DUMITRU TUCAN

TEMESWAR

The collapse of the poetical utopia

> This is compulsory for the poet, angel or demon, to bring with himself the order and the reasons of a world perceived through the interspaces of the average man's real world. Thus, poetry is nothing else but the supreme expression of human condition: grandeur and misery – a lucid consciousness of our chances and limits in brief.[1]

Man fights the world, which is hostile to him, on several levels. Poetry is one of these levels, in which naiveté, strength an intuition merge into an unitary whole – "the supreme expression of human condition" – which surpasses the circumstantial concreteness.

Beyond the vastness of the adventure within the space created by poetry, beyond the tensions that enable the presumed tragedy, together with its different concretenesses, there is an important suggestion that this fascinating space generates – and this is the *utopian instrument*.

But, first of all, poetry can be looked upon as an utopia, the generalization of a certain spectacular space. It is poetry that challenges reality, tries to *fix* it, and if it cannot finally offer truths, it can offer at least illusions. Truth, illusion or a way of discovering things, poetry projects its potentialities to the accomplishment of a new quixotic temptation that stems from man's everlasting anxiety, from his desire to conceive himself differently from what he apparently is.

> We need to establish the fact that, simultaneously with philosophy and science, simultaneously with the universality of the approaches to knowledge, man trusts his capacity of wandering about certain fields, still and forever inaccessible to him, he perceives himself capable of longing for a science he is never going to dominate, he thinks he is able to cope with purposes which are inappropriate to the human being, since there is an abyss between his destiny and the destination he aims at, since what is essential indeed, is that in his paramount activity he conceives himself differently from what he actually is.[2]

If we were to complete the definition of the poetical space, we should also add that poetry is an *uchrony* as well. The sign defined as poetry, seen as a conceptual whole sets aside any determinations, it tries to identify the original, to find the ontological bases to our world so as to define its truths, whereas it projects all its images in a specific time[3], during which the linear potentialities disintegrate.

---

[1] Ştefan Augustin Doinaş, ***Lampa lui Diogene***, Bucureşti, Eminescu, 1970, p. 7.

[2] Jules de Gaultier, ***Le Bovarysme***, Paris, Société Mercure de France, 1902, p. 51.

[3] Even when modern poetry does nothing else but turn its look towards itself, still the main issue is exactly that of searching for its own bases, in their close connections to the great questions of the world, whichever they may be: "the poem tends to be o self-sufficient structure with long-effect meanings, highlighting them as a tension network of the absolute

BDD-A13203 © 2001 Mirton Verlag
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 20:52:00 UTC)

Nourishing the myth of human grandeur, trying to surpass the determinations, the contingent, the constraints, the institutionalized, wishing it were pure spirit, poetry eventually surpasses the actual utopia and finally becomes a universal, almighty, tragic generator, an *utopian instrument*.

> Eminescu's poetical discourse is set in a moment of transition from expressive Romantic poetry to objective modern poetry, the statements about language lead to this, as well as to the defining reflexivity for the creative process or to its impersonal self as the very lyrical self[4].

In Romanian poetry, Eminescu is a "transition point" between the poetical naiveté of imitating models, doubled by the deep faith in the magic forces of the poetical language and the lucidity of self-assuming the poetical calling; it is a moment of transition in which *the utopian instrument* – poetry itself – changes its utility, shifts from a mere compensatory universe, as a reply (a mirror) to the original dimension of the universe (an "aesthetic dream" says I. Em. Petrescu) to an instrument of lucid investigation into history and the changes that occur at the level of our world's quintessence.

Although, the beginnings of Romanian artistic language, and implicitly the very beginnings of poetry, can be localized in a far-off period of time (Cantemir, the Chroniclers, Dosoftei), the writing consciousness and all its consequent implications (the duty of fully expressing a definite sentimental or abstract reality) manifests long after. However, beyond any evolution, Romanian literature, particulary poetry as its privileged space, starts its incursion among models, as any other modest literature does, coming thus with its own reply to history.

> After 1840, when Romantic psychology pervaded more profoundly, the poet began suffering from what was called <<the sentiment of incompleteness>> and, to the same extent, he suffered from the threat of disorder in both the physical and moral worlds. Chaos generated gloomy visions for him. An awakening sentiment of order attempted to reconcile those <<arguing elements>> (in the case of Grigore Alexandrescu and Heliade, especially) that were to be perennially found beside the sensation of stifling and the desire of expansion.[5]

The great convulsive events of history, shaped by great cultural models, confer a dialogued configuration to the beginnings of the Romanian poetry. They are the revolt and ideals, turned into the so-called *compensatory universe*, on the one hand: revolt, eroticism, typical Romantic sentiments, created on the models of Western literature (namely Lamartine, Hugo etc.): these are the sentiments of the individual related to the world. On the other hand, there is the tendency of conferring to this emancipated movement a specific order, a coherence that initially was not to be found except in the great classical literary models, and afterwards in the lucidity of questioning the world, in the taste for tragic contrasts, born out of interactions between epochs, out of the ruptures between them.

The obsession for antithesis strengthens the idea that Eminescu is a genuine

---

forces that suggestively actions against the prerational strata, making the mysterious fields of the concepts vibrate". (Hugo Friederich, ***Structura liricii moderne***, Bucureşti, E.L. U., 1969, p. 11).

[4] I. Em. Petrescu, ***Eminescu. Modele cosmologice şi viziune poetică****,* Bucureşti, Minerva, 1978, p. 72-73.

[5] Eugen Simion, ***Dimineața poeților***, Bucureşti, Cartea Românească, 1980, p. 11.

BDD-A13203 © 2001 Mirton Verlag
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 20:52:00 UTC)

transition point. Antithesis is the bringing together of two antagonistic terms. Their opposition makes their bond manifest conspicuously, so that eventually the last peculiarity of their confrontation is the interrogative density that is dialogistically tensioned, and beyond all these the rupture, *the crisis*.

If we compare Eminescu's entire work to a labyrinth in which the fundamental themes (cosmogony, the dialectics of history, the genius, the demon, the titan, nature, love, the aspiration for the artistic and folkloric innocence) are nothing but some obstacles or rather some misleading tracks, and if we were to find a rule so as to diminish the vastness of this labyrinth, there would be nothing else but *antithesis*. Antithesis between utopia and reality, antithesis between the enchanting mythic darkness and the modern profane, exhausting light, the antithesis between *poetry*, as an *utopian instrument*, and the lucid *prose*[6], the fundamental reference points are to be found on either sides of antithesis, the repertoire being very rich. Beyond antithesis, beyond its dialogistic tension, nothing is left but the tragic dimension of a changing moment.

The utility of this reduction proves to be beneficial in order to highlight the "systemic coherence" of this poetical universe, structured by Eminescu. This coherence does not imply one-sidedness, on the contrary it rather outlines the ontological bases, set in a direct link to a certain type of poetical strategy outcome, involved in the poetical process; and these strategies generate the variations of his entire work.

An obvious systematic coherence prevails in Eminescu's work. As an implicit volition that defines the poetical (and simultaneously cultural) process: "Eminescu is much more prone to systematization, which is characteristic of the first romantic theorists."[7] Eminescu's poetical universe is unitary in its essence, regardless of its inherent variations. Consequently, the presence of a creative energy is obvious, as well as the presence of an integratory force which confers coherence and a systematic horizon to this poetical universe. This coherence identifies with a coherence in construction and the systematic horizon is looked upon as an architectural plan, designed by some textual strategies which purposely activate the types of discourse.

An analysis of the types of Eminescu's discourses has to consider this *reality* of poetry, as a precomprehension level, namely that of the *utopian instrument*, reality all the more specific of Romanticism, and implicitly specific of Eminescu, reality that defines and dominates the poetical self, "the creative energy" which generates these types of discourse. *The poetical self* notion has to be fathomed as an attitude that assumes a textually implicit reply, as an action that carries a wealth of meaning. More than that, since each type of discourse implies a specific manifestation of the poetical self (resembling that *confession de foi* found in the Biblical writings – P. Ricoeur[8]), the consequent tensions between these types of discourse or the very tensions stirred within them, beget, throughout the entire

[6] The meaning of the word "prose" is different from its usual meaning. For Eminescu the word means "banality".

[7] Dan C. Mihăilescu, ***Perspective eminesciene***, Bucureşti, Cartea Românească, 1982, p. 9.

[8] Paul Ricoeur, ***Essais de herméneutique***, Paris, Edition du Seuil, 1986, p. 119-133.

BDD-A13203 © 2001 Mirton Verlag
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 20:52:00 UTC)

work, fundamental contrasts that reveal the unity and the specificity of Eminescu's poetical universe.

> Perceived as a vast *concordia discors* Eminescu's proves an indestructible unity, based on an unlimited intricate body of symbolic constellation between *the cognitive field and sensitivity field* (this is a fundamental feature of early Romanticism), that implies, on the one hand, the undoing of the universal order, on behalf of the self's willingness, and on the other hand, the restoration of this order in a spiritual *summa poetica*.[9]

Reason, sensibility, determination to act seem to be the imperatives of Eminescu's cultural process and these imperatives are in full concordance with Romantic imperatives. As a result, reason is correlated to a certain mentality, specific to the epoch; in its turn, sensibility supports the former and the determination to act germinatively manifests itself in the realm of art.

One part of Eminescu's poetry tends to revive the lost models. Cosmogony models, reason models, materializing in aphorism-like statements, erotic models, poetical models that are meant to recreate the mythical harmony. Thus poetry becomes a weapon against time or a weapon against divinity:

> The song? The highest and the boldest
>
> Is nothing but an echo of the great voice
>
> Of the terrible waves, high and noisy
>
> Of a river, that one cannot see
>
> they are the waves of time
>
> brought by the future only to banish them back to the past. (Andrei Mureşanu).

Thus poetry becomes a way of mirroring the poetical self against the whole universe, through a demiurgic dimension, and in this case the self is a globalizing, all-conquering one – in other words it is the titan, the genius.

Under the circumstances, Eminescu's Romantic self reveals itself as an essentialized spirit that becomes the centre, it radically opposes the reality that becomes a projection of the latter, by overthrowing the perspective. For the Romantic hero reality is but an extension of his own soul. The space groups around this creative energy as if around a generating centre of an ontological circular model. The circularity of such a model (a rather point-like circularity) already announces a negative limitation, a relative confinement which is especially characteristic of modern poetry.

Ultimately, Eminescu's poetical universe can be drawn according to a *circular pattern* which assumes a centre (the poetical self) as a generating point and a constancy of establishing relations with the periphery, besides a wealth of many-faceted reflections on the inside. This wealth of reflection implies a series of *faith confessions* a series of *discursive strategies* as the very operating manner of the major themes that compose Eminescu's poetical universe.

The different types of discourses are the thematic structures coming out of the intertextual contaminations, as a result of their relations with the historical literary philosophical models; these subjects are in the limelight of the criticism about

[9] Dan C. Mihăilescu, *op. cit*., p. 7.

BDD-A13203 © 2001 Mirton Verlag
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 20:52:00 UTC)

Eminescu. However, beyond being some ordinary cultural fields, beyond being mere intuitions or a poetical game, these themes are the essence of a quasi-dramatic[10] project, apparently typical of Eminescu's poetical universe.
On the whole, Eminescu's work bears a complex construction. G. Călinescu[11] numbers over twenty themes and fundamental motifs. Yet some of these, through their projective proportion, pregnantly participate in the reactive tensions of the work: cosmogony, the dialectics of history, the genius (with its versions: the demon, the titan), nature, the aspiration for the artistic and folkloric innocence and the aphorism-like discourse.
Although these types of discourse, these polarized themes are the natural outcome of the manner in which Eminescu makes this utopian instrument (poetry itself) function, they also participate, conversely, in the staging Eminescu chooses to be the right one. All these types of discourse are actually built on an antithetical scheme (or they belong to a body with antithetical specificity), they take part in a conflict, they generate dialogic tensions and last but not least they generate a rhetorical strategy.
One of these types of discourse is the cosmogony construction (*expunerea cosmogonică*). Since G. Călinescu, literary criticism has considered Eminescu's work "to have its sources in the cosmogony thrill"[12]. Ioana Em. Petrescu[13] establishes a cosmogony typology considering the defining stages in Eminescu's entire work. There is a specific stage, in Eminescu's poetry, in which the sentiment of togetherness between the divine reason and the human reason is lost and this stage is to be found where Plato's cosmogony model and the so-called Kantian model meet. Plato's cosmogony model "is no longer considered a formative reality in the universe, but the aspiration of the poetical reason which revises an absurd universe by means of an illusory harmonic compensatory project."[14] The belief in the reality of the absolute turns into a crisis in thinking, changes into the utmost adventure that experiences the assumed rupture. Consequently, resentment[15] is the attitude that faces universal incoherence. This is the ground from which the images in the third stage of Eminescu's poetry stem; this stage, as I. Em. Petrescu states proves "a tragic consciousness over the existence in an universe in which

[10] The meaning of the word *dramatic* is connected to the dialogue that is produced within these types of discourse and it has also a spectacular, exhibited aspect, beyond the specific Romantic rhetoric. Even if Romanticism is a prelude to Modernity (or a disease of Tradition), it still preserves the poetical criterion unchanged, and the latter presumes a certain rhetoric, a certain anecdote and an overt sentimentalism (cf. Nicolae Manolescu, ***Despre poezie***, Bucureşti, Cartea Românească, 1987, p. 142).
[11] G. Călinescu, *Opera lui Mihai Eminescu*, în ***Opere***, Bucureşti, Minerva, 1969, vol XII.
[12] Idem., ibid., p. 10.
[13] I. Em. Petrescu, op. cit.
[14] idem., ibid., p. 18.
[15] The word *resentment* (fr.<ressentiment) acquires another meaning, that given by Nietzsche. To Nietzsche losing the desire to live (integrated by *decadence*) implies a revengeful attitude towards life, manifested through resentment (see M. Călinescu, *Cinci fețe ale modernității*, Bucureşti, Univers, 1995, p. 156). Unlike Nietzsche, Eminescu perceives *resentment* through the idealization of the past or the idealization of a particular thinking.

BDD-A13203 © 2001 Mirton Verlag
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 20:52:00 UTC)

the gods sought their refuge in inexistence and still they coercively urge the world into existence"[16]. As a result, the cosmogonic solutions and their existential mirror are the marks of an antinomy whose last suggestion is the *rupture*, the *crisis*.
The other types of discourse are built on the same antithetical schemes. Dialectics of history (in Eminescu's case this theme is a blend between Schopenhauer's metaphysical static view and Hegel's dynamic view), precisely the comprehension of "the historical plan as the materialization of the absolute spirit"[17], is supported by the consciousness regarding the estrangement of the constituting elements of the world, by the consciousness of their voidance. This antinomy is directly linked to another one, namely that of erotic idealism, followed by an unavoidable *fall in the flesh*. By building up erotic utopias, by idealizing this sentiment (in a Romantic manner), Eminescu intimates everything was a dream from which awakening is imperatively:

> Fancy, naught but fancy's farce. Whene'er we are alone we two
>
> how oft you take me on the lake, what seas and forests you guide me through!
>
> Where did you see these unknown lands of which you speak to me today?
>
> And where these joys? Since then I deem five hundred years have passed away"[18].
>
> "For you are drunken with the magic of a wondrous summer dream
>
> That in you is lighted... but ask her longing and I deem
>
> That she will speak to you of frills and bows, and the latest mode,
>
> While secretly within your heart there beats the rhythm of an ode[19].

Throughout the entire work, the genius, the titan is opposed to the *common*, becoming the expression of an individualism shaped in a narcissus – like fashion in Eminescu's own myth.
Yet this personal myth (the genius) expresses the lack of communication between the individualities, ultimately it is the expression of a broken harmony, of a world which is now shattered to pieces[20]. Eminescu is still deeply involved in this scenario. He balances the Romantic rhetoric on one part, and the prosaic dimension of the existence, on the other. On the one hand, there is the verticality of the spirit that voyages towards the Idea; on the other hand there is the horizontality of a world in which the values have lost their intimate essence. Under the circumstances, poetry as an utopian instrument changes into the symbol of a new world. This new type of poetry falls short of expressing something original, it fails to attain the original, the myth:

---

[16] I. Em. Petrescu, op. cit., p. 19.
[17] Eugen Todoran, ***Eminescu***, Bucureşti, Minerva, 1972.
[18] Mihai Eminescu, *Satire* IV, in ***Poems***, English version by Corneliu M. Popescu, Bucureşti, Cartea Românească, 1989.
[19] idem., ibid. (***Satire*** *V*)
[20] Still earth shall only earth remain,
Let luck its course unfold,
And I in my own kingdom reign
immutable and cold. (*Lucifer* in M. Eminescu, op. cit.)

BDD-A13203 © 2001 Mirton Verlag
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 20:52:00 UTC)

Oh! cursed calling, not being given the chance to tell

But stories that have already been told

Thousands of times by Homer and others (***Icoană şi privaz***).

The same idea is reiterated in *Dumnezeu şi om* (God and Man) or in *Epigonii* (*Epigones*). It is the rupture between past and present, a rupture that disintegrates even the essence. Poetry is no longer an utopian instrument but a skill that perfectly imitates the world, it is no longer the mirror of the divinity, but a profane decor in which the limitations grow unbearable.

"Antitheses make up life itself", Eminescu wrote down in his manuscripts. Antithesis seems to be an obsessive macrotextual device to Eminescu. The antithesis involves the dialogue, the spectacular and the tragedy of the poetical consciousness. Ultimately, we have to underline that it is opposition whose last suggestion is the rupture, the crisis and its consciousness. The meanings born out of the tensions generated by this rhetoric device (which is the instrument of an implicit strategy) are numerous. Either there is the contrast between poetry as an utopian instrument and poetry as an instrument to lucidly investigate history, or there is the opposition between reality and the compensatory universe (those "aesthetic dreams" in I. Em. Petrescu's criticism), the world of Eminescu's work is split in two, it is the world that came into being out of a contradictory consciousness which objectively remarks on a lack of continuity, a paradigm change. The world, its elements, ultimately the individual is looked upon as an indestructible complex of dialogic tensions. First of all, these dialogic tensions are the outcome of the contacts between epochs and secondly of the need to convey a certain direction to a culture whose identity is in deficit. Eminescu's strategy tends actually to reveal the evil hidden in a particular "reality":

So what strange fancy holds your mind

What dreaming thus belates you?

Return to earth and there you'll find

The awakening that awaits you? (***Lucifer***)[21].

This attitude announces nihilism, yet while the modern nihilist idealizes by proliferating ugliness, leaving the past shattered to pieces, Eminescu still feels a deep nostalgia for the essence. Given his everlasting nostalgia, deep and sincere to such an extent that the dialogue is practically refused, Eminescu will forever be an inveterate Romantic. His option will forever be balanced towards the Idea. As a matter of fact, what is important indeed is that beyond his "option" there is the anxiety due to the paradigm change.

Eminescu versifies this anxiety. He either does it directling from the perspective of his personal myth, as he does in Lucifer, Satire I and Satire V, or indirectly, through past – present antithesis (Satire III, Epigones, God and Man etc.) or else through reality – ideal antithesis (Satire IV and Icoană şi privaz). The corpus of his feelings and aspirations – the utopian instrument – is replaced by the fall in the lucidity of the *epic*, of the *prose*:

[21] ***Lucifer*** in M. Eminescu, op. cit.

BDD-A13203 © 2001 Mirton Verlag
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 20:52:00 UTC)

O, I'm weary of life composed of disillusion's stuff,

Of misery and bitter prose... of such a life I've had enough[22].

The integral assumption of paradigm is unpretentiously made in Romanian literature after Eminescu, despite the series of epigones that are to follow. Eventually, Bacovia will consider the utopian instrument a real mirror to reflect the degradation of the world, what Eminescu inferred half a century ago Bacovia will later on experience to its utmost. The Utopia of the Romantic revolutionary models, necessary in its time, by disintegrating itself, left space for new manners of reconsidering values. It left space for Romanian modern poetry.

[22] *Satire IV* in M. Eminescu, op. cit.

BDD-A13203 © 2001 Mirton Verlag
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 20:52:00 UTC)