SHAKESPEARE'S INFLUENCE ON EMINESCU'S DRAMATIC PROJECTS

Corina Mihaela GEANĂ
University of Craiova

Abstract: *As G. Ibrăileanu used to say, the theatre, the dramatic art, represents the author's highest level of fulfillment of his literary vocation. Therefore, we will not be able to completely understand Eminescu's literary production if we don't take into account the fact that it is based on the poet's dramatic experience, his activity as a prompter, transcriber, actor, translator, dramatic critic and theoretician. Conceived in a romantic perspective, impregnated with a tragical vision which is applied to the entire Romanian history, Eminescu's dramatical projects certify the influence of Shakespeare's theatrical ethics and aesthetics ideas. We were kept several lines and almost finished plays from Eminescu's dramatical projects, among which we can mention: Alexandru Lăpuşneanu, Mira, Gruiu-Sânger, Bogdan-Dragoş etc. Eminescu thinks that Macbeth's plot and characters are related to some characters from our agitated and bloody history, to the usurpations and ambitions which led to the numerous and painful changes of the Romanian voivodes. Perpessicius and Călinescu showed that most of Eminescu's poems originate in the author's dramatic creation. This is the very reason for which to know Eminescu's dramatic creation is to come to a complete understanding of his entire literary production. Eminescu's conception about the theatre is similar to that of Shakespeare's. He wanted to describe the world just like it is, God's role being played by the author and then by the characters of his plays. In his dramatic projects Eminescu makes use of some themes and motifs characteristic to the commedia dell'arte and to the Elizabethan popular theatre.*

Keywords**:** *theatre, romanticism, tragical vision, commedia dell'arte, Elizabethan popular theatre.*

Conceived in a romantic perspective, impregnated with a tragical vision which is applied to the entire Romanian history, Eminescu's dramatical projects certify the influence of Shakespeare's theatrical ethics and aesthetics ideas. We were kept several lines and almost finished plays from Eminescu's dramatical projects, among which we can mention: *Alexandru Lăpuşneanu, Mira, Gruiu-Sânger, Bogdan-Dragoş* etc. Eminescu thinks that Macbeth's plot and characters are related to some characters from our agitated and bloody history, to the usurpations and ambitions which led to the numerous and painful changes of the Romanian voivodes. Perpessicius and Călinescu showed that most of Eminescu's poems (like, for instance, *Memento Mori*) originate in the author's dramatic creation. This is the very reason for which to know Eminescu's dramatic creation is to come to a complete understanding of his entire literary production.

In a notice published on the 5th of December 1876, referring to the performance *The general inspector*, Eminescu, speaking about Gogol, thinks that, in the dramatic art, we must begin with the author's complete understanding: "Gogol is considered by some people the most original author, others think that he is the best Russian author. The reality is different: he struck in his mind the real life of the Russian people, his characters are copies from the nature, they are real people, whom we can meet in the small towns which are lost in the middle of the Cossack steppes. All the nations have such writers, although not all of them have written a play. (…) Just like the other writers, who don't take pains in telling us something just for entertaining us, but who have something to say, even it is a sad truth, Gogol is not trying to attain any goal,

BDD-A5636 © 2008 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:42 UTC)

because he wrote neither for percentages, nor for success, but for he loved writing, as he felt and saw things, without being concerned about Aristotle's rules and, as far as I am concerned, he did well. The feverish interest we are inspired with by the modern French comedies, in which the play's action is based either on adultery or on adulterous attempts, turning men's and women's sins in dramatic jokes filled with slippery expressions and with even more slippery situations, all these didn't concern Gogol at all. One has seeds in a hotbed, rain falls down and all the seeds spring in full light, each having its own characteristics. This is also Gogol's case, who shows us a small town's hotbed, in which all the people are languishing in inherited sins, without anyone being concerned about them … when, suddenly, an inspector comes in and all these plants become fat, clumsy, real on the stage, and you realize there is no imitation, no affected character in them – the human wickedness and degradation appear just like they really are, and we laugh at them …" (Eminescu, Mihai: 197-198)

A true profession of faith results from this notice, according to which the only criterion Eminescu has in view whenever he analyses a dramatic production, a literary production, in general, is the life. The dramatic art is, therefore, similar to the life. Gogol's characters are compared with some real, living plants, none of them being an "imitation, or an affected character"; they "appear just like they really are". In other words, the truthfulness must have precedence in art, the scene must present "the real life of the people, real people, copies from the nature". In this respect, Eminescu's conception about the theatre is similar to that of Shakespeare's. In *Hamlet*, the British author used to say that "any thing so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." Hamlet, asking the actor to "speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you", advised him: "Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor: suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature (…)". (Shakespeare, William, 2003: 168, 170) "Not to overstep the modesty of nature" is an Aristotelian request and Eminescu has adapted himself to it from an artistic point of view, as, for him, too, the acting must be a natural one and the theatre's goal is that of presenting "real people".

Thus, the old man Arbore from the play *Mira* considers art "the mirror of the hope". Therefore, the actor must re-create the life, he must be a mirror of the hope, he must identify himself with his character. Hamlet himself says it (in Act 2, Scene 2), after the First Player has recited a "passionate speech":

"Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wann'd,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in 's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit?" (Shakespeare, William, 2003: 148)

The heroine Mira is conceived after one of Shakespeare's most remarkable female characters – Ophelia. Just like Juliet, Mira is fallen asleep with the help of a narcotic and her apparent death causes Maio a great pain. The "theatre within a theatre" model has inspired Eminescu in writing this play. Having *Hamlet* and *A midsummer night's*

BDD-A5636 © 2008 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:42 UTC)

dream as sources of inspiration, Eminescu has developed in *Mira* a "comedy" at the court. Desdemona's name also appears in *Dicţionarul de rime* (in the manuscript 2265, fragment 139), just like a line from one of Arbore's remarks refers to *The winter's tale*.

A first proof of the brilliant connection between Eminescu and Shakespeare can be found on the page of the first version from *Horia* (manuscript 2262, fragment 4), when Eminescu was planning to write a series of plays inspired from the Transylvanian revolutions (*Răsunet, Iancu, Răzbunarea română*), having as models famous characters, like Ariel, Faustus, Don Juan, etc. Therefore, Eminescu, at the age of sixteen, has been already acquainted with at least one of the Shakespearean plays – *The Tempest*. Yet, Eminescu has known other Shakespearean plays from his youth. Thus, in a notice dating from his journey to Transylvania, when he arrives from Iaşi to Bucharest, Eminescu reminds of Coriolanus: "My pursuit of that boyar's girl in Cişmigiu – when I've come from Blasiu. The figure – Coriolanus!"

Working as a prompter in Pascaly's theatrical company, Eminescu knew well not only the actors whom he "prompted" or "transcribed" – mainly French and German actors – but also Shakespeare. In this period, Eminescu dreams of writing a classical tragedy – *Crucea-n Dacia* or *Joc şi Christ*, having as a source of inspiration Corneille's *Polydecte*, as well as several tragedies inspired from the Romanian history, among which we can mention the tragedy *Mihai cel Mare*, having as a model Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (as it is shown in manuscript 2254, fragment 301), planning to show Mihai's murdering, having the British playwright as a model.

In the same period, Eminescu gives a complete translation of Guilom Jerwitz' *Histrion.* It is the tragedy of the old actor Histrion who lives the drama of losing his former glory and entrusts his son with the art of playing. Undoubtedly, Eminescu has enjoyed a lot the monologue in which the old actor compares his life to that of the King Lear.

Eminescu's translation from Rötscher's *Art of the dramatic representation* is very significant for this period. This book contains numerous references to Shakespeare's heroes and artistic means, as well as extended or fragmentary analyses of some Shakespearean plays – *Othello, Romeo and Juliet, The merchant of Venice, Hamlet, King Lear* and *Macbeth.* The English language, considers Eminescu, as well as the Romanian language, excels through "its logic's fine organic structure". Thus, Scene 2 from Act 3 in *Hamlet* is significant in this respect. Hamlet hands over a pipe to Guildenstern and asks him to play upon it, being aware of the fact that Guildenstern was made by the king to pump Hamlet. Guildenstern doesn't even know how to grab the pipe. Then Hamlet speaks to him: "Why, look, you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass: and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ; yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me." (Shakespeare, William, 2003: 198)

Just like Shakespeare, Eminescu considers that true art is a mirror of the world, with its good and evil, with its happy and sad, virtuous or sinful deeds.

On one of the pages from the manuscript 2285, fragment 377, Eminescu is writing: "That ist (sic) the question", and on the page 126 it appears a project, which is a

BDD-A5636 © 2008 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:42 UTC)

parody against the "localizations"' practice in Bottom's style, the weaver from *A midsummer night's dream*.

Eminescu has started to write plays since 1864. On a page of one of his manuscripts, the poem *Cine-i* appears, having as a subtitle "din tragedia Steaua mării". This poem is included in *Mira*. It's the song of the poet Maio, interpreted at a dinner given at the princely residence.

Between 1864 and 1869, Eminescu begins to write a new tragedy – *Demon şi înger*, he goes on with *Planul Mirei*, then he translates some fragments from Goethe's play *Torquato Tasso*, after that he publishes articles in *România junǎ* and makes his debut at *Convorbiri literare*. Then he goes on with a Daco-Roman tragedy *Decebal* and he begins to write the comedy *Infamia, cruzimea şi disperarea* (the play has two more titles: *Peştera neagră şi cǎţuile proaste* or *Elvira în disperarea amorului*), as well as other projects – *Bogdan-Vodă, Gogu tatii, Văduva din Ephes, Împăratul, Împărăteasa, Bedlam Comödie* or *Minte şi inimă*. Just like Shakespeare, Eminescu used to alternate the comedy with the tragedy.

Shakespeare's influence is more than evident in Eminescu's dramatical projects. Thus, *Bogdan-Dragoş* and *Grue-Sânger* originate in *Macbeth*. Several lines, scenes, situations or characters from these two tragedies are almost identical. Both plays are written with the same ink (dark violet and, then, light violet). Though less developed than *Bogdan-Dragoş*, *Grue-Sânger* is emblematic for Eminescu's dramatic production, through a mixture of historic and mythological motifs. Characters like Sas and Bogdana from *Bogdan-Dragoş* or Mihnea and Irina from *Grue-Sânger* remind us of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth and, also, of their ways of acting. The scene between Dragul and Bogdan, a scene in which the father hands over the crown to his son, is a scene which we have found in *Henry IV* (Part 2, Act 4, Scene 3):

"… this crown; and I myself know well
How troublesome it sat upon my head.
To thee it shall descend with better quiet,
Better opinion, better confirmation; (…)" (Shakespeare, William, 1930: 534)

In these plays, the whole is formed of "constituent parts", of monologues of a special dramatic beauty, like, for example, Roman Bodei's curse from *Grue-Sânger*. It is possible for Eminescu to have been inspired by Shakespeare in writing about the curse law. Thus, in *Richard III*, the curse is the play's leitmotif, it's "the art of the living pain" (Modorcea, Grid, 2006: 36-37). The curse manifests itself through the force of the language filled with hatred. Even the Duchess, Richard's mother, advises Elisabeth in Act 4, Scene 4:

"… be not tongue-tied; go with me,
And in the breath of bitter words let's smother
My damned son, that thy two sweet sons smothered.
The trumpet sounds. Be copious in exclaims." (Shakespeare, William, 1930: 212)

There is still a difference between the ways in which the two dramatic authors have approached this curse law. At Eminescu's, men, poisoned with hatred, utter insulting and injurious words. On the other hand, in Shakespeare's plays, the female characters are those who have the gift to utter curses. Either it's about mothers or betrayed queens, like Constance from *King John* or Margaret (a character who appears in *Henry VI* and *Richard III*), women know the curse law, they believe in it, but they also know how to keep away from it. Men, on the other hand, are more cautious, they

BDD-A5636 © 2008 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:42 UTC)

don't believe in the curse law, that's why they will not survive. Margaret is a character who appears both in *Henry VI* and in *Richard III*; she knows how to avoid the bad consequences the curse might have. On the contrary, Suffolk, her lover, by not knowing this particular law, curses his enemies, in *Henry VI*, Part 2, Act 3, Scene 2:
"Could curses kill, as doth the mandrake's groan,
I would invent as bitter searching terms,
As curst, as harsh, and horrible to hear,
Delivered strongly through my fixed teeth,
With full as many signs of deadly hate (…)" (Shakespeare, William, 1930: 76)

Even Hamlet's fate is influenced by the curse law, that "something rotten in the state of Denmark" will affect the Danish prince, too, who has the mission of saving his country.

Between 1874 and 1877 Eminescu is working on his most ambitious theatrical project: *Dodecameron dramatic*.

Alexandru Lăpuşneanu, the last play from *Dodecameron dramatic*, though it has been considered a "Romanian Macbeth", there is a big difference between the Shakespearean play and Eminescu's play. Macbeth is a power-mad, selfish character, with a dual personality. Just like Iago or Richard III, Macbeth is a double-minded character, each and every of his remarks being "a kind of catastrophe which his soul is living". On the other hand, Lăpuşneanu is always the same, a cruel and mean character. Eminescu has outlined his character taking into account his own creed according to which the literary production must always present the world just like it really is and the characters have to be "copies from the nature". God's role is played by the author and then by the characters of his plays. Eminescu had planned to write this play as early as his adolescence, as it is shown in a note dating from 1868: "Alexandru Lăpuşneanu might be turned into a Romanian Macbeth" (the manuscript 2254, fragment 301). Two other notes had been written in the period when he had been working on Rötscher's book translation: "Macbeth, Othello, Theseu, Carol Moor. Lear – this mammoth hand of the heroic times" (the manuscript 2254, fragment 389); in the second note, Eminescu gives a characterization of the main character: "Macbeth's each speech is a kind of catastrophe which his soul is living (…)" (the manuscript 2254, fragment 437). Even though this play has been considered a "Romanian Macbeth", the joke, the irony, are preponderant.

In 1879, Eminescu begins to translate the first scene of the Act 1 from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*. Through his characters – the Poet and the Painter – Shakespeare expresses his own conception about the world and the art. The parable of the "throned Fortune", that of the glory and the decline, which the Poet is picturing here, has inspired Eminescu in his notes, in which he characterizes the Romanian society: " … Anybody realizes that in order to become someone like Cariadgi, Carada, Giani etc., the soul of a well-born man tries to live some almost tragic experiences, just like Timon of Athens, the hero of a play by Shakespeare. Indeed, for a man so friendly, hospitable, generous, as Timon is in Act 1 to turn into a savage misanthropist, a hermit, in Act IV, his soul must have lived a lot of experiences which made him change completely, from a flower into a belladonna." (the manuscript 2254, fragment 243-244). The Poet has its means of presenting the reality, but so does the Painter. The painter shows the Poet a picture which the latter could "explain it in words":
"PAINTER:

BDD-A5636 © 2008 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:42 UTC)

It is a pretty mocking of the life.
Here is a touch; is't good?
POET:
I will say of it,
It tutors nature. Artificial strife
Lives in these touches livelier than life." (Shakespeare, William, 1930: 885)
All these ideas have had a great impact on Eminescu, thus demonstrating that his theatrical poetics has been very much influenced by that of Shakespeare's.

One of the most complex plays of this *Dodecameron dramatic* is *Bogdan-Dragoş*. Shakespeare's influence on this play has been observed by G. Călinescu, but Filimon Taniac (1933: 7-12; 1934: 21-30) was the one who has fully commented upon this parallelism between Shakespeare and Eminescu. Bogdana's instigation (from Act 1, Scene 5), the murdering, the hesitation and both Bogdana and Sas's great fear resemble those from *Macbeth* (Act 1, Scene 7 and Act 2, Scene 1). Taniac also observes here a "motif" from *Julius Caesar* (just like the Shakespearean hero, who disappears in Act 3, Dragul dies at the beginning of the play). In his second article, Taniac realizes that he has exaggerated and says that Eminescu had planned to write his play in a different way and that "he is superior even to Shakespeare".

Călinescu says that there are several resemblances in the way the characters are built. The couple Bogdana-Sas (or Irina-Mihnea, in *Grue-Sânger*) reminds us of the couple Macbeth-Lady Macbeth. Both of them are committing the same crime, but they have different temperaments. Bogdana is a true Lady Macbeth, a "witch", who "has read in the mirror" to Sas "the black sin" (in *Macbeth*, too, the witches foresee Macbeth's destiny). Sas is vacillating, he has qualms of conscience, he is a hypocrite, very similar to Iago, who compares himself or is compared to a spider. Sas makes use of the same image of the spider. In *Macbeth*, too, the woman is the first to take action:
"(…) Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear (…)" (Shakespeare, William, 1930: 980)
On the other hand, Ana thinks that Bogdan is a goblin, a vampire or a ghost and the scene between the two of them might be compared to that between Romeo and Juliet. Dragul considers the world to be a "dream", a "shadow" and the life, with its vanity, - a fairytale told by someone else; Dragul's monologue has "the resonance of some lines from *Henry VI*" (Grigorescu, Dan, 1971).

Ştefan Avădanei (1972: 42-43) considers that the whole Act 2 from *Bogdan-Dragoş*, as well as the dialogue between the porter and the messenger from the Act 1, Scene 5, from *Grue-Sânger* remind of the porter's comical monologue and his amusing conversation with Macduff and Lennox, from *Macbeth* (Act 2, Scene 3). Shakespeare appeals to the so-called "comic-relief", to that "cathartic postponement" introduced by the porter's knocking on the gate, immediately after the description of the horrible crime.

The heroine from *Mira*, in her turn, follows Ophelia's example (Tacciu, Elena, 1979: 306). Mira is a "somnambulistic, pale girl", a mysterious and melancholic heroine. Ştefăniţă considers her a "pale and dead … virgin", a "goddess in long white clothes". Ştefăniţă, too, is, in a way, a hamletian character; he is noble and inconstant, melancholic and sanguine character, a heartless person, his father's "ghost" or "shadow". His monologue resemblance Hamlet's well-known monologue (from Act 3,

BDD-A5636 © 2008 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:42 UTC)

Scene 1). In act 1, Scene 4, Ştefăniţă makes use of a image which seems to be borrowed from King John's conversation with Hubert (Act 3, Scene 3):
"(…) If the midnight bell
Did with his iron tongue and brazen mouth
Sound on into the drowsy race of night;
If this same were a churchyard where we stand (…)" (Shakespeare, William, 1930: 411)
Arbore himself is compared to Essex; Ştefan's memory is for him "a winter's tale" and, just like Prospero, he talks about the "shadow of a dream"; in general, Arbore's lines (especially in Act 1, Scene 2), full of sadness when watching the world's decline, remind of those from *Hamlet, King Lear* or of some sonnets.

In the comedy *Infamia, cruzimea şi desperarea*, the king ponders even more than Pyram. He seems to be Lear's mirror from Edgar's words (Act 4, Scene 5):
"O, matter and impertinency mixed –
Reason in madness!" (Shakespeare, William, 1930: 967)
This is the tone, purely Shakespearean, of a play which might have been (if it had been completed) a great comedy.

Another unfinished play (Eminescu has written only the beginning) can be found on the manuscript 2285, fragment 126, entitled *Shakespeare, Richard al III-lea*. It is a burlesque transposition which aims at bantering the foreign plays adaptations' practice in that period.

Taking into account all these mentioned above, we may conclude that Eminescu' life and literary production have been very much by the Shakespearean theatre. As G. Ibrăileanu used to say, the theatre, the dramatic art, represents the author's highest level of fulfillment of his literary vocation. Therefore, we will not be able to completely understand Eminescu's literary production if we don't take into account the fact that it is based on the poet's dramatic experience, his activity as a prompter, transcriber, actor, translator, dramatic critic and theoretician. Eminescu's conception about the theatre is similar to that of Shakespeare's. He wanted to describe the world just like it is, God's role being played by the author and then by the characters of his plays. In his dramatic projects Eminescu makes use of some themes and motifs characteristic to the commedia dell'arte and to the Elizabethan popular theatre.

Bibliography

Avădanei, Şt., *Eminescu şi literatura engleză*, Editura Junimea, Iaşi, 1982
Călinescu, G., *Opera lui Mihai Eminescu*, Editura Minerva, Bucureşti, 1985
Dumitrescu-Buşulenga, Z., *Eminescu. Viaţă. Creaţie. Cultură*, Editura Eminescu, Bucureşti, 1989
Eminescu, M., *Articole şi traduceri*: *The French Comedy and the Russian Comedy*, Editura Minerva, Bucureşti, 1974
Grigorescu, D., *Shakespeare în cultura română modernă*, Editura Minerva, Bucureşti, 1971
Modorcea, G., *Shakespeare şi Eminescu*, Editura Aius PrintEd, Craiova, 2006
Shakespeare, W., *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, Ediţie bilingvă, Editura Pandora-M, Târgovişte, 2003
Shakespeare, W., *The Complete Works*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1930
Tacciu, E., *Eminescu, poezia elementelor*, Cartea românească, Bucureşti, 1979
Taniac, F., *Buletinul Mihai Eminescu*, nr. 11, 1933
Taniac, F., *Lady Macbeth, Bogdan şi Vidra, o paralelă dramatică*, nr. 12, 1934

BDD-A5636 © 2008 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:42 UTC)