

## **Cultural Journalist Eminescu and the Theatre from Bucharest**

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### **Abstract**

Eminescian cultural journalism means to dedicate several articles to literature, language, folklore, theater, religion, education and culture. In this paper, I pointed out that, of the 20 items about theater, 11 are dramatic chronicles and 9 are theatrical dissertations. Like inter-war Camil Petrescu, the journalist Eminescu exceeded in the 8th and 9th decades of the nineteenth century and reviewed the status on all facets of this art of Thalia. From the hottest actors, performers game, fame authors, director role - intrinsic problems - from economic and sociological literature, such as salaries, the attitude of theatrical heads (anagers) public empathy. Success depends not only on the performance on stage or the sounds of the playwright - among those approached by the journalist: Sophocles, Hugo, Scribe, G. Sand, Shakespeare, Gogol; the great interpreters of the time, Millo, Eufrosinia Popescu, Petre Velescu can have moments of apathy, which would seriously damage public success. So there may be less visible factors in scenic representation of a dramatic work. Polyphonic journalist by vocation, Eminescu sensed the thorny issues in theater and objectivity made him take matters into his own hands, regardless of the consequences. Criticism in socio-political area was manifested in the theater area, the targets being artists, designers, directors... The dramatic analyst never spared anyone, not even the president of the Theatre Committee, Ion Ghica. Disavowed demanding cultural journalist, the columnist impugned order and stunned the cultural world of the time with the vastness of his knowledge in comedy, tragedy, drama. Eminescu had sufficient documentation about French, German, and even American theater! He was intrigued that we still hadn't had a

national repertoire - I flaw unsolved by Kogalniceanu's and Alecsandri's forty-eighters. Moreover, sarcastic theatric commentator every now and then showed by a kind of tabula rasa that very few actors would be credited as a professional in his opinion: Alecsandri, Hasdeu, Deparateanu. He omitted himself, supreme proof of modesty. Eminescian theatrical publicity catches the eye with the deep views, by drilling haze layers of text, and by alert, concise and elastic phrasing, not once connotative, aphoristic. There is even a study where Eminescu can afford a theatrical bet. In general, he remains a vigilant theater analyst, perhaps the most active of his period, being a forerunner to Nicolae Filimon.

**Keywords:** journalism, cultural journalism, Eminescu, Bucharest theatre  
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## **1. Introduction**

Impassioned reader, and keen bystander on what concerned the theatrical phenomenon, Eminescu wrote with generosity and bent indulgence papers about the way the performers acted, the esthetic taste, the national repertoire, actors in fashion, their salaries and the artistic level of the plays (Oprea, 2000; Mocanu, 2003; Jicu, 2012; Nimigean, 2012; Mocanu, 2013; Nedelcu, 2015). It is absurd to claim the aura of being leader of the dramatic chronicles to the polyvalent journalist, at a time that the journalistic species presented earlier did not have a tradition in Romanian literature. The only dynamic pen, N. Filimon, had disappeared from the image, the rest were pure amateurs, not to be rude to say it was a tedious void. Eminescu did not say he was a bar setter, a possessed man, vigilant about the dramatic domain, advantage which showed for example, on the line of political chronicles, and maybe cultural and linguistic.

With a lot of common sense, calm and clemency, the journalist got close to theatre, without doing coherent studies, like in other domains; the fragmentarism denotes, although, a few bald ideas, a “critical eye”, a visionary. The bad, negativism, imperfections, are taxed, and those which are successful receive bonuses, appreciations.

## **2. Attention on theatre of Bucharest**

Of the 20 articles studied on this theme, 11 are dramatic chronicles, and the other one theatrical dissertations (Mironescu, 2012; Tinca, 2014; Mocanu, 2014). The drama structured in 4 acts, “*Moartea lui C. Brâncoveanu*”, by Antonio Roques (Eminescu, 1970, pp. 151-154), would have had a certain value, is stated with subtleness by the journalist: It would have been better if it

had not been written, despite the acting struggles of Galino. In total opposition, of a totally different style, is presented the drama in 5 acts "*Moartea lui Petru cel Mare*", by E. Scribe (Eminescu, 1970, pp. 154-159), time of an axiological reflection: the comedy is "catchy" for Romanians, while the drama – is not.

The proximal argument? "*Caterina a II-a de Dumanoir și Bieviele*", comedy in 3 acts, examined with rigorousness, from the theme, to the acting of the players, to the reactions of the audience, and most of all, the relationship between international theatre and the Romanian one.

Comforting for the watcher, for the art consumer is for the representation to take place outdoors, in the garden of a coffee-shop -like it is said in "*Teatrul de vară*" (Eminescu, 1970, p. 159)-, with young actor keen to perform. On a classic repertoire, from Corneille, Racine and Molière. The warm applauses confirmed the success of the drama "*Orfelinele*" (Eminescu, 1970, p. 161).

The enthusiasm of the public can repay either the directors ingenuity (as in the case of "*Fadette*" by George Sand (M. Eminescu, 1970, p. 188), French novel dramatized by Carlotta Birchpfeiffer), or by the remarkable acting of one actor, let's admit, the Italian Ernesto Rossi (1827-1896), the ideal shakespearean interpret (in "*Reprezentările Rossi*" (Eminescu, 1970, p. 195) or Frédéric Damé, in "*Visul Dochiei*" (Eminescu, 1970, p. 180) and "*Ostașii noștri*" (Eminescu, 1970), artist in his best shape, competed, but not equaled by a series of talented colleagues. Talent ignores age, illness, human pains, extra-scene, so that the 65 years old actor triumphs in the capital as well, in the art. "*Millo în București*" (Eminescu, 1970, p. 196), being able to serve as a model for many dilettantes from the Thalich universe. Analytical spirit, close follower of things already hidden, the columnist intuits the good translation – of "*Ruy Blas*" (Eminescu, 1970, p. 201), criticized on the other hand, in the same article being presented the uneven acting of the players, not forgiving, surprisingly, even the fashionable Fr. Damé: "*Visul Dochiei*" is a long tarara, of declamation on Ștefan, Mircea, M. Viteazul, which ends in a parade of hunters and dorobanți.

"The wind" of Romanians preferences can blow one way or another, clearly decided, the theatrical commentator admits value, diagnosing: the play in 5 acts "*Despot-Vodă*", "in the verses and language of the nightingale from Mircești" (metaphor) is the best drama of the moment.

When it comes to rejections, the exigent journalist, notes the melodrama "*Mănăstirea de Castro*" (in "*Teatrul Național - Mănăstirea de Castro*") as a vulgar weaving with images and misadventures (Eminescu, 1970, p. 201), even though the artists Millo, Eufrosina Popescu, Petre Velescu tried to put it on an ascending path. The difference between the dramatic works is figured out by

the esthetical criteria. The dichotomy of successful and unsuccessful plays, after set principles, suffers a correction, by the inclusion, says Eminescu, of the characters' consistency.

On a simplistic view, the Eminescian chronicles are based on 2 elements: the narrated literary subject, and the players act. Of these put head to head, the memoirs about theatre – some uneven, discontinuous – compose, with difficulty, the profile of a dramatic journalist, very profound in the articles: *Repertoriul nostru teatral*, *Despre actorie*, *Despre soarta actorului*, *Visul Dochiei*, *Două orfeline*, *Deschiderea stagiunii, 1878-1879* and *Despre scrierile dramatice*. With them, the items are one after one passed, probing deep down in the theatrical substance, entering in tangent with the literary sociology (poor payment of the players, poor capital for special montages, the need for a theatre of the Royal court) and the teatrology ( the “fragility” of the theatrical repertoire, inadequate repartition of roles).

In subsidiary, Eminescu operates with the “scalpels”, in diachrony, basing himself on masterpieces from Sofocle (*Oedipus*) and V.Hugo (*Ruy Blas*); the plays in fashion make him smile, ironically or to slide towards collateral “territories”.

Merciful with some of the plays that were on the public's taste, the journalist eludes their esthetical level, and binds “a few sentences of circumstance”, reiterating the play's ideation, or appreciating the representations of the actors Galino, and ladies Dănescu, Evolachi.

Practically, the heavyweights of the scene in Bucharest, impossible to be offended by anything. Even more, veneration had become something normal, and for the journalist Eminescu a strategy of discrediting, by omission, of some dramatic acts, of ephemera fame. On a neutral tone, the journalist announces in the article *Despre actori* (Eminescu, 1970, pp. 177-179), that the benefit representation of Ms. Dănescu will take place on a Sunday, occasion to mount a comedy, *Teatrul național*. Letting go of truisms and the ordinary, the theatrical analyst, arrogating a serious image, admits that in that pêle-mêle of romantic plays, the value accesses with difficulty the sandy layers of amateurs, to bring them towards the light: “In our country, the success of mediocrity is very easy, and the fight of all the better elements are beyond measure”. He pities the directors which, in order to survive, have to show, on the notice boards, sensational plays, filled with crimes, physical pain, and obscene pranks. Taking the curtains off, Eminescu concedes that chronicles are made on demand, choosing the play, the author or actors. Few actually have talent, pertinent observation, but this was a inconvenient situation for the Romanian theatre in the VII and VIII decades of the bourgeois century.

Perfectly conscious of the abyss appearance – essence, of the erroneous path of dramatizing on the national scene (Curelaru, 2005; Mureșanu-Ionescu, 2009; Curcă, 2012; Dragulanescu, 2012), from Bucharest especially, the journalist gives up on the on the sweetened up attitude and puts the dot on the “I”, opening once again a “wound”: “there is no original theatrical repertoire” (Eminescu, 1970, pp 143-150). After noticing the “liberty in feeling” (Eminescu, 1970, p. 143), the dramatic commentator “takes the sword out of the scabbard” of criticism, of polemics, the effect being of revival of the article, and the opponent - a journalist from “Familia”, which falsely approached the problem of Romanian text - was driven into a corner. Taking over his fellows by the vast information, intelligence, and scriptural refinement, Eminescu presents the point of view of the colleague x, explains, combats it, classes it, arguments it and gloomily concludes: we don’t really have theatre, just a few notable plays by M. Millo, Pantazi Ghica, B.P.Hasdeu, V.Alecsandri. The news of that present, and the only “glimmers”, *Rienzi* by S. Bodnărescu și *Grigore Ghica* by Mr. Al. Depărățeanu. The phrase has nerve, consistency, irony. If “the European atmosphere was infested with corruption and frivolity” (Eminescu, 1970, p. 146), no different were the things in our country. Rigorous, honest with V. Alecsandri but still logical in what he affirms, the visionary journalist starts from a caustic premise: he imagines what a nihilistic spectator might say.

On the scenes of Bucharest theatre, the plays were frivolous, melodramas, adaptations, imitations, plays from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> shelf anyway, either from titans, a Shakespeare, Gogol, Hugo being rarer. Starting from a particular case – a play by Gogol, showing the life of the Russians – the journalist prospects the space of German and American literature, builds comparisons and validates al national writers Fritz Reuter, for the Germans, and Bret Harte, for the Americans, and Pëtofi (Eminescu, 1970, p. 167), for Hungarians.

The incursion in Weltlitleratur had the purpose of reporting the national, the particularity in general. So, A. Pann, Slavici și Creangă have truthfully mirrored the fate of people from Târgoviște. If the translation was imperfect, the cues easily modeled, the journalist firmly intervenes.

In *Deschiderea stagiunii*(M.Eminescu, 1970, pp. 198-200) some language harshness are sanctioned, the sample being offered as the play *Fiica lui Tintoretto*, translated in a language a bit non Romanian.

The venturesome journalist affords to critique Ion Ghica, president of the Theatrical Academic Committee, personality of his age, intangible (Eminescu, 1970, p. 199). In opposition will happen in the context of the

representation of a masterpiece by V. Hugo (*Ruy Blas*), where the direction and the translator receive lexical garlands from the journalists (Eminescu, 1970, p. 201). Without a doubt the journalist knew in detail the real situation of the Romanian scene. He was indignant by the poor salaries of actors and the very relaxed attitude of directors which were receptive not to valuable plays, but to ephemerae like: boulevard theatre, pranks, melodramas, historical poems. This kitsch faked the public's taste, it educated the watcher, like what Mihail Pascaly or Iorgu Caragiale did for example. The press reader had acclimatised with the famous interpreters of the time: Millo, Velescu, Vasilescu, Dănescu, Manolescu, Galino etc.

The grave situation consisted of the fragile presence of Romanian plays in the theatrical repertoire, filled up with fashionable, eccentric plays, some even bloody. There was no national repertoire, just a polychromy of imitating drama. The conception of the dramatic journalist was heading towards Greek antiquity (Sofocle), French classicism (Corneille, Racine, Molière) and French romance (V. Hugo), first of all, and then towards other literary spaces: Italian (Goldoni), Russian (Gogol). He did by no means accept the dilettantism, the journalist documented himself a lot, reading even American and German theatre, following like a professional the very best on the posters of theatres in Bucharest.

He was in theme with the young authors, but which were played right. Striking remains the hiatus between the alive actors, and the artistic level of the dramatic plays. With harshness the specialist journalist treats the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> rank dramatists like: Halepliu, Carada, A. Lăzărescu, Mavrodol, Șt. Mihăileanu. The difference is made between Bolintineanu the poet, and Bolintineanu the perishable dramatist. Superficial, uneven it seems to him to be also Frederic Damé, the Frenchman which arrived to our land, author of two plays: *Visul Dochiei* and *Ostașii noștri*. The representations of Italian actor Rossi seem monumental to him.

### **3. Conclusion**

Synthetic spirit, the journalist manages to sign once in "Curierul de Iași", nr 139, from dec. 1876, on the column "Revista Teatrală", publishing an article about three plays *Cerșitoarea*, *Paza bună trece primejdia rea*, *Uciagașul*. Anyways, the study "*Repertoriul nostrum teatral*", is a veritable theatrical breviary, where, for 7 pages, he talks about the necessity of creating a national theatre, about the best plays of the moment, about corruption, frivolity, and polemizes an anonymous journalist etc.

The action of demolition of false poetic and prose values, initiated by Maiorescu is continued on a theatrical realm, by Eminescu, which critiques what was irrelevant, proposes laurels for the actors and some plays, and he turns on all sides, as always, the Romanian drama, retaining only a few names (Alecsandri, Pantazi Ghica, Depărățeanu Hașdeu) and offers solutions for getting over the crisis. Shortly, the opinions of the signatory from “Curierul din Iași” will be taken into account, and the progress of this art will not be delayed.

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