

# PHILOSOPHICAL ENCYCLOPAEDISM AT MIHAI EMINESCU

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**Abstract.** The study starts from the status of philosopher of Mihai Eminescu who was not only a great poet and journalist. Eminescu studied philosophy at Vienna (1869–1872) and Berlin (1872–1874), where he attended the lectures of the great philosophers of the time: Th. Vogt, R. Zimmermann, Ed. Zeller, H. Bonitz, etc. According to the curriculum, during these years he studied also matters of law, economy, history, philosophy and natural sciences. His notes prove his interest and his personal thoughts on such matters. A few decades after Hegel's death, who was considered one of the most educated people of all times, Eminescu seems also to follow the path of the absolute Idea in sciences and culture, history and nature, animated by *encyclopaedic* preoccupations.

**Key words:** philosophy, investigation, interiorization, absolute Idea, *uomo universale*.

What is usually forgotten in what concerns the personality of Mihai Eminescu is the fact that he, even as great poet and journalist as known, was actually a philosopher by profession. Eminescu studied philosophy for five years at Vienna (1869–1872) and Berlin (1872–1874), attended the lectures of great philosophers of notoriety even today, such as: Th. Vogt, R. Zimmermann, Ed. Zeller, H. Bonitz and so on. According to the scope of the university education at the time, he studied also law, economy, history, and natural sciences along philosophy. His notes from that period prove that Eminescu was very interested by such matters and that he insisted to study them further by himself, by readings and personal considerations, as nowadays usual students in philosophy do not do anymore. Philosophers of profession used to do that, though, at that time. We are only with a few centuries after Hegel's death, when his philosophy was not in fashion anymore. Hegel was considered one of the most cultivated men of all times. Obligated or not by his own conceptions, on the route of absolute Idea to which nothing can resist, Hegel crossed in its name not only all the sciences of the time and all the cultural and artistic domains, but also their histories, from their very beginnings.

It was thus only natural that young Eminescu had such *encyclopaedic* preoccupations. Our opinion is that he followed with special interest the accomplishment of an encyclopaedic vision of the world. With, or without the intention to find a formula or a principle from which to deduce then, as Hegel, and as all the systematic philosophers, in general, the evolution of the entire world. Eminescu himself says it: "I believe I have found the solution of the respective problems, grouping the intuitions and the demonstrative systems that accompany each of the stages of evolution, in antinomies referring to the eternal aspect (atemporal aspect) of history, law and politics, but not in the sense of the Hegelian evolution of the Idea. For, as Eminescu differentiates himself from the German philosopher, at Hegel thought and being are identical – here, they are not". This is a fragment from a letter addressed to Titu Maiorescu (5 February 1874) who advanced the idea that Eminescu should become philosophy professor after he obtained his PhD title. It was not meant to be that way. Which does not mean that Eminescu, in his way, and we refer to his famous „Note-books”, failed to leave us, at least as intention, but also as a partial accomplishment, a series of evidence supporting the affirmation of Constantin Noica, according to which, our poet was also, truly *uomo universale*, in general, and especially, "the complete man of Romanian culture".

Researching for several years the manuscripts of Eminescu, respectively the remaining „Note-books”, we can say that, aside the many torn pages, obviously by a foreign hand, (because Eminescu did not use to tear these ”Note-books”, as his purpose was precisely to keep any note, draft or version, despite the many corrections), obviously there are many *other* ”Note-books” missing that we are not going to find ever again. Is not then curious, concerning these ”Note-books”, filed at the Library of Academy only as late as 1900 that nobody mentioned their *number*, nor that of the unbound sheets as if they were just any papers of an antiquary? And then is not a very strange thing that they were bound together randomly, as the binders saw it fit?

There are precise data concerning some of the readings of Eminescu, about lectures attended, about translations and about certain books with notes made on many pages, concerning which it is impossible that he did not make notes, as he had always done in his ”Note-books”. Maybe most of the „Note-books” were preserved, or maybe these that we have were all of them. Fact is that *these* determined Constantin Noica’s admiration. The negativist spirits can appreciate that most of Eminescu’s notes are mere unfinished attempts. The enthusiast spirits, *à la Noica*, consider that this is the greatness of these ”Note-books”. If Eminescu would have taken too seriously any one of his inclinations, let us say, for the grammar of Slavic language, he would have to abandon the other interests. And we would have now, for instance, 44 note-books with annotations concerning Slavic language. On the other hand, we know that Eminescu was able to finish a creative activity, and to take it (not just to completeness) even to perfection. This is the case with certain poems. Even more, if we do not forget the philosophical perspective, and we must not forget it, the interest does not stay in the thematic in-depth study of some domains or in continuously extending the specialized domain of investigation. These are matters that preoccupy the scientists who are bounded to the perspectives of particular sciences. From a philosophical perspective, we are interested in familiarisation with the essential aspects of an investigation domain, and not with the investigation as such, with acquiring a general perspective on the connection of the particular with the universal and, maybe first of all, we are interested in the interiorisation of these aspects in our own consciousness. All these are interesting in the perspective of their intuitive rebirth as personal goods. This is the position that Eminescu sustains explicitly. Even in what concerns the great philosophers, the size of Kant, the poet says that important is the “intuitive rebirth of their thought in my mind, with the specific smell of fresh earth of my own soul”. For the presentation of Kantian philosophy, as a professor, Eminescu felt necessary to translate a great part of his fundamental work, *The Critique of Pure Reason*. After the accomplishment of this duty (this is the first massive Romanian translation from Kant), the German philosopher becomes more and more familiar for our poet. Nowadays we have a note (within the manuscript no. 2287) from where we can tell what might mean that „intuitive rebirth” of Kant’s thought in Eminescu’s mind. It suffices to reproduce this fragment, to feel “the smell of fresh earth” of the great soul of the one who could have become an eminent philosophy professor. “Any generous thinking, says the poet, any great discovery, starts from the heart and appeals to the heart. It is strange when someone once got Kant, when set on the same point of view so foreign to this world and to its ephemeral desires, mind is but a window through which the sun of the new world comes in, and it comes into the heart... The time has vanished and the eternity, with its serious face, looks back at us from each and every thing. It seems that you

have waken up to a world stoned in all its beauties and it is as if you passing through life and your birth, as if your very emergence and happiness are but a thought...” But this means, in conformity with the exigencies entertained by Eminescu himself that he arrived at capturing that ”eternal (atemporal)” dimension of universal-human kind, different from the Hegelian Idea, within Kant’s philosophy. Here are the criteria on which basis we can consider that Eminescu could have become an excellent professor of philosophy. For this, though, he would have had to appropriate the thinking of the other philosophers, too. To translate their works and so on and so forth. But, under these circumstances, he would have still been that *uomo universale*? Therefore, instead of regretting the fact that Eminescu did not become a professor of philosophy, even an excellent one, as he might have been, we should be happy that he did not take too seriously this enterprise. And this is not the only one. As an authentic encyclopaedist, he proposes himself, and even attempts to make a kind of philosophical *dictionary*. This is about the manuscript no. 2289 from the Library of Academy. A note-book in small format, comprising annotations concerning the early stage of the Romanian War of Independence, the beginning of a poem („The Flower of the Angel of Night...”), three times some lists of laundry, a few other poems, stray thoughts and lines from the poem *Pe aceeași ulicioară* [*On the Same Lane*]. The same note-book was taken over from the other side, so the pages were written on both sides. Its initial purpose reveals from note from mark “80 v”, entitled „Index”, where there are all there letters of the alphabet with numbers in connection to each of them. But the pages of the note-book are numbered, too. So the note-book had the structure of a dictionary. At the pages mentioned in the „Index” sometimes, up there, is a letter and other times German, Latin and Romanian words. According to the general procedure, it seems that Eminescu had a German-Latin dictionary and a Latin-German one, both philosophical dictionaries, from where he had chosen the significant terms, translated them (from German language into Latin, or the other way around) and then he explained them in Romanian. We are interested here in the manner in which Eminescu had conceived this dictionary. It is about its initial structure. He did not content himself with the repertory type of division of the note-book: a, b, c..., but he attempted to gather the terms under sections indicated by groups of two letters. For letter „a”, for example, there are 15 corresponding pages marked ab, ac, ag, ah, ai, aj, al, am, an, ap, ar, at, au, av and az. This implies an excessive detail of the dictionary, a framework that forbids losing sight of any term. We can imagine the amount of work necessary for such a dictionary. We make abstraction here of the fact that we do not encounter even today such a rich philosophical dictionary. Eminescu plunges though into this sort of work and starts gathering terms, translating and explaining them. We have counted up to 68 generic terms, to which we add other numerous terms derived in the combinatorial manner of the German language. At *Wechsel*, for instance, he finds 16 combinations, for which he finds Romanian correspondences. He proceeds though randomly and finally he abandons this activity, so that the note-book, left almost empty, is later on filled with annotations masking the original intention. This explains also the fact that Perpessicius considers this note-book merely “a reporter block-notes for the redactor of the newspaper ‘Curierul de Iași’ ”. Yet, this note-book was meant to become our first, and most detailed, philosophical dictionary. The circumstances made that Eminescu had the true occasion to contribute to an encyclopaedic dictionary. In manuscript no. 2 255 from the Library of Academy there is a letter signed „F. A. Brockhaus” and addressed

to „Librarian Mr. M. Eminescu, Jassy”. The letter was posted from Leipzig at 12<sup>th</sup> July 1875. Friedrich Arnold Brockhaus was the founder of the company „F. A. Brockhaus” that edited the famous *Allegemeine deutsche Real-Encyklopädie für die gebildeten Stände. Conversation-Lexikon*. From the accounts at hand (H. E. Brockhaus, *Die Firma „Brockhaus”*, Leipzig, 1905), at the date mentioned, the one in charge with the relation with the collaborators of the *Lexikon* was the descendant Rudolf Brockhaus. He signed, on behalf of the company, the letter addressed to Eminescu. From the letter we learn that Titu Maiorescu, a Minister at the time, mediated the possible collaboration with the mentioned publication (the 12<sup>th</sup> edition) for Eminescu. The editor sent aside also a minute that has been lost with reference to the conditions of collaboration. Not knowing these conditions, especially the fact that the articles should be solicited by the editor, Eminescu had sent him several materials regarding certain personalities and places from Romania. These are materials that the editor calls „articles”. Among these, although not required, he considers that the ones referring to Bucharest and *Brăila* “will be compulsorily accepted”. Even more, he asks Eminescu to review, from the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Conversation Lexicon*, the articles: *Bolintineanu*, *Botoșani* and *Brătianu*. So it happens that from the important libraries from Bucharest exactly the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Brockhaus Lexicon* is missing (one can find only the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> editions). The 12<sup>th</sup> edition can be compared with the manuscript no. 2 289 from the Library of Academy, where there are the drafts of the letter posted by Eminescu at 27 February 1875 (letter to which the editor made reference). Here are described the corrections suggested by the poet regarding another article of the *Lexicon*, entitled *Boyar*. The corrections appear as made by Eminescu, in the 13<sup>th</sup> edition, vol. III, pp. 272-273. Indifferently, though, of the manner in which they were accepted, integrally or not, by the editor (who used to operate changes in every new edition), we are in possession of the manuscripts of the articles *Botoșani*, *Brăila* and *Bucharest* (the last one, present also in the 13<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Lexicon*). They prove, given the data included, that Eminescu had a good knowledge of history. Within the articles there are rigorously mentioned events with strict reference to these places, as in the later, more modern monographies of these localities. They were events unmentioned in the traditional history books. Eminescu combined precise geographical localisation, suggestive and succinct descriptions, and economic, cultural, artistic data, etc. Comparing the article *Bucharest* from the manuscripts with the one in the 13<sup>th</sup> edition, we notice the interventions of the editor (that might be very well absent in the 12<sup>th</sup> edition, though). They concern especially the reminiscence of personal considerations and details, as they frequently appear in Eminescu’s articles. Knowing well his lack of patience for such interventions, we can easily imagine that the poet renounced, especially for this reason to further collaboration with the Brockhaus editor. We emphasise with this occasion a fact that cannot be overlooked and that should be especially underlined within the editions of Mihai Eminescu. This is the *frequency*, in his numerous encyclopaedic preoccupations, of the considerations referring to the territories dwelled by Romanians. Even more, in the German texts, the respective annotations are usually made in Romanian. And this is no wonder since Eminescu, this *uomo universale*, was at the same time, not only the „complete man of our culture”, but also the complete man of our Romanian feelings.

*Translation by Henrieta Anișoara Șerban*