first stage is then more clearly defined as one of "imaginative romanticism – when he was heavily influenced by German romanticism (poetry type: *Floare albastră*)"<sup>8</sup>. We also note here the author's contradiction, who, in the Lectures, identifies the second period as the most specific to the German Romanticism, and in the second study he reverses them, the poem *Floare albastră* passing as an example from the second phase to the first stage. Thus we consider the periodization made in *Eminescu – pe lângă plopul fără soț*, as more plausible because it does not contain errors and it is also more clearly expressed. Also a surprising contradiction occurs when he insists on proving that romanticism comes out of the poet's nature and is explicable only by ignoring the role of cultural influences and elsewhere he considers that Eminescu has the merit of having inserted in the Romanian language specific elements of German Romanticism, and elsewhere he speaks of the influence of Novalis in *Floare albastră*.

It can be seen that until the First World War, Ibrăileanu is the defender of the sociological and psychological critic, which does not allow a very careful analysis of works and reduces much of the value of his writings until the 1920s. Since that time, he has evolved towards an inwardly focused criticism, focused on the literary work, his articles gaining importance as the previously mentioned *Eminescu – pe lângă plopul fără soț*, in which he clarifies and orders all the disparate and often opposite ideas occurred in his lectures.

However, in the period 1912 - 1918, when the Lectures were published, he offers important milestones on the issue of the German influence in the work of Mihai Eminescu, especially if we consider all the minor contributions made by scholars in this field. His speech shows his insistence on the analysis of Eminescu's pessimism and the elements coming from the Buddhist or Schopenhauer's philosophy.

Other similarities with the German romanticism are vaguely reminiscent, and unfortunately, not analyzed. Ibrăileanu's contributions up to the First World War are formidably expressed by Ioana Vasiloiu: "Despite the exegetical efforts of the critic in Iasi were not crystallized in a unitary work, his aesthetic, simple observations on Eminescu's work represented an important step in developing Eminescu's works as a science, as a special field of research"<sup>9</sup>, but we also encounter many contradictions, ambiguous language and vague expression that lower a lot the value of his studies. It is, however, remarkable the consistency of information regarding the link between Eminescu, Schopenhauer and Buddhism.

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<sup>7</sup> Ioana Vasiloiu, *Receptarea critică a lui Eminescu până la 1930* (București: Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2008), 339.

<sup>8</sup> G. Ibrăileanu, "Eminescu – pe lângă plopul fără soț (considerații tehnice)" in *Opere 3*, ed. Rodica Rotaru and Al. Piru (București: Minerva, 1976), 79.

<sup>9</sup> Ioana Vasiloiu, *Receptarea critică a lui Eminescu până la 1930* (București: Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2008), 319.

## CONCLUSION

Although markers identified in this period were relatively few compared to what the exegesis of the following periods will bring, however, the early identification of errors of some similarities between Eminescu and German writers are rooted here. This confusion is due, in particular, to the erroneous reception of works of German authors by the Romanian literary criticism. One reason for this reception is interpreting the texts on translations of German authors into Romanian, which do not faithfully render the original, often serious changes appearing to the primary meaning. It is too much insisted on some unfounded influences, like that of Goethe or Schiller, but no critic has the initiative to prove these influences.

The mere juxtaposition of poems that "seem" to contain similar ideas is not reason enough to put a sign of equality between two authors, or to decree that one must have been influenced by the other. Some general ideas and themes are conveyed in different eras, by authors belonging to different orientations or currents.

It is more important to process these themes so that the final product (poetry or prose) should present the specific features of that current. Another feature that can be seen in articles, volumes or lectures from this period is the absence of a different kind of approach to the link between Eminescu and German romanticism than the one under the name of "influence."

Influence is defined as an action exercised upon a writer leading to change in his style and is synonymous with "leaven". But there are more suitable terms to reveal this relationship, which are used successfully by contemporary criticism. The similarity is the relationship which can be established between two writers or their works that resemble exactly or a comparison based on the existence of common properties. Affinity is matching between authors and their texts because of spiritual similarity. The terms "affinity" or "similarity" fit much better in terms of Eminescu's link to the German romantics, and those of "influence" or "leaven" are representative of Kant's or Schopenhauer's relationship with Eminescu.

Therefore we can conclude by saying that critical studies of the period 1906 - 1915 provide the first identification marks of the German sources in Eminescu's works. These guidelines address a wide range of ideas, some being the foundation for future exegesis and other being the root of some error reception of the German literature.

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