Shakespeare's Influence on Eminescu's Literary Works

(abstract)

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The similarities between Eminescu and Shakespeare are diverse and can be made on many levels of interpretation. From the axiological point of view, both Eminescu and Shakespeare are two artistic personalities who dominate the Romanian national culture – Eminescu, and the English national culture – Shakespeare. On the other hand, according to Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon*, Shakespeare could be placed right in the middle of the European culture; that is why a research which focuses on the literary works of the two canonical writers is first of all necessary so as to fundamentally contribute to the definition, delimitation and integration of the Romanian literature within the European literature and, implicitly, within the universal literature.

In the chapter entitled *The Possibilities and the Specific Character of the Comparative Method*, we will define the working instruments, beginning with the French school of comparative literature and, then, continuing with the American school's contributions, also mentioning the attitude of the Romanian critics interested in the comparative literary research. Therefore, we will accomplish a comparative study which illustrates the way in which the spirituality of an époque establishes similar ways of thinking and artistic manifestation, which overlap, develop themselves simultaneously or become complementary under some typical, human manifestations. Not only the discovery of some similarities of themes, images or schemes of thinking and poetical development is important; there are also important the new relations and hermeneutic horizons which an imaginative universe suggest to another artistic universe. The parallelisms, accidental or not, reveal values to one another, they complete each other in order to clear up the motivations and accomplishments of a certain type of spirituality which make "a platform of enriched re-reading of the two writers, made through the

analogical context hatched to each other by the other writer's literary works"[1] out of "the typological correlation", which leads to the enhancement of the dimension of the poetical sense. Because of all these reasons we believe that a concise presentation of the Shakespearean literary works would be necessary within the Victorian period.

In the next chapter, *The Originality and Complexity of the Shakespearean Literary Works*, we will focus on the specific character of the European literature, especially the English literature from the 16th century, beginning with writers, like the poet Edmund Spenser, the novelist John Lyly or the playwright Christopher Marlowe, who were all considered Shakespeare's forerunners, then we will concentrate on the biographical moments which are significant for the understanding of the Shakespearean literary works, thus coming to the originality and complexity of Shakespeare's literature. If on a linguistic level, among the 20.000 words which make up the vocabulary of Shakespeare's literary creation, some of them seem to have been created by Shakespeare himself, on a rhetorical level the various associations of words give birth to new meanings, so that the elaboration of some special studies as well as of some Shakespearean grammars was necessary for an adequate understanding of the texts[2]. Shakespeare's originality can also be seen as far as the stylistic and poetical methods are concerned, through the extremely suggestive expressions and the musicality of his poetry – a reason for which we will focus on his most representative poems. Among these, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, through their extensive discursive developments, reveal what the rigours imposed by the fixed form of the sonnet will signify for Shakespeare. Shakespeare has written 154 sonnets which present themselves as a small love story, with three characters: the poet, his unfaithful sweetheart and the poet's friend, who seduces the poet's sweetheart. Hamlet's author distinguishes himself as a playwright by creating new types of protagonists, real characters of the tragedy,

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[1] Viorica Nişcov, *Eminescu şi Novalis*, in *Caietele Mihai Eminescu, IV*, Eminescu Publishing House, 1977, p. 140.
[2] See, for example, the works *A grammar of Shakespeare's language* by Norman Francis Blake, Houndmills/New York: Palgrave, 2002, *Shakespearean Sentences: A Study in Style and Syntax* by John Porter Houston, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1988, or *Shakespeare: His Life, His Language, His Theatre* by Sam Schoenbaum, New York: Signet Classics, 1990.

namely the negative heroes, as we can notice in the plays *Richard III* and *Macbeth*. The vast Shakespearean dramatic works include ten tragedies, having as a background England's history, seven plays inspired from the Greek-Latin antiquity, five tragedies and fifteen comedies.

In the fourth chapter, *The Recovery of Antiquity in Shakespeare's and Eminescu's literary works*, we will discuss the way in which the two writers have intercepted and utilized different elements of the Greek-Latin classicism. The Greek antiquity brigs about innovations in the dramatic creation, modifies the sense of the tragic component, revives the traditional myths, makes heroes with multiple valences out of certain characters or, on the contrary, it makes simple mortals out of them, as we can notice in Sophocles's (495-406), Euripides's (480-406) or Xenophon's works. As far as the Latin antiquity is concerned, which was very much influenced by the Greek antiquity, it cultivates the art of the dramatic show based on music, dance and dumbshow, sometimes in detriment of the dramatic text. Terence (190-159), well known for his ideal of humanity, and Seneca (4-65), who was the last great author who gave value to dramaturgy thanks to his vivid discourse, complete the group of authentic writers who have been an inspiration for the next generations of dramatic authors. Maiorescu used to say in his article *Direcţia nouă în poezia română* (1872) that, in Eminescu's literary works, we encounter "a rare thing among ourselves, the love and understanding of the ancient art"[3], and in *Eminescu şi poeziile lui* (1889), the critic underlines the fact that Eminescu "used to continuously memorize the significant works from the ancient and modern literature"[4]. Slavici confesses that Homer was Eminescu's favourite author, and in his manuscips we can find some fragments which were translated from the *Odyssey*. Eminescu also admired Plato, Horace and Vergil. As far as Eminescu's capacity of translating is concerned, we should mention the conference of the academician Petre Gheorghe Bârlea, at the Romanian Academy, on the 17th of March 2005, within the cycle *The Romanian Language and its Relations with the Romanians' Culture and History*. If, on the whole,

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[3] Titu Maiorescu, *Direcţia nouă în poezia română* (1872), in *Critice I*, a revised edition and chronological table by Domnica Filimon, preface by Eugen Todoran, Minerva Publishing House, BPT, 1973, p. 172.

[4] Titu Maiorescu, *Eminescu şi poeziile lui* (1889), in *Critice II*, a revised edition and chronological table by Domnica Filimon, preface by Eugen Todoran, Minerva Publishing House, BPT, 1973, p. 263.

the speech refers to the contributions of the translations from Latin to the formation and development of the Romanian literary language, *Lecția lui Eminescu*[5] is given as an example within the context of the translations from Latin in the great classic authors' époque. The Romanian critic is talking about not only the correct translation, from the grammatical as well as from the lexical point of view, but also about the ancient literature's great impact on the Romanian grammatical and lexical structures and on the poetical images from the Romanian literature. From this point of view, Eminescu, although he has translated only three poems written in the Latin language, is "a model of the translator-creator of the Romanian literary language", as Maiorescu used to say in his speech.

The fifth chapter, *Shakespeare's Influence on Eminescu's Poetry*, is concerned with the poetical works of the two writers. Ştefan Avădanei ascertains that "the only domains in which one can establish real contacts between Eminescu and the English literature are that of Shakespeare's and of romanticism."[6] In Eminescu's works from his youth period, Shakespeare is first of all present through quotations and allusions (or – as critics used to call them – "contaminations") which prove that Eminescu regarded Shakespeare as an exponential author. The end of the poem *Mortua est!* (and the sub-manuscript *Elena – meditaţiune*) changes itself into a commentary on the well-known monologue from *Hamlet* (Act III, Scene I): "For who shall declare which is ill and which well, / The is or the isn't? Can anyone tell? / For he who is not, even grief can't destroy, / And oft is the grieving, and seldom the joy."[7] We can also mention here *Cugetările sărmanului Dionis* ("My kingdom for a cigarette") or King Lear's invocation in *Împărat şi proletar*. Another kind of influences which can be identified is the presence of the same images, themes or motifs. We will first concentrate on the motif "life as a dream", with its variants: "life as a shadow or as a sleep", then "life as an insignificant passage into non-existence", but also "life as a story told by a foreign mouth". The genius'

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[5] Petre Gheorghe Bârlea, *Rolul traducerilor din latină în evoluţia limbii române literare*, The Romanian Academy Publishing House, "Conferinţele Academiei Române" Collection, Bucharest, 2005, p. 30.

[6] Ştefan Avădanei, *Eminescu şi literatura engleză*, Junimea Publishing House, Iaşi, 1982, p.16.

[7] Mihai Eminescu, *Poems*, English version by Corneliu N. Popescu, Eminescu Publishing House, 1978, p. 68.

suffering' condition and women's perfidiousness' image seem to be complementary at both Shakespeare and Schopenhauer.

The sixth chapter, *Shakespearean Echoes in Eminescu's Prose and Journalistic Articles*, is based on different Shakespearean echoes which we can encounter in Eminescu's prose. Thus, one of the heroines is compared to a "feminine Hamlet" and the hero from the posthumous short story *Archaeus* is talking about books as "words! words! words!", just like in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* (Act II, Scene II). "The world as a dream" can also be found in Eminescu's prose – Dionis considers the world as a "dull dream – a catlike dream" and after that he offers the solution – "Come, sleep – or come, death." Another significant detail is that in *Cugetările sărmanului Dionis*, the famous interpreter of Shakespeare's literary works, the actor Garrick, appears. At both Shakespeare and Eminescu the famous "Ophelia's complex" is based on Charon's ancient myth, which makes the artists imagine death as floating on the water – a matter of death. This complex, also analyzed by Byron, Keats or Poe, appears not only in *Memento Mori*, but also in narratives like *Avatarii faraonului Tlà*, *Geniu pustiu* or *Cezara*. The motif of the double can be found in *Gemenii* and *Macbeth*, but its universality and different usage by the two writers make us believe that Eminescu wasn't much influenced by Shakespeare in this respect.

The seventh chapter, *Shakespeare's Theatre and Eminescu's Dramatic Projects*, begins with several remarks on art and the artist, in which Shakespeare's name is also mentioned: "Homer and Shakespeare, Raphael, the geniuses in art are born once at 3 or 4 thousand years."[8] A letter addressed to Iacob Negruzzi from the 17th of June 1870 includes a commentary on the author's sincerity towards his literary creation, very much like the theory of empathy formulated by Coleridge with respect to Shakespeare.

Having Shakespeare as a model, as we can easily notice from the fact that he is given as an example for our dramaturgy by Heliade, Hasdeu, Bolliac or Negruzzi, Eminescu partially accomplishes a cycle of plays inspired from Moldavia's history. More precisely, it is about a national epic, which deals with the period beginning with the

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[8] Manuscript 2255, fragment 256. Apud. Ştefan Avădanei, *Eminescu şi literatura engleză*, Junimea Publishing House, Iaşi, 1982, p.41.

Middle Ages until the 18th century, focusing on the voivodes from the Muşatin descent. Just as Shakespeare had found his inspiration sources for his historical plays in Hollinshed's chronicles, Eminescu made use of the Moldavian chronicles, especially Ureche's and Neculce's chronicles (published by Kogălniceanu), in order to accomplish his most ambitious theatrical project: *Dodecameron dramatic*. Considered one of Eminescu's most complex plays, *Bogdan-Dragoş* can be found in more than ten manuscripts and its story is reiterated, with a few changes, in *Grue-Sânger*. Călinescu was the one who noticed some Shakespearean influences on this play, but Filimon Taniac[9] was the one who has developed a comparative study, underlining the fact that the urge of Macbeth's wife in order to kill the king of Scotland is the same as Bogdana's urge, Sas's wife, to kill Bogdab, Dragul's son; even if Bogdana's urge from Act II, Scene I, resembles the one from Macbeth (Act I, Scene VII and Act II, Scene I), it's about the general aspects, and not the significant details and dramatic conception. In one of his chronicles, Eminescu mentions some names of playwrights whom he considers worthy of being given as examples for the Romanian playwrights: Hugo, Shakespeare, the Norwegian B. Björnson and the Spanish playwrights.

The motifs and themes' circulation in the universal literature is a phenomenon which has been very much acknowledged and studied. Their presence on several literary meridians, either simultaneously or successively, can be explained, first of all, through the existence of some prototypical models of thinking and feeling, therefore they are pure parallelisms or homologies. The correspondences between Eminescu and Shakespeare represent a combination of these themes and motifs, a result of the artistic processing and assimilation, together with affinities, influences and catalytic correspondences through different intermediaries of the universal culture.

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[9] Filimon Taniac, *Bogdan Dragoş,* in *Buletinul „Mihai Eminescu",* 1933, no.11, p. 7-12.