

# EMINESCU IN ELIADE'S VISION

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**Abstract.** The investigation emphasizes the pro-Eminescian contribution of the world famous Mircea Eliade, the Romanian scientist, philosopher and writer, as famous as Constantin Brâncuși was, on the realm of visual arts. These two, Eliade and Brâncuși are most frequently quoted, commented and *present*. Eminescu deserves no less and Eliade understood that Eminescu legitimately occupies a unique place in Romanian culture, as the embodiment of the identity and soul of the Romanian nation, given the exceptional value of his work. Eliade was by no means alone in his appreciation. Titu Maiorescu, Garabet Ibrăileanu, Nicolae Iorga, George Călinescu, Eugen Lovinescu, Lucian Blaga, Perpessicius, Tudor Vianu, Constantin Noica, Tudor Arghezi, Zoe Dumitrescu Bușulenga, Dimitrie Vatamaniuc, Ioana Em. Petrescu, Edgar Papu, Alexandru Surdu, Nicolae Georgescu, Amita Bhowe, Ion Negoïtescu, Petru Creția, Alexandru Oprea and many more found multiple meanings of Eminescu's work, as well as interpretations of his value as a symbol within the national consciousness.

**Key words:** Mihai Eminescu, philosophy, spirituality, gnosis, embodiment of national identity.

Eminescu is the Romanian author who has enjoyed the most and consistent exegesis, along the modern Romanian culture. On the value of Eminescu's work and symbol in the national consciousness and as the emblem of the Romanian soul sometimes, many had written from Titu Maiorescu, Garabet Ibrăileanu, Nicolae Iorga, George Călinescu, Eugen Lovinescu, Lucian Blaga, Perpessicius, Tudor Vianu, Constantin Noica, Tudor Arghezi, and other prominent people of Romanian culture. From the post-war period we should mention Zoe Dumitrescu Bușulenga, Dimitrie Vatamaniuc, and Ioana Em. Petrescu, Edgar Papu, Alexandru Surdu, Amita Bhowe, Ion Negoïtescu, Petru Creția, Alexandru Oprea.

Less known is the pro-Eminescian contribution of Mircea Eliade, the scientist, philosopher and Romanian writer who had conquered global fame, remaining intact until today, alongside that, in the realm of fine arts, of Constantin Brâncuși. They are the most frequently cited, commented, and the most *present* of the Romanian personalities, Eliade in the congresses of the Oriental specialists, historians and philosophers of religions, literary critics, or on the shelves of bookstores and libraries, Brâncuși in museums, in aesthetics and art history, and in the top auctions of his works.

Our leading exegete of Eminescu, university professor Nicolae Georgescu, gave us a wonderful book for mind and soul in 1999, the critical edition of the poem *Luceafărul*, or *The Morning Star* in the English language, superbly illustrated with the *Hyperyonian* sculptures of Constantin Brâncuși, then recently discovered. It was further evidence of Eminescu-Brâncuși inter-connections, whose immortal works drawn their sap from the archaic spirituality, from the layer of mothers in Gaea, from the *dough* of Romanian people, as frequently named by Eliade, but also with influences from the ancient Indian culture, proof that national and universal elements can live very well together.

Eliade has dispelled aspects concerning the work, destiny, and cultural influence of Eminescu over a large part of Romanian readers in the country and in the Diaspora, by journalism, lectures, conferences, pertinent assessments and forecasts.

The leader of the „new generation” of the '20s and '30s was fascinated by the encyclopaedic intellectual profile of the great poet, who was passionately interested and keenly understood various history and language problems, ethnography and folklore, politics and economics, mathematics, astronomy physics, philosophy, especially, epistemology, and last but not least journalism, in which he was brilliant, like no other great personality at the time. Eliade was similar to him in terms of complexity of the areas of interest, as well as by a very particular osmosis between erudition and passion, argument and vehemence. They were, obviously, kindred.

A constant in his scholarly comments regarding Eminescu was his „legitimizing” as the occupant of a *unique place* in the Romanian culture, the embodiment of Romanian identity and soul of the people, by the outstanding value of his work and genius endowment. Through this vision Eliade fitted into a strong current of opinion, theoretical support and even idolatrous fervour.

Among many stands, the most significant one is included in the preface to a poetry volume, written in Paris in 1949 and printed at Freiburg under the aegis of Romanian Library, nearing its celebration the centenary since the birth of the national poet. Eliade wrote there, among others, as one of the organizers of the anniversary events that implied the emotional factor, too. He wrote: „Everything created after him, from Nicolae Iorga and Tudor Arghezi to Vasile Pârvan, Nae Ionescu, Lucian Blaga, bear the seal of the genius, thought or at least of the Eminescian language. Rarely a whole people found itself in a poet with such spontaneity and such fervour as the Romanian people, in the work of Mihai Eminescu. We all love Creangă, we admire Hasdeu, we learn to write with Odobescu, we respect Titu Maiorescu and we hardly can let much time pass by without re-reading Caragiale. But Eminescu is, for each of us, *something else*. He revealed for us other horizons and helped us know another kind of tears. He and he alone helped us understand our heart beat. He enlightened for us the meaning and the joy of the misfortune to be Romanian” (...). „For us, Eminescu is not merely our greatest poet and the most brilliant genius born to Romanian earth, waters and sky. He is, in a particular manner, the embodiment of this sky and of this earth, with all the beauties, pains and hopes grown out of them. We, over here, severed from land and people, we find in him again everything that we left behind, from the skies over our mountains and from the melancholy of our sea, to the sky of the Romanian night and the blossoming linden (or lime) tree of our childhood (...)”

In the cultural post-war published works, Eliade showed interest especially for the place of Eminescu within the polarized structure of our culture. He presented his ideas in several essays and in a conference held in 1948 in Paris, at *Salle des Sociétés Savantes*, organized by the Cultural Association „Mihai Eminescu” of the emigrated Romanian intellectuals. We quote: „Any culture is polarized; that is, it is described by antinomian and complementary spiritual creations ,, as in the culture of the ancient Greece the Apollonian and Dionysian spirits were in confrontation, or as in Italian culture, where there is a double tradition illustrated by the tension between Dante and Petrarch, or between Papini and D’Annunzio, or in the French culture, the complementary between Rabelais and Pascal or between Voltaire and Rousseau, or in the German culture, between Meister Eckhart or Goethe, and Wagner or Nietzsche”.

Later, in his essay *Two Romanian Spiritual Traditions*, Eliade emphasized writing: „In the Romanian culture Mihai Eminescu earned a unique place”.

Nevertheless, his work cannot represent the Romanian spiritual phenomenon in its entirety.

It recalled the tension sensed along the modern Romanian culture and history – and we notice its continuance to this day – between the „Eminescu” pole (or Iorga) and „Caragiale” pole (or Lovinescu), a beneficial tension, Eliade predicts, because it nurtures Romanian spirituality defending it from formalism and keeping it open to history.

„Eminescu’s admirers” – wrote Eliade in the above mentioned essay – complained of the cosmopolitanism of „Caragiale’s followers”, for their lack of roots into the authentic Romanian soil („the last phanariot occupant” was what N. Davidescu called Caragiale), the excess of critical spirit, their complex of inferiority towards the Western civilization, the absence of the feeling of Nature in their work, the bias toward irony, practical jokes and scepticism, the realist and negative perception of woman and love, the minimization of the rural landscape and the emphasis of the ridicule of patriarchal customs etc. „Caragiale followers”, on the contrary, criticize the conservatism of the „Eminescu’s admirers”, their romantic vision of history, the exaggerate capitalization of a certain historical past and traditions not always worth praising, the appetite for emphasis and verbosity, the pseudo-heroism, the mystagogy and the misunderstood patriotism, their spiritual and cultural provincialism, their lyric attitude toward Nature, woman and love etc. (...) The conclusion: „In fact it is clear that as well the position represented by Caragiale, as the one represented by Eminescu belong equally to the Romanian phenomenon (...) Unwillingly, the literary character named Mitică of the Romanian writer Caragiale is part, with the same authenticity and vigour from the Romanian spirituality as does Eminescu’s character, Pitiful Dionysus [Sărmanul Dionis] or Liviu Rebreanu’s Ion” (p. 18-19).

The antinomian and complementary polarity, says Eliade, is not reducible only to „Eminescianism” and „Caragialism” but it has much deeper roots in the spirituality of the Romanian people in the folklore dominated by „pastoral” and „peasant” creations.

The echoes of this ancient spirituality, as those of the Romanian Middle Ages are breaking through into the creation of Mihai Eminescu, the last great romantic poet of the nineteenth century – as he was characterized Tudor Vianu – but also in the Dacian horizon and in the cosmological vision of where arises his literary work entitled Morning Star.

The value of his outstanding poetry, philosophy and journalism does not stay only the historical and cultural connections, but especially in the art of poetry, in the depth of meditation, in the vastness of his knowledge, in the ability to tailor Romanian language, the literary one and the foundations of the philosophy language, through the translations of the most difficult to translate German philosopher of modernity, Immanuel Kant.

It was in the natural order of things that the multilateral insomniac author and consumer of readings of all kinds, the encyclopaedist Mircea Eliade from the next century, to follow the appearance in the West, as well as within the country, the exegesis of commentators and translators of Eminescu's work. In 1928 he saluted the volume with 78 poems translated by the literary historian Ramiro Ortiz, author of Italian poetry masterpieces massive exegesis named the *Masterpieces of the Italian Lyrics*, who became in 1934 a member of the Romanian Academy. The year 1963 was generous; it was marked by the appearance of two books analyzing Eminescu's poetry

work in Italy and France. In Paris was published at the Didier publishing house the volume *La Génèse intérieure des poésies d'Eminescu*, [*The Interior Genesis of the Poems of Eminescu*] when the author was a Sorbona professor of Roman languages Allain Guillerrou, specialized in the Romanian language and literature as a fellow of the French Institute, with long stages of studies and research in Bucharest and Jassy. As a professor refugee, during the war, he established at Nice University the Department *Eminescu*, in 1943, with Elena Văcărescu and Eugen Ionescu.

Guillerrou's book highlights new referential marks for the understanding of Eminescu's creation, the depth of his lyric meditation and the expressive force of his artistic talent. Eminescu, sustains the author, brings a new original richness to the common fund of the European literature, showing his capacity to model art *at the level of the universal lyric masterpieces*. Guillerrou was, at the same time, a friend and admirer of Eliade's literature. He translated in French his novels *Maitreyi* and *Noaptea de Sânziene* [*The Forbidden Forest*], published in tens of editions.

Also in 1963, in Modena, the volume entitled *Mihai Eminescu o dell'Assoluto Studi e Testi*, 482 pages. [*Mihai Eminescu or the Absolute*] saw the light of print under the auspices of the Institute of Roman Philology from University of Rome. The author was, Miss Rosa Del Conte, teacher of Romanian language at La Sapienza University of Rome, with a presence of six years at Romanian literature departments in Bucharest, Câmpulung-Muscel and Cluj. Born in 1907 and crossing the threshold of one hundred, she became the most longeval literary critic and historian in the world.

In what regards the book reviewed Eliade states clearly: „It is, no doubt, the most vast monograph dedicated, in a foreign language, to Mihai Eminescu” (...) If there were merely the fact that there are included and translated several thousands of lines – among which more than half from Perpessicius's edited manuscript – and we should still be grateful to the author (...) For the first time, the poetic work of Eminescu is analyzed and interpreted in its *entirety*, that is, by taking into consideration all the versions and drafts published in Perpessicius's magisterial edition”. Rosa Del Conte's book is „a dense, rich, bold work”.

Eliade was always fascinated by the great „perfectionist” authors, himself working hard for each page of his fundamental books on the history of beliefs and religious ideas, but also on the literary masterpiece, the novel *Noaptea de Sânziene* [*The Forbidden Forest*]. He seemed delighted that Eminescu overcame him in perfectionism! And we quote: „When he evoked ‘those possessed by the deep thirst of the perfect forms’ Eminescu thought, of course, of himself, too. We have nowadays 13 versions of the poem *Despărțire* [*Break up*], all written between 1877 and 1879. That admirable poem *Memento Mori* or *Vanity Panorama* (1872) includes 218 strophes with over 1300 lines, of which only the fragment *Egipetul* [*The Egypt*] (that is, 15 strophes) was published during the life of the poet. So much beauty slept buried for so many decades! How would we have loved to read during our teenage years, when we ourselves have discovered *Egipetul* that extraordinary prologue, a true ecstatic ascent to imaginary worlds”?

„My flock of dreams I graze as golden sheep,  
When the dark of the night – the starry Moorish king –  
Leaves his soft puffy clouds on welkin bed,  
And the silver moon, as a sweet sun paled,

Casts spells over the world through the stars snowing,  
 When, my child, in their strata tales grow, glowing.  
 Go you, boat of my life, on the glomming waves of dream,  
 Up to where holy waters proud stand up in banks,  
 With the green laurel groves and cypress meadows,  
 Where the black branches eternally a song-sigh,  
 Where the saints roam in their long coats of light,  
 Where death is; with her black wings and pretty face”.

In a substantial part of the volume, entitled „aspects of art and language Eminescu” Rosa Del Conte studies chromatic sensitivity, the „secret” of Eminescu’s lyrical musicality, the symbolism of matter, the „autochthonous” substrate of Eminescu’s Culture and the reflection of the „cultural traditions in certain images of Eminescu’s language”. Eliade points out that unlike the most Romanian literary critics and historians interested to discover especially influences of Western culture; Rosa Del Conte gives priority in her analyses to the first „autochthonous” phase in the spiritual formation of the poet. Raised in the atmosphere which reflects Orthodox spirituality - quote from del Conte - „be it in educated religious tradition” grown on the sources of the oldest patristic literature, not always foreign to Neo-Platonist and Gnostic influences, or in traditional folklore, which reflects so many aspects of popular Salvo-Byzantine ‘piety’. And it ought to predispose him (underlined by the author) to enter either in the naturally magical climate of philosophy and German Romantic poetry, or in the mythical oriental air of thinking”.

Another part of Rosa Del Conte’s book examines Eminescu's main lyrical themes. Eliade is fascinated by six chapters, „the most substantial and bold”, destined to analyze the issues of Time: Demiurge-Time, head of existential drama and the Absolute understood as Eternity; becoming as structure of the cosmic time and human destiny inserted into the circular flow of Time; Poetry overcoming Time and the prophet-poet; this feeling of time duration and the ambivalence of psychological time; the evasion of time and cosmic unity; love as a calling of the Absolute. At the heart of all these aspects is the problem of Time and Eternity, of the Demiurge and cosmogony.

All these are for Eliade perennial issues of philosophy and gnosis, very complex, accessible only to those who need vocation and culture. Despite being unsystematic as a philosopher, Eminescu impresses with the lectures presented and commented in his notebooks, predominantly from Kant and Schopenhauer.

It was known long ago that Eminescu approached philosophy issues not on the „classical and pedagogical” path fundamental works, as on devious and obscure roads of magic and Hermetic gnosis, its exegetes putting this preference on the account of German Romanticism.

„Cosmic Imagination” is situated to the centre of Eminescu’s universe. The cosmogonist theme is combined with the motif of the Magus where Time dominates. Rosa Del Conte distinguishes „a *vital time* that the mystical conception, of astral structure, of the poet, makes it coincide with the cosmic time and with a *mortal time* that his ethical pessimism makes it coincide with the mode of existence on Earth”. The adequate terminology for such an analysis is accessible to the specialists of the field, so that the author uses an explanatory Romanian saying: „The clock works and strikes, but time stays time”.

Eliade remembers that the other brilliant disciple of Nae Ionescu, with which he was confronting in the complicated issues of the philosophy of life, at that villa in Băneasa, the professor had, and that became a true Romanian *Akados Garden*, Mircea Vulcănescu, deciphered the above mentioned saying „differentiating the historical duration (in a dramatic flow: ‘the clock...strikes’) and the cosmic time which ‘stays time’, because it is circular. This ambivalence of Time is exemplified with versions and subversions from *The Morning Star*, such as:

„Time is stretching a dead body  
And it becomes eternity”.

Or

„From the bosom of perennial yesterday  
Live the perishable today”.

The divinity, the perfection, the power, the beatitude „are supportive of the infinite duration”: „In heaven’s apiary there is the old man burdened with days, God” or the „old magus” of which the Emperor (himself Elder, with one hundred years on his snowy forehead”) says:

„While he was still young he was an elder, though:  
The eternal flow of times cannot be disturbed”

These are images that, according to Eliade, betray Eminescu’s fascination for everything that succeeds, by un-natural prolonging of its own natural duration, to resist in front of decomposition and death. We quote: „In an article from 25 years ago (*Euthanasius Island*, Review of Royal Foundations, 1939) I have shown how the heavenly images in Eminescu’s work are consistent with the hope in a magic or ecstatic ‘hold up’ of the time.”

The article was occasioned by the appearance of volume IV of the *Works of Mihai Eminescu*, and signed by George Călinescu, the eminent literary critic - as proclaimed by Eliade - cherishing his fantastic erudition and many of the aesthetic and philosophical evaluations, but also expressing disagreements between them two, inclusively in what the „Island” was concerned, and on the possible inspiration sources from Indian mythology, strictly regarding their discussion of the short story *Caesara*. Because, as the eminent researcher Amitha Bose was to prove later on, Eminescu’s knowledge and his emphatic orientation toward the ancient Hindu culture were impressive.

Since the very first line of his article Eliade states categorically: „The letter of the old hermit, at the beginning of chapter III of *Caesara*, includes, undoubtedly, the ultimate perfect vision of heaven in Romanian literature” (...) „*Euthanasius Island* presents especially a maximal interest for the understanding of the poet. It is not an accident that is chosen as place for the history of the passion between Geronimo and *Caesara*” (...) The magic of the island, by itself, solves the drama of the characters”.<sup>1</sup>

We remind here the fantastic stage decoration: It is a small island, in the middle of a lake situated on a larger island, in a deep valley, under the glimmering level of the sea, a mythical island, of course, where one can arrive through a moving stone found in a cave. Within this luxuriant „island within island”, with an orchard of oranges, flowers and apiary, a hermit lived, Euthanasius. The lake is fuelled by four springs. In the text are noticeable particular elements, symbols of heavens, for instance, the four springs –

<sup>1</sup> Translation from Romanian into English language by Henrieta Anișoara Șerban.

reminiscence of the four rivers of Heaven (*Genesis*, 2, 10) and the „flower place” in the small island as a replica of the ‘garden’ from the centre of the Paradise.

Also, the dynamic of the characters, in this described landscape, is marked by symbols. The undecided and melancholic (placid) Geronimo does not succeed to fall in love with the passionate maiden Caesara, until after he contemplates her, in nude, on the shore of the island. They have known each other from the “fortress”, but only the paradise island made possible the Adamic love of the two. The nudity discovered by Caesara and Geronimo represent as well an ambiguous state of plenary life and, at the same time of symbolic death, because the dead are buried naked and embraces an agricultural fate becoming seed. They live Adamicly because they have renounced any „human form”, completely unveiled, entering in a sacred area, that is *real*, unlike the surrounding space, ‘profane’, ground by the everlasting becoming and crumbled by illusions, sufferance and vanity.

The symbol of initiate man is embodied by the ability of Euthanasius and later on of Caesara’s to discover the cave and the small opening permitting the access inside the island to „those who long – Eliade writes – with all their being toward the reality and the beatitude of the *beginning*, of the primordial state. The heavenly island can be, at the same time an island of death similarly to these ‘islands of the blessed’ where certain heroes lived, such as Pelee, Cadmus, Achilles” (...). The ambivalence of the island of Euthanasius is produced on a land where „the beatitude of the Adamic life does not exclude the beatitude of the ‘beautiful death’; both one and another are states in which the human nature – the drama, the pain, the becoming – was suspended. The symmetry is thus emphasized by the poet. The naked corpse of the hermit Euthanasius stays buried under the water fall of a creek ... „let tropical creeper and water flowers surround with their vegetation my body and let that my hair and beard entangle their threads... The river flowing forever fresh to dissolve me and unite myself with the whole nature, *but* (Eliade’s emphasis) *to protect me from rottenness*”, so „as a king from the fairy tales, asleep for hundreds of years on an enchanted island”.

The importance of the cosmogonist elements (water, islands) in Eminescu's work, as revealed by George Călinescu fully founded, says Eliade. I quote: „They belong so much to the spiritual climate of the poet's creation that seems incomprehensible - or, in any case, deprived of metaphysical significance and consistency – if one is not aware of them.”

„With the intuition of a creator, a specific symbol intervenes in a work of art and organizes it with its precise coherence, with absconded ‘logic’, without the poet always realizing the meanings, the proportions and the valences of the symbol. Each great creator –Eliade affirms – rediscovers certain symbols, unknowingly”, in a simple act of intuition, of „revelation” from an extra rational zone. „Knowing Eminescu’s philosophical vocation and his romantic descendance, we are entitled to grant an important role to symbol and metaphysics in the explanation of his poetic work”.

It is said sometimes that Eminescu's stature in our culture is comparable to that of Goethe in German culture, of course keeping the proportions. Among the supporters of this bold comparison was also Eliade. We are quoting here his arguments:

“Considering just what he published during his life and what has been preserved in his notebooks, Eminescu's culture was truly exceptional. It was undoubtedly the most cultivated poet of the century, only to be joined by Goethe (obviously, if Goethe would have died before age 40). Also in Goethe finds response his tendency toward the

‘universal man’. But again, when speaking of Eminescu’s ‘philosophy’ Eminescu cannot be compared to a professor of philosophy, but to an encyclopaedic mind, also one inclined personal synthesis, similarly to Goethe’s mind”.

However amendable the evaluations of Mircea Eliade might be, as „exercises of admiration” – a phrase charged with special meaning by Emil Cioran – they bring us the most beautiful and deserved eulogy we know:

„In this love of the Romanian people for its greatest poet there is the thirst for eternity of the whole community. A people survive not through his history, but through the creations of his genii (...) In vain attempts a king or a despot to erect his state for eternity. A historical form, as perfect as it may be, is always precarious nevertheless: it lasts for a number of years and then it leaves the place for another historical form (...). The only ‘eternity’ accepted by history is the one of the spiritual creations (...) The pathetically fight of Hellenistic Greece with Persian people is still significant for the modern world because Aeschylus sang it” (...)

„Obscure, but not less pathetic, Romanian people senses that has his right to ‘immortality’ ensured, especially due to the creation of Mihai Eminescu. Our oil and gold may come to an end one day. Our wheat can grow as well elsewhere. And it is possible that one not too distant day, world strategy registered such modifications that our position as borderline people has lost all meaning registered for a century and a half”; „in other words Romania might lose, forever, any chance to play an active role in universal history. All these might happen. Only one thing cannot happen anymore: the disappearance of Eminescu’s poems. And, for as long as there is, somewhere in the world, even one exemplary of Eminescu’s poems, the identity of our nation is saved”.

We are ending here this presentation that we preferred to offer, predominantly, as a ‘review’ from Eliade, an author interpreting Eminescu more interestingly and substantially, more correctly and with more merit than what is said nowadays of Eminescu, in this noise of the unending transition, since the loss of contact with the Romanian genii Pleiades that followed after Eminescu, up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. „As for myself, wrote Eliade in his essay *How to make a culture* (December 1951) – I would most certainly expect with less fear the future have I known that somewhere, in the country or elsewhere, a new Eminescu was born, or a new Iorga, or if I knew that a Romanian physicist is getting closer to a new system of understanding the Universe, or that a Romanian philosopher is preparing a book that shall radically change the orientation of human thought (...) If Einstein were Romanian, a letter from him addressed to a newspaper would have weighted much more for the destinies of Romanian people than tens of tons ‘propaganda’”.

A culture – he added – is not accomplished with programmes and manifestos, but first of all, through the creation of cultural values.

These cannot be improvised – Ladies and Gentlemen – we must wait to be created, naturally, by the personal vocations, by freedom and the sustainability of creation, not through orders, through partisan demystifications, or the favouritism of culture administrators or sponsors. The self-proclaimed elites have not produced yet any Einstein and it was not the cult of Eminescu, or the The Little Ewe ballad, what prevented them to produce remarkable values.

*Translation by Henrieta Anișoara Șerba*