

## NEVER AS ONCE ...

Nicolae GEORGESCU\*

**Abstract.** The paper investigates the negotiations of meanings between the current and older linguistic systems, to follow the wonderful journey of words, images and meanings in Eminescu's poetry. There is no final version even for one manuscript of the Romanian national poet Mihai Eminescu, not even the one that went to the printing press. And, then, we must know that even after it saw the light of print, Eminescu worked on the text again. His effort is divine, his poetry is incantatory, bringing the universe of existence closer to God.

**Key words:** meanings, sense, writing systems, incantatory poetry, "once"

When one governs an older writing system he must be attentive to the meanings twice: first, in relation to the current and usual ones, then, to those in the respective older system. The authors that have long thought about writing are involving the thought in the script; one must at least ask oneself whether *what* and *how* they wrote make sense, before changing that for us. Look, for example, at the ordinary "once" used by Eminescu. I am giving the first stanza of "Luceafărul" (*Evening Star*) in the form from *Almanahul România Jună* (April 1883):

There was, as in the fairy tales,  
As ne'er in the time's raid,  
There was, of famous royal blood  
A most beautiful maid.<sup>1</sup>

*Convorbiri literare* magazine resumes the poem in August 1883, as following:

There was, as in the fairy tales,  
As never in the time's raid,  
There was, of famous royal blood  
A most beautiful maid.

Titu Maiorescu kept, for release in December 1883, the form from the Almanac, in the second edition (1885) it is the same - but in the third edition (1888) he put *A fost o dată ca nici o dată* (*There was once ... as not ever*) form

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\* Associate Member at the ASR. Professor, PhD. at "Spiru Haret" University.

<sup>1</sup> Transl. by Petre Grimm.

that he then abandoned. (It is not difficult to understand why he dropped it: when resuming the term, in the girl's words, he had: N'oi merge nici odată (I will ne' ver go), so he also intended to correct here: *o dată* (using "once"), but the proofreader misunderstood and this is how the mistake *Noi merge* (We shan't go) appeared instead of *N'oi merge* (*I will not go*); but usually around Maiorescu's corrections, new typographical errors appear. So, in the fourth edition he gave it up.) The publishers after him oscillated between never (*niciodată*) and *nici odată* (*ne'er*). Today the text is like this, according to Perpessicius:

There was, as in the fairy tales,  
As never in the time's raid,  
There was, of famous royal blood  
A most beautiful maid.

In the first edition of 1939, Perpessicius had nothing after the first verse, against the whole tradition up to him, but then he returned to the form adorned with commas – that in fact C. Botez (1930) had set.

As to the manuscripts, they do not clarify too much, "Evening Star" laboratory being extremely broad. We find somewhere "A fost odată ca 'n povești, / A fost ca nici odată" - *There was, once, as in the fairy tales/ There was, as ne'er ever*(Ms. 2277, 132, correlated with "N' oi merge nici odată" – *I will ne'er go*), it is the same in Ms. 2275, 39, as in *The Legend of the Evening Star* (Ms. 2261, 198, dated April 10, 1882 by the poet) we find "A fost odată ca 'n povești / A fost ca nici o dată" - *There was, once, as in the fairy tales/ As not ever/once in the time's raid*, but correlated with "N'oi merge nici odată" – *I will ne'er go*. Throughout the manuscript the punctuation is white - whether there are drafts or it is left aside on purpose (probably in order to be completed on the final text systemically) - so that we can only attribute to the author himself for sure the comma from the *Almanac* or the full stop from *Convorbiri* after the first verse. Once again: the one who deludes himself with the illusion that the manuscripts solve the most editorial problems is wrong – they rather give suggestions. For not (even) a poem by Eminescu do we have the final manuscript, the one given to printing. And, to be even more reassured about this, there is one thing we also have to know: even after printing the poet intervened on the text (see the case of *Letter III*, published in *Convorbiri literare* and then in *Timpul*). I have shown elsewhere that, in extreme cases for typographical errors interrupted the printing of literary talks, due to typographic mistakes, the printing process of *Convorbiri literare* used to be interrupted, and the correction was made and then it printing was resumed. (There are copies of the magazine, the same issue, which differ: some have the printing mistake, others do).

So, also regarding the first verses of the *Evening Star*, again the editors should observe the authorial will.

What does it mean, in fact, this oscillation of forms and punctuation? Not much, one would say, writing evolved to simplified forms, *nici o dată, nici odată, niciodată* – *not ever/once, ne'er, never* whichever is easier to write. The Romanian language does not have a specialized term for the French "*jamais*" (for example the way in which nor German has) – and I think it's attempted its artificial creation. In our language, the theoretical "*nicicând*" (*not once*) failed to generalize (it refers to the future, not to the past).

The adverb "*odinioară*" (*formerly*) is, on the other hand, quite complicated; but what an interesting noun-formation from the Latin *de una hora* - "in one of the hours", moments, instances: see, for example, "*într-o doară*", which is symmetric to it: *in una de hora* "in any hour, any minute", "randomly", "or whatever may be" - but not "*bunăoară*", *bona hora*, "a good moment" – for which, see the French *bonheur*, "happiness", except that there a pair of was created with *malheur*, "misery", from *mala hora*, while the Romanian language has not preserved *malus* (we have inherited a legal term for the idea of "bad": *reus*, which means *accused*; perhaps that the Thracian "mal" (*shore*) was too strong and could not be displaced, see *Dacia malvensis* and so many place names around *mal*: Mălureni, Malu Surpat, even Moldova, as demonstrated by Mr. Mihail Vinereanu, etc., etc.; in Romanian "*ceasul rău*" (*a bad moment*) is a Slavic-Latin mixture, it does not mean "misery", "malheure", but "bad luck", and it is also related to the fatidic moment or hour – and it does not have a pair in "*ceasul bun*" (*a good moment*). Thus, the expression "*să fie într-un ceas bun*" ("may you have good luck") seems singular and it is probably rebuilt on the cultured line: to be of good omen, etc. – since it also means something concerning luck: it seems that in our language the expressions pair-system has become unbalanced here because the rejection of the Latin *malus*, and, anyhow evil is not opposed to good, as in the phrase "*e bine rău*" (it's awfully good), where, etymologically, something or someone is *accused* of something good, very good). Unable to create the pair, *bunăoară* (*for instance*) has passed into the adverbs group. All these forms are disguised in writing, because we write phonetically (and well we do, of course ...) that is connected: *doară* for *d'oară*. But if we are curious to search, the Latin primary meaning is preserved, even for the man of an average solid culture, not only for linguists.

Thus, the multiple forms with the Romanian "*dată*" (*time*), may confuse the speakers and they tend towards a uniform script, "never" instead of "ne'er", just like in the case of "*oară*" (*time*). A scientific panic – I think – pushes the Romanian linguist to form words – concepts or to discover concepts where you would not expect as a philologist. For example, a good friend from this area of linguists is convinced that in the Romanian word "*nimic*" (*nothing*) lies the idea of absolute zero, of *kenos* from Greek. Not at all: nothing comes from "ne" and "mica" (a crumb, very small piece, "miette" in French), so nothing (rather "nimica") is not even a whole crumb, but less than a crumb. That is why it is said: "*o nimica toată*" (almost nothing), that is a very small bit, than all - so, something

however that can still be divided, not an atom (it is also said: *un nimic, niște nimicuri* - a scraping, scrapings), language expressions appear to be aware of etymology). Space is fragmented for the language – and so is time: fragmented times and times ... But the linguist must do his centenary-long norm in reforms, otherwise he cannot explain evolution anymore, can he? ... To get out of this area of so pleasant digressions, we'll say simply that we accept this writing, but ask to be told where it changed, so that we, the ordinary readers, would know.

As to commas, again the contemporary linguist can say that they only help to recreate the fairy-tale atmosphere, are desirable ... If so, why don't the publishers put one more as follows: "an exquisite royal" because relatives are great, and kingly, is an apposition, wouldn't be good to be pointed out? Here, however, no one makes it an apposition. It is not about kings like great people, great family members - but it is about the great kings, the kings of the world (maybe even in temporal sequence), those who have kingdoms, not simple kings from fairytales. This must be emphasized when reciting, so the author invites us to use special accents. The poem of Eminescu starts with "there was once", but it does not continue in the logic of a fairytale: "Once upon a time, there were a king and a queen, and they had a daughter, and so on", but it stops at a most beautiful maid, who was the only child of her *parents*, but, again: the parents are to be found among the saints and the stars.

I think that nobody judges so simply the „overture” (Lucian Costache) of “Luceafărul” (*Evening Star*) anymore, as they notice that the basic text, the one from *Almanac*, stands out among the editions. The poet does not create fairytale atmosphere, but he judges the fairytale and passes beyond it, surpasses it going towards profound philosophical meanings. The Academician Alexandru Surdu told us once, in the smoking room of the Academy Library, that, in the preamble of "Luceafărul" (*Evening Star*) he acknowledges the definition given by Hegel in the introduction to "Science of Logics": *being is nothingness* (I quote his words from memory „Das Sein, das reine Sein (...) ist das Nicht"); I can confirm that he would spell „Das reine Sein” exactly like „O prea frumoasă fată” (*a most beautiful maid*) afterwards. This presentation remained in my mind, and I found the text in the translation of D.D. Roșca: „Being, pure being (...) is, in fact, the void.” (GWF Hegel: “Science of Logics” p. 62-63, passim; he apologizes to Mr. Alexandru Surdu as, “although I do not have the necessary instruments to approach the issue in the strict area of the philosophy, I write about these things ‘relying on him’: I think I also do that to bring it to Eminescu himself”). You can find here the formula from the preamble of the Romanian fairytales, but it depends on how you read it. If I say “there was once”, it means that it happened as it has never happened before or as it shall never happen afterwards, it happened only once; in French: *une fois comme jamais* – so it was, it did happen, but we do not know exactly when. To this end, “once” can be written (and understood) as *once, only one time*, as Titu Maiorescu wrote and understood it in his third

edition. But, if you say as Eminescu did: *odată ca nici odată* (*once as not ever*), it means that you clearly deny *odată* (*once*), it was/happened with no determiner, so it has never happened (in French: *jamais pas jamais*, in Greek: *topos – atopus, kronos akronos*). *Luceafărul* (*Evening Star*) wants to say that *once upon a time there was*, as in fairytales, it is possible to happen as in fairytales; it is emphasized when reciting *a fost* (*it was/happened*) as a certainty: indeed, as in the fairytales from our days, it happened once upon a time. The argument from *Convorbiri literare* seems to me firmer, and I compare it with the situation from *Te duci* (*You leave*), verse 2: again, the firm argument from *Convorbiri* (refused though, by all the editors, one by one). But, besides this firm argument, it goes on with: it happened as it cannot happen, as it can never happen. But these events, this story, this myth ... are/is real. (The fairytale goes ironically out of the paradox, emphasizing it as follows: „Că dacă n-ar fi nu s-ar povesti” (*As, had it never happened, we could never tell it.*)) It is/happened without being, as it did not fall in the Time. It was not/did not happen in the past, it will not be/happen in any future: that means that it can be/happen any time, even now. Moreover: this means it is continuous, these events are underway now, are happening now, have always happened and shall always happen, continuously springing, looking for ... a time/ a “once” of their own.

To this end *Luceafărul* (*Evening Star*) is felt as *present*, and is *present* as a myth, i.e. we all live it, and it lives us all. (As at the end of the fairytale, with “Și au trăit fericiți până la adânci bătrânețe, și mai trăiesc și azi, etc.” (*And they lived happily ever after, and they still live, and so on and so forth*). Hyperion is continuously tempted to go down as a clayface and continuously restrains himself not to, as he has not the dimension of luck, i.e. he cannot be now and here, for this most beautiful girl: he may fall somewhere else (in time and space), he may find another girl, but not this one. He must let her look for him. But how is she going to recognize him among so many clay faces („Ce-ți pasă ție, chip de lut dac’ oi fi eu sau altul?” (*How much to you care, clay face, if it's me or another?*)) (with the original punctuation), how else unless by matching herself with somebody and ... invoking her luck?! Again to this end, ... the story writes about a girl who is not, but she is, she has no corporality, no time, she is only in our minds, a „virtual reality”, a reasoning ...

In a recently published book (Lucian Costache: *Mihai Eminescu. Eseuri deschise. Chipul de aer și chipul de lut* (*Mihai Eminescu. Open Essays. The Air Face and Clay Face*), Ed. Tiparg, Pitești, 2009), the author reads Eminescu with the original punctuation and forms and comes to similar conclusions. This book is a real encyclopaedia of Eminescu’s works, Mr. Lucian Costache consulting actively, for his analysis to „Luceafărul” (*Evening Star*), a really impressive bibliography. To the opening of the poem, he dedicates almost one hundred pages for a philological and stylistic analysis. Among the suggestions offered by him, I first quote this one, from Tudor Vianu: „it is a *niciodată* (*never*) neither of the

past, nor of the future, but a *niciodată* (*never*) of the *fiction*; the above-mentioned formula wants to say that the narrated story belongs to imagination/illusion, not to reality, it is ethereal and cosmic". I would gladly read Vianu again, only that Mr. Lucian Costache sends me to a new edition (Junimea, 1974), while the study of Tudor Vianu appeared in 1930, before the edition of Perpessicius, so he could not quote the latter one, i.e. it was modernized after our norms, from nowadays. Thus, I will not confront them now, but I remind you that, in ancient times, they used to quote from Eminescu after the first sources, and the editions used to be printed with the necessary circumspection. (I found at Vianu several quotations even from *Convorbiri literare*, with the punctuation from there).

But we would not stop to "Luceafărul" (*Evening Star*). We find *odată* (*once*) in many contexts in the works of Eminescu, for example in *Rugăciunea unui Dac* (*A Dacian's Prayer*), v. 6: „Pe când pământul, ceriul, văzduhul, lumea toată / Erau din rândul celor, ce n-au fost niciodată” (*When the earth, the sky, the blue, the whole world / were from among those which have not been once*) (C.L., Sept. 1<sup>st</sup>, 1879; in two previous manuscripts: *nici odată* (*not ever*), which is a proof that he studied the last form, the print form; at Titu Maiorescu: *nici-odată* in all the editions; for the rest, everywhere *niciodată*, the comma after *celor* (*among those which*) from C.L. is not kept anywhere), where we can find the same context: *a fi este a nu fi* (*to be is not to be*), except that those which “were” stayed this way, identical with themselves, in the uncreated world, and were waiting to become beings, faces, and realities. If we overlook the manuscript forms (as the common sense actually urges us), we have the clear situations in the printed forms: „a fost ca nici odată” (*there was once as not ever was*) *Luceafărul* (1883) – „n-au fost niciodată” (*they have never been*), *Rugăciunea unui Dac* (*A Dacian's Prayer*) (1879; the Eminescu's comma is very necessary here, as it clearly separates the quasi-identical categories: *celor, ce* (*among those, which*) and *cele, care* (*those, which*) are not the same, those which, they, but *unele* (*some*) as compared to *altele* (*others*)). To this end (*Rugăciunea unui Dac/A Dacian's Prayer*), never is „jamais” and shows the continuous time, undifferentiated, before the creation. One cannot say *nici odată* (*not ever*) about concepts which exist and only wait to enter the world.

Again in 1879, in *Despărțire* (*Separation*): „Să fie neagră umbra în care-oi fi perit / Ca și când niciodată noi nu ne-am fi găsit” (*Be it black the shadow in which I had disappeared / As if we had never found each other*) – identical situation: *nici odată* (*not ever*) for three times in the manuscripts, *nici-odată* (*ne'er*) at Titu Maiorescu, *niciodată* (*never*) in the first printed work. (What other clearer proof do we need to understand that he used to study the forms in the manuscripts, to decide about them in the final text?). The hypothetical situation from the argument has the same meaning *niciodată* – „jamais”.

We illustrate this with "Strigoii" (*Ghosts*): „...Și fost-ar fi mai bine / Ca niciodată'n viață să nu te văd pe tine” (*And it may have been better / for me, to*

*never ever have seen you in my life*), as we have an expression, probably a loaned translation from French: „jamais de ma vie”.

There is also a context which we would like to invalidate the above-mentioned statements.

We are talking about *Sonet (Trecut-ai anii)* (*Sonnet (The Years Have Passed)*), the first two verses, reproduced as follows nowadays:

Trecut-au ani ca nouri lungi pe șesuri  
 Și niciodată n-or să vie iară  
 (*Years went passing by as long veils(=clouds) over the plains,*  
*And they will never ever come back*)

I read in MLR Edition the test established by Petru Creția, who explains, in a separate study, why he preferred the form *nouri* (*veils*) from the manuscript [for *clouds*]. Indeed, it harmonizes more elegantly than the classical form [*clouds*] from Maiorescu Edition (the first print work; here, the editor does not put a hyphen, but uses two words, as in the preamble of *Luceafărul* (*Evening Star*):

Trecut-au anii ca nori lungi pe șesuri  
 Și nici odată n'or să vie iară  
 (*Years went passing by as long clouds over the plains,*  
*And they will never ever come back*)

The manuscript form provides similarities especially for the nouns: *years* and *veils*, both not articulated. But the disagreement with the title is still there: "Trecut-au anii" (*The Years Went Passing By*). This appears only in the first print work. The manuscripts did not contain it. The one who gave it (Eminescu or Maiorescu) must have had in view the articulated form which repeats: *anii* (*the years*). There are 7 versions of this sonnet in Eminescu's manuscripts, each of them very much worked, and the final (i.e. printed) text takes something from each of them. They are not first hand. It is clear that the author weighed properly each detail until he found the right form. But, in the choice made by Petru Creția for „ani ca nouri" (*years like veils*), the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse is *Și nici o dată n'or să vie iar* (*And they will not ever/once turn back*), as seen in Mss. 2260, 150 (deciphered by Perpessicius *niciodată* (*never*), linked, maybe intuitively or absent-mindedly). *Nici o dată* (*not ever/once*) is repeated in Mss. 2261, 237, this time written even by Perpessicius this way. We are not interested in the oscillation *nici o dată - niciodată* (*not ever/once - never*). It is more important that we have *nici odată* (*not ever*) in other forms.

After all, what does this poem want? At Eminescu, *Sonetele* (*Sonnets*) are fixed forms of incantation poetry, they raise the spirits, conjure, they remind us of *enigmas*, *superstitions* (*ghicitori*, *eresuri*). Here, the negation is strongly underlined

three times: *not ever, no, again* (*nici odată, nu, iarăși*). But, in the form of the first print, there still is a play-upon-words: (*lungi*) *nori* (*long clouds*) / *n'or* (*să vie*) (*will not/won't turn*). After all, it is a banal statement: the years have passed, and they won't turn back. Told to the long clouds, but which have no uniqueness, whose law is to turn back again and again, the irreversibility of time becoming relative. It is told three times that “*nu vine*” (*will not turn*) in firmer and firmer forms, among which *nici o dată* (*not ever/not even once*), not even once, it is very solid, but the image of *nour* (*the veil or cloud*) persisting in the play-upon-words ... gives some hope. In prophecies or incantations, divination texts in general, the word matches validate or invalidate; here, that *jamais* makes things relative. Let us pay attention to the logical accent (not necessarily to the prosody): *Trecut-au ani ca nouri lungi pe șesuri / Și niciodată n-or să vie iară:* the accent falls on *nouri* (*veils or clouds*), *niciodată* (*never*), nostalgically, but: *Trecut-au anii ca nori lungi pe șesuri / Și nici odată n'or să vie iar,* the accent falls on *anii* (*the years*) și *nici* (*not*), leaving a secondary accent line on the immediately following words: *nori* (*clouds*) – *n'or* (*will not*). After all, it is the „philosophy” of our „never say never” of nowadays. Even in *Luceafărul* (*Evening Star*), when saying at the presumptive mode: “*N'oi merge nici odată*” (*I won't ever go*), the king's daughter totally denies time, she thinks the action is relative and she leaves space for changes of mind, as a proof: the *Evening Star* really comes with the same entreaty / request. She does not state firmly: *Nu merg* (*I won't come*), but leaves a trace of doubt: *Maybe I'll come, maybe I won't* (she even negotiates, asking him to come down on the earth, and so on).

It is important that the form „*nouri*” (*veils*) is in the manuscript 2260, 150, in correlation with *nici o dată* (*not ever/once*). The printed form, *nori* (*clouds*), is not in the manuscripts, but it is positioned in *Maioreșcu's Edition* besides the word *nici odată* (“*ne'er*”). The play-upon-words made by *Eminescu* cannot be destroyed by choosing the manuscript form *nouri* (*veils or clouds*), no matter how expressive and grammatically comfortable it would be (and, with *Eminescu*, *nouri* (*veils or clouds*) is recurrent, see also the character *Toma Nor*; moreover, the exception from here must be considered as relevant and must be kept), and *nici odată* (*ne'er*), split as it is, must be kept with the value from the preamble of *Luceafărul* (*Evening Star*): there, something is continuous, as negation is negated; here, it is seen as relative as, although mounted in a triple negation, it still stays in a powerful connection with the compared reality. Had he said: the years are *not* like the clouds which come and go, the years do not turn back again, the author would have told a simple truth, noticeable for everybody; when he says that the years are (passing) as clouds do, it is something else. It means that he hopes for them to come back or, as in *Cu mâne zilele-ți adaogi* (*With Tomorrow, You Add More Days to Yours*, from the same manuscript area), that he intends to develop his own theory of the complete time.