
**MIHAI EMINESCU—
THE COMPLETE MAN OF ROMANIAN CULTURE***

CONSTANTIN NOICA

Mihai Eminescu (1850—1889) could have been the greatest thinker in Romanian culture, if he had not happened to be its greatest poet. We have grown too accustomed to see him as a poet, forgetting about the man of culture in him or occasionally seeing him as a man of free, almost improvised education, without any inclination of scholarly culture. But the 44 manuscript notebooks left by him clearly show (in spite of their being just shapeless and approximate notes jotted down by a young man between the ages of 19 and 23) how perceptive and broad his mind was, how keen on specialized information, whether it was philosophy or history, economics or philology. This Eminescu, the healthy and eager quester, must be discovered again standing side by side — and perhaps in perfect union — with the poet of deep sadness.

Eminescu was not yet twenty when he came into contact with Kant's writings and not yet 25 when he translated a substantial part — incidentally the most difficult — of Kant's capital work. Nobody who is willing to go deeper into Eminescu's literary and philosophical creation can ignore this great event of Romanian culture. In 1874 Eminescu gave the following answer to the urge of the great critic and man of culture Titu Maiorescu (1840—1917) — right then on the point of becoming minister of public education — to work in Germany for a Ph. D. in philosophy: "I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the chance you are giving me, the prospect of appointing my humble person in the lofty position of a professor of philosophy; but although such a proposal can only be flattering to me and suitable to my entire frame of mind, my conscience tells me it comes too soon. At the moment, the mere form of possessing an academic title would be the smallest obstacle, the easiest to overcome. But is this the only one? Could I, at my age and without a definite plan of studies, thoroughly worked out, dare to do such a thing?"

In spite of this legitimate modesty, nevertheless Eminescu did not refuse any chance of university activity. Soon afterwards he wrote: "A free position of a 'Dozent' — therefore a private one — covering lectures on a definitely limited domain of philosophy — for instance Kant and Schopenhauer in particular, as expressed in their respective writings — I could dare to assume responsibility of..."

Without actually professing philosophy, not only did Eminescu intuit but he even practised, in his own rhapsodic manner, a few things which his successors have not always proved inclined to do:

- He translated philosophical texts — which has not been done to a sufficient extent until recently;
- He learnt or at least strove to learn the great languages of traditional cultures;

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- He permanently dwelt on the sources, being one of the few Romanian scholars of the time who knew how to make use of manuscripts;
 - He strove to find or to coin Romanian terms suiting philosophical thinking and emotion;
 - Permanently, but much more markedly in his last years, he showed interest in and open-mindedness for sciences.

And the same can be said for the study of history, for the study of economics or of philology: whether thoroughly trained or not, Eminescu had the intuition of the essential.

On page 114 of manuscript 2258, Eminescu made this marginal note of strange expressiveness as a comment on a fundamental text — or perhaps on the entire *Critique of Pure Reason* from which he was translating:

"Representation is a ball of thread, unique, absolute, simultaneously given and perceived. The unfurling of this simultaneous ball of thread is time and — experience. Or it is also a fleece from which we spin the thread of time; only thus can we see what it contains. Unfortunately the spinning and the fleece last for ever. Whoever can contemplate the fleece ignoring the spinning has philosophical inclinations."

Whoever can contemplate the fleece . . . Eminescu himself seems to have been watching at that moment the fleece of philosophy, of the real reflected in philosophy or of time rolled up. You try to link the note made by him to the place where it appears (as part of *Transcendental Analytics*, in the subchapter "On the Synthesis of Apprehension in Intuition") and it makes little sense. Then you try to interpret this note as a sort of motto to the thinking in Kant's book and you manage a little better. Yet it may occur to you to go beyond one work and one author, to think of philosophy itself, and then Eminescu's thought will clearly reveal itself: whoever can contemplate the fleece . . . has philosophical inclinations.

"Representation is a ball of thread." In the beginning, everything is a ball of same kind. Your own life is a ball of thread, the world's history is a ball of thread, and there are scholars who tell us that originally matter used to be a ball, of extreme density at that, which began expanding and is still going hard at it. If Eminescu says that representation is a ball of thread, he probably does so under the influence of Kant's language. Perhaps he wanted to say: the representation is that of a ball; or perhaps by "representation" we understand not so much a product of conscious life but consciousness itself as obtained about something that is given to us (in fact Kant himself said it) and which is "given to us simultaneously." But have you got philosophical inclinations if you only see this ball of thread? Not yet.

"The unfurling of this simultaneous ball of thread is time." You must see its unfurling and then wisdom begins to glimmer. There is some deep meaning in Eminescu's words, for it makes you see time no longer as an empty frame, a mere order of succession, but primarily as the time of things, growing and unfurling out of things, in the way today's science prefers speaking about space too. The fact that Eminescu sees a time of concreteness and not a mere pendulum of a clock, a mere cosmic ticking, can also be shown by the thought that not only time but also experience is now involved.

But Eminescu does not say "time and experience," putting them together; he says: "Time and (dash) experience," separating them yet, in a way, not differentiating them. For experience *lato sensu* means "testing out" something, and the whole of time as unfurling could be the testing out of the initial ball of thread. And experience *stricto*

sensu is that of the world in man's consciousness, or of man plunged in the world, and it changes the wisdom to watch the unfurling of the ball during time into a skill that things share with us — to unfurl ourselves in time.

"Or it is also a fleece,' Eminescu therefore says, instead of "a ball of thread." A mere ball of thread would unfurl blindly, would twist this way and that and might even knot itself again, while a fleece has in itself the assurance of an unfurling which only expects its spinning. It is out of this fleece that we and things spin the thread of time. And now time has indeed become a form of order and not one of mere counting. A thread is spun with it, and its unfurling means spinning.

He who has had the wisdom to see that everything is unfurling in time, who subsequently understood unfurling in time as genuine experience — can now see, under the organized pouring of things, what exactly the fleece contains. He has become a lucid consciousness. But still he is far from being a philosophical consciousness, because: "unfortunately both spinning and the fleece last for ever."

Why all of a sudden this "unfortunately" — a sad exclamation in the midst of an objective and cold description of things? Perhaps precisely because it is a stroke of bad luck not to have obtained a philosophical consciousness as yet, Eminescu seems to say. Both ourselves and things keep spinning the thread of time, with our inborn skill, under the laws which govern all of us and all things. Moreover, as human beings, we sometimes put some skill of our own to good use. But what could a splash made by a man mean among all the billows that carry him? Can he spin himself out of the spinning, out of Time? Can one again watch everything as "a ball of thread, unique, absolute, simultaneously given and perceived?"

Eminescu provides the answer concluding: "Whoever can contemplate the fleece ignoring the spinning has philosophical inclinations". Is it an invitation to philosophical meditation? Or is it irony?

First of all, you tell yourself, since Eminescu describes with such assurance the hour of man's meditation when these philosophical inclinations appear in him, maybe he lived that hour, lingered in it. But he returned to the unhappiness before the philosophical hour and gave it poetical expression.

On the other hand, does Eminescu mean that the man with philosophical inclinations truly forgets about the spinning? That he observes the fleece very much as in the beginning, as a ball of thread without sending it aspin? Perhaps he means to say: philosophical inclinations are proved by he who abstracts himself from the spinning, not by those who pretend it does not exist; they are proved by the man who (as Kant showed) enters transcendental Time instead of remaining within the time. For, on the contrary, a philosophical perspective can only be acquired as the spinning of the thread, as the unfurling of another time. And such is the beatitude of philosophy.

Why did Eminescu fail the beatitude — be it momentary — of philosophizing, is a mystery of his soul or perhaps of his body, a mystery of his place or of his time in history. Yet, if we mentioned Eminescu's marginal note, we did it not so much for his sake as for somebody else's; we believe Eminescu actually described (in terms of surprising accuracy) a man, a real philosopher. Without realizing it, he described Hegel and one of his books, *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*.

Eminescu did not appear to have a very good opinion of Hegel, to the extent to which he knew the latter directly but especially indirectly, through Schopenhauer. A few notes of Eminescu's, his thoughts laid on paper in a useful letter from Berlin and

even the hilarious rhyme found for "Hegel" in his rhyming dictionary (manuscript 2265) would point to this. Nevertheless, his note on what philosophical proclivities imply could be an unexpectedly fine opening to Hegel's book.

The Phenomenology of the Spirit is a book in which man's consciousness appears, together with the whole world in which it plunges, as a ball of thread "unique, absolute, simultaneously given and perceived"; in which the ball unfurls and gives birth to historical time or to the experience which mankind's consciousness acquires along history. Hegel spins the thread of time, enabling us to see what it contains; but he shows us that, unfortunately, we are involved in the spinning and can hardly escape it. If we could only abstract ourselves for a moment from this spinning! Then we would be shown whatever unfurled before his eyes when he gave free rein to his philosophical inclinations.

But how could we find a "motto" precisely with the man whom Eminescu denies? Perhaps because nevertheless, in his own way, Eminescu was contemplating the fleece.

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In the editions of Eminescu's literary prose, from writings either published or left in manuscript, there is a fragment to which the editors have given the title "Archaeus". Page 22 of manuscript 2268, a fly-leaf, seems to be a fragment destined for the story "Archaeus" but left aside from it:

"But before you speak to me about Pharaoh Tla, I should like you to tell me what you mean by Archaeus, whose name you have uttered so many times tonight?"

"My dear ... I've spoken to you about the manuscript in the drawer. You will concede that all this comedy would hardly have taken place (...) but for that insignificant hundred years old manuscript at the bottom of the drawer. How much wealth (. . .) within a few dirty and dog-eared pages, in which Archaeus lay veiled . . . All right, look upon life as a comedy: but who stages it then? Look upon man as a machine: but who drives it then? Look upon nature as a decor: but who paints it then? And, then do not forget that the paper was necessary only in order to set Archaeus.

If you take the manuscript, does it mean that he does not exist? Oh, yes, he does. What was he? A mere nothing, a mere possibility.. . But now try to imagine that at the height of the performance, a wall falls, an actor breaks his neck, another actor forgets his lines... here is a wounded Archaeus and you feel that he is wounded. Why do you feel it? Because that nothing exists in you too, because he was insulted on stage and is insulted in you too. Nevertheless it could stay for thousands of years in a drawer, its paper body might rot, and you yourself might not have been born, might have joined the number of those that never were (. . .) Well, nevertheless existence was possible because he exists. He would have existed as an idea, as a comedy (merely mimed) whose manuscript has been lost and about which nobody

knows anything, although it used to exist, although it exists even now in Nature's mind."

"Therefore you have been, you are and you will always be."

Fascinating in this fragment from Eminescu is the feeling of concreteness, which triumphs in his most thoroughly philosophic visions. No matter then, in our analysis, the precedent set by Paracelsus, Van Helmont or possibly Iacob Boehme — however interesting it may be for the literary historian to see upon what Eminescu drew for his myth. Very much as in the short-story "The Wretched Dionysios" — where in the last analysis neither Kant nor Schopenhauer were involved, nor the Indian vision either—, in this particular fragment, Eminescu manipulated Archaeus very much as he wanted. None of the authors invoked could have had the freedom to lend so much colour to the archetype or was inclined to turn it to account at such a human level. You can feel that Archaeus has become Eminescu's myth, his justice or injustice, but philosophically or literarily, it is his own truth.

And then what is Archaeus in the version we have just read? Nothing grandiose, metaphysical, not an "eternal" archetype of things in the absolute, and even less so a mystical or religious-cosmological seminal reason, but a mere possibility, Eminescu says. Only that it is an organized one. It is a structure, if one prefers to say so, one that holds and makes something else hold through it. Does it exist anywhere? In the mind of nature, at most; which actually means it does not exist, it has no subsistence. On the other hand it has consistency. If it appears, it is like this: linked together, structured, organized — and cannot be otherwise. It may very well not be ("it could stay for thousands of years in a drawer, its paper body might rot"); but as soon as it appears it can only be in one way, as if everything were prescribed.

That such existences without "reality" — or rather such consistencies without subsistence — do exist around us, is attested by any theoretical science, first of all mathematics, in which a theory (therefore something rationally consistent) may not be constituted but only constitutes itself in a certain way. If you do not render it as it "exists", reason pure and simple is maimed.

Eminescu does not invoke the great rational order but the immanent order of every situation and being; not the generic but the specific order in immediate circumstances. In each real situation there is a "reason" to be found nesting as in a cocoon. In its different manifestations it may preserve a certain kind of relationship with general reason; important is now its relation with its substance which it controls and organizes by virtue of its very status of authentic, though unique, reason. Eminescu has a fine name: "Archaeus" for the fundamental principle of realities or situations in reality. As reason can be maimed, an Archaeus can be wounded too.

There is an Archaeus in every forgotten play. It is not the idea, not the text, nor its production or ideal performance but what makes them all possible. You don't

exactly know what an Archæus is except when you offend it; when the set collapses or the actor forgets his lines.

Such an instance is manuscript 2268, which suddenly makes Eminescu appear different, not pessimistic as he is usually regarded. *At least* the idea of offending an Archæus is characteristic of Eminescu and can be very suggestive too. An awkward handshake, a bad step, something you have failed to accomplish are as many offensive gestures to an archetypal world. Thinking archetypally, even nowadays a handshake is still part of a long-lost symbolism, a dancing step can send us from the profane space to a different one, something done is always something the demiurge first did and the holiday is a removal of man into a different time and space.

What then is Archæus after all? Like all good myths it has got lost among its own significances.

Leaving behind the *feeling* of a specific rationality that causes all of us — things and beings — to be but one. In spite of general dissolution and iwfl Srelativity, something keeps staying.

Like Goethe for the Germans, Eminescu is the better part of our consciousness. His books take you along so many roads of the mind or of the heart that eventually you discover that no matter what you wanted to say, it is already written there. When a people receives such a gift, they — including the younger generation — must be ready to accept it.