

# The musical feeling of Eminescu's lyrics

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Paraschiva PÎȚU  
Otilia UNGUREANU

[parasca\\_pitu0826@yahoo.com](mailto:parasca_pitu0826@yahoo.com)

Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava (Romania)

**Résumé :** Au fil des années, la poésie d'Eminescu a longtemps été considérée comme un art de l'ouïe plutôt que comme un art de la vision. Le présent article révèle quelques aspects stylistiques et poétiques concernant l'harmonie des vers d'Eminescu. L'euphonie, l'une des constantes reconnues des paroles d'Eminescu, est un phénomène complexe qui, pour pouvoir être mise en évidence, nécessite l'analyse de tous les moyens de style. La musicalité structurelle du vers eminescien crée parfois une sorte de plate-forme pré-sémantique sur laquelle sera construite la sémantique du texte. L'euphonie d'Eminescu n'est pas seulement un phénomène phono-prosodique, ses sources se retrouvent à la fois au niveau morphologique, lexical et syntaxique, se transformant en une caractéristique du niveau textuel. De plus, comme nous le verrons, l'euphonie d'Eminescu n'est pas un simple phénomène sonore, mais plutôt un sentiment musical.

**Mots clés :** *l'harmonie, l'euphonie, phénomène phono-prosodique, stylistiques et poétiques.*

“I bitterly regret I haven't learnt music, for in my childhood, mother, who had a charming voice, competing with my father, who used to play the flute as a genuine artist, had discovered me having a good ear for music” (Mihai Eminescu, confession to Veronica Micle) (Cosma, 2000: 20).

G. Ibrăileanu, in *Notes about verse*, tries to point out that Eminescu's poetry is more an “art of sound” than an art of sight. Eminescu's rhyme turns into a musical instrument: “music from Eminescu's soul releases great effects in rhyme”. Forwards, Ibrăileanu claims that there is “harmony between the sonority of expression and the intention issued in the text”, the musical rhyme therefore acting as real music in the theme of life. The roots of the innate musical sense display on the surface a melodious note “delivered from his soul's

music" (Ibrăileanu, 1974: 144). Ibrăileanu outlines Eminescu's sensitivity for music, his music instinct based upon reason and his talent for orchestrating artistic sounds alike world's greatest composers, except the fact that Eminescu doesn't write notes on a portative but he builds euphonies with the help of his poetic language. The structural musicality of Eminescu's verses often produces a sort of pre-semantic platform on which it would be built later on the proper semantics of the text.

Eminescu's poetry, through the musicality of the verses, passes into a song, a weaving of poetry and music. Eminescu is a poet of music and a musician of poetry. The poem *Oh mother...* when it's read it slowly and graciously, reveals through the words a sorrowful song: "*Oh mother, sweet mother, from the mists of times/ On the rustling leaves you shall call upon me/ Above the dark crypt of the holy tomb/ Acacia trees are shaken by autumn and by wind / And slowly beat their branches, Whispering your name... They always beat, but you shall always sleep*" („O mamă, dulce mamă, din negură de vremi,/ Pe freacățul de frunze la tine să mă chemi:/ Deasupra criptei negre a sfântului mormânt/ Se scutură salcâmi de toamnă și de vânt,/ Se bat încet din ramuri, îngână glasul tău.../ Meru se vor tot bate, tu vei dormi meru.”) (I, 129)

Music engrains the words, the text is an euphonic body, and the hearer, being fascinated by the pure music of the verses, is frequently tempted to abolish the search for the meaning.

Eminescu's euphony is not a simple loud occurrence, but instead a musical sensation which Tudor Vianu defines thus: “the whisper of the Latin vowels, the sound of the hom, song of the river, cricket's song, the voice of the leafage are thereby no more than isolated sounds and somehow emblematic of a wide harmony, of world's music (...) Eminescu's harmony in its entirety is therefore separate from all those voices. It is rather a musical corresponding of the whole Eminescu's inspiration, (...) and thus its real style can't be revealed to us when considering it as an isolated loud fact, but only when considering it the entirety of the ideal tendencies from which it is interwoven.” (Vianu, 1970: 38)

Euphony, one of the established constants of Eminescu's poetry, is a complex phenomenon, which requires the analysis of all styles. Eminescu's euphony is not just a phono-prozodic phenomenon: its sources are both found on morphematic, lexical and syntactic level, changing into a textual level feature.

The musical aspect of the verses is set, on the phonetic level, by the mixture of open vowels (a, e), of mid-open vowels (i, o, ă) and of close vowels (î, u), which give an uplift and a descent movement, arising a “wave game” (Popa, 1982: 131) between the opposite, light and dark tones, as we can notice in *I only have one wish*: “*Whereas loudly fall/ Eternally the springs/ Let the moon glide/ Through the long fir peaks/ Let the bell penetrate/ The cold wind of the night/ Above me the holy tea tree/ Let its branch be shaken*” („Pe când cu zgomot cad/ Izvoarele-ntr-una,/ Alunece luna/ Prin vârful lungi de brad./ Pătrunză talanga/ Al serii rece vânt,/ De-asupra-mi teiul sfânt/ Să-și scuture creanga.”) (I, 216). The repetition of the vowels e, a besides the assonances in the lyrics “*The sky reveals its stars/ Sweet proclaimers of the lasting silence*” („Cerule stelele-și arată/ Solii dulci ai lungii liniști”) (I, 103), together with the alliteration of the consonant l, suggest the euphonic fluidity of the sphere as in the poem *I only have one wish*. Ascent-descent alternation as prosody phenomenon is also exemplified in *Years have passed*. The light tones of a vowel, constantly centred in the verse, are swallowed by dark tones of the low-vowels which surrounds them, mostly in the last stanza: “*It's all lost in the range of youth/ And voiceless are the sweet lips of other times/ And time rises behind me...I'm getting darker?*” („Pierdut e totu'n zărea tinereții/ Și mută-i gura dulce-a altor vremuri,/ Iar timpul crește-n urma mea...mă-ntunec”) (I, 201). Light a and e tones compose a connection between the voice tag and the Eminescu's soul: “*Moon on the sky flows saintly and clear/ Your large eyes seek*

for the rare leaf? („Luna pe cer trece-așa sfântă și clară/ Ochii tăi mari caută-n frunza cea rară...”) (Eve on the hill, I, 231)

Stressing *e* shows the presence of a shining light, contemplating magical inner feelings: “Your strands of hair spread out/ And likable they stay/ Don't say no for I embrace you/ Nobody'n the world shall see us” („Părul tău ți se desprinde/ Și frumos ți se mai șede,/ Nu ți ba de te-oiu cuprinde,/ Nime'n lume nu ne vede.”) („Leave your World, I, 209). The regional phonetism of the diphthong in the word *creapă* (breaks) shows a characteristic pronunciation of Moldavian dialect (Corrupt youth):

“See how the urn breaks down, and ash revived/ How past whisper with a voice for fight/ the Roman people” („Vedeți cum urna creapă, cenușa reînviă/ Cum murmură trecutul cu glas de băătăliă/ Poporului Roman.”) (I, 277). A diphthong or a vowel together with the nasal consonant *m* and *n*, which are considered to be the most melodious, are able to deliver metallic sounds and a pressure effect. „Though branches hit the window/ And poplars shake/ It is for having you in mind/ And to slowly come nearer” („Și dacă...”) „Și dacă ramuri bat în geam/ Și se cutremur plopții,/ E ca în minte să te am/ Și ncet să te apropii.” (I,192). Euphonic value of the sounds *m* and *n* together with the semantic plenitude of the noun *bell*, indicates in the poems When soil I will be (“It's wind they hear on waves/ From mountains the bell”, I, 223), Memento Mori (“Joyful tearing branches are coming with bells on neck”, IV, 128), I only Have One Wish (“Hold the bell/ The night's cold wind/ Above my holy tea tree/ Let him shake his branch” I, 216) (Iar când voui fi pământ („S'aud pe valuri vânt,/ Din munte talanga”, (I, 223, Memento Mori), („Vin rupând verșele crengă cu talangele de gât”, IV, 128), Mai am un singur dor („Pătrunză talanga/ Al serii rece vânt/ Deasupra-mi teiul sfânt/ Să-și scuture creanga”, I, 216) the idea of a musical accompaniment which resonate with poet's melancholic sensation. Rhythmed *i* tones generate a surprising beatitude sensation, similar to high notes reproduced by a violin (Near the Lonely Poplars): “For I adored you with pagan eyes/ And paved with pains/ Which I received from elders/ From ancestors to ancestors” (I, 191) (Pe lângă popii fără soț): „Căci te inbeam cu ochi păgâni/ Și plini de suferinți,/ Ce mi-i lasară din bătrâni/ Părinții din părinți.” (I, 191). *U* close tones mean falling in the depths, reflecting therewith lyrical self's introspection covered in grief and darkness (Through silent nights): “Through silent nights/ Through mute watersides/ Through quick wind/ I hear a voice; (...)” (I, 467). (Prin nopți tăcute): „Prin nopți tăcute,/ Prin luncă mute,/ Prin vântul iute,/ Aud un glas; (...)” (I, 467).

According to Gheorghe Popa in *Eminescian poetic space* (Popa, 1982: 134) the repetition of *a* vowel might suggest the suffering and the lack of hope in the closed round space, reproducing an insatiable music, which helps the intensity of the spirit going so high that all meanings are completely understood (*Lucifer*): “The depths of my breast ache from the / Desire of thy fierce love/ My heavy, big, eyes also ache/ When into them thine shove” (I, 167). „Mă dor de crudul tău amor/ A pieptului meu coarde/ Și ochii mari și grei mă dor,/ Privirea ta mă arde.” (I, 167). *U* and *a* vowel have the role of soberness and mourning. Hidden tonalities as *i*, *u*, *ă* help *o* vowel reproduce a deep lamentation music, the awareness of a tragic human fate being overcome by the musicality of the lyrics which goes on the foreground *Ta Tvam asi*: “What do these candles mean that burn in every corner/ Below the gloomy shapes with heavy tiny faces?/ “What does that singing mean which filled with kindness is/ Which mournful floods the mighty sphere? (IV, 362). (*Ta Tvam asi*): „Ce'nseamnă' aceste candelă ce ard în orice colț/ Sub chipuri mohorâte cu-adânci și slabe fețe?/ Ce 'nseamnă' acea cântare pătrunsă de blândete,/ Ce împlă tânguioasă puternicile bolți?” (IV, 362).

The acoustic value of *u* and *ă* found in the words which are placed in the beginning and in the ending of the lyrics, gives a musical effect through its symmetry and shows an inner grief: “Above the dark crypt of the holly tomb/ Acacia trees are shaken by autumn and by wind” (Oh Mother, I, 129) „Deasupra criptei negre a sfântului mormânt/ Se scutură salcâmi de toamnă și de vânt.”

(*O mamă*, I, 129). According to Garabet Ibrăileanu, „poetry is an art of sound but not of sight” (Ibrăileanu, 1974: 133), causing unconsciously an “imitative harmony”. “Acoustic sensation of the water which flows through the rocks” (*ibidem*, p. 145) is given by the repetition of the *r* sound, as we can notice in the first two lyrics in *The wish: Come in woods at spring/ Which trembles on the gravel* („*Vino-n codru la izvorul/ Care tremură pe prund*”) (I, 182).

In *When Soil I will Be*, the repetition of *d* in the first verse and *r* in the second express from a phonetic point of view the smooth flowing of the spring: “*And gently do I hear how fall/ Eternally the springs*” (“*S’and cum blânde cad/ Izvoarele ‘ntr’undă*”) (I, 223). Vowel-consonant alternation in *You Hear Through Dried Leaves (You hear through dried leaves/ A passing cold wind*” (IV, 342, *Auzi prin frunzi uscate*) („*Auzi prin frunzi uscate/ Trecând un rece vânt.*” IV, 342), *From Among Hundreds of Masts (From among hundreds of masts/ Leaving shores and banks and bays, / Are there many to be lost/ Broken by the winds and waves?*)” (Dintre sute de catarge („*Dintre sute de catarge/ Care lasă malurile, / Câte oare le vor sarge/ Vânturile, valurile?*”) (IV, 396). Through *Silent Nights (The good world/ The full moon/ And the silent sea/ Are an Icon/ My eye looks for it/ In the wide world/ With drunken mind/ I cry and sing*, (IV, 25, *Prin nopți tăcute*) („*Luna senină, / Luna cea plină, / Și marea lină/ Icoan-i sunt;/ Ochiu-mi o cată/ În lumea lată, / Cu mintea beată/ Eu plâng și cânt.*”) (IV, 25) helps increasing the acoustic effect, which creates unclear impacts of the noisy dried leaves, of the whirling waves, of a sorrowful song, making at the same time a musical harmony which increases the beauty of the poem. The consonant group *pr* circumscribes a general musicality, decreased through dissimilation of the vibrant *r* and *p* in the structure of the preposition “*through*”: “*Through black, ancient walls*” (Loneliness, I, 105)

Eminescu is not pleased with finding a good rhyme for the previous verse, but he creates “luxurious” rhymes, especially in the second stage of creation, rhymes that astonish the ear through their aesthetic and euphonic value: “*guest-Istaspe; peerless-all; bell-branch; smooth-serene; banners-branches; in one-moon; wind-holy; ahead-remember; song-earth.*” (*oaspe-Istaspe; fără soț – toți; talanga – creanga; lin – senin; flamuri – ramuri; într-una – luna; vânt – sfânt; înainte – aminte; cânt – pământ.*)

In certain poems the shape of the rhymes is “Draconian”, having short rhymed lyrics: “*Through silent nights/ Through muted meadows/ Through the fast wind/ I hear a voice./ From a passing cloud/ From the cold moon/ From withered dreams?*” „*Prin nopți tăcute, / Prin luncă mute, / Prin vântul inte, / And un gles, / Din nor ce trece, / Din luna rece, / Din visuri see.*” (Prin nopți tăcute, IV, 25) (*Through Silent Nights*, IV, 25); “*The voice of horn crosses/ Your black loneliness/ Submit my dear/ To waves of sounds/ Over the Woods There Stands a City*” („*Glasul conrnului străbate / Neagra ta singurătate / Valului de sunete / Draga mea sîpune-te. / Peste codri sta cetatea*”) (V, 115)

The loud rhymes reveal music that creates a dispersed vague impression of the poems. In the first stage of creation Eminescu uses more assonances than rhymes: *glasses-scales, face-arms, peonies-spies, wood-sign: ochelari – cântar* (mold. *cântariu*); *față – brațe* (mold. *brață*); *bujori – pânditor* (mold. *pânditori*); *lemn – semn* (mold. *săm*).

Consonant alliterations obtained the same way as the groups of sounds were chosen, or the same resonant group, spread over the text create a musicality in consonance with the meaning of the text. Mostly, alliterations have a binary or ternary structure (Tohăneanu, 1965):

b...b: “*When Selene trembles on the brown vault*” („*Când pe bolta brună tremură Selene*”) (At Bucovina I, 9); d...d: “*shiny diamonds*” („*dalbe diamante*”) (At Bucovina I, 9); “*Oh, you simply don’t know how sweet and tender and divine*” („*O, nu știți cât e de dulce, de duios și de divin*”) (Why shall you die? IV, 37); f...f...f: “*As the cattle that it’s branded with*

the fiery iron” („Ca vita ce se-nfără cu fierul ars în foc”) (Corrupt Youth, I, 23 ); j...j: “my juvenile games” („jocurile-mi june”) (From Abroad I, 6); l...l...l: “...with a slow step, slowly in its path” („...cu un pas a lene Lin în calea sa”) (At Bucovina I, 9), “at faint light which he sees shining” („La slăba lumină ce-o vede lucind”) (The Hope I, 11); “When with lamp he flies lightening the world” („Cînd cu lampa zboară lumea luminînd”) (What I wish you, sweet Romania? I, 15); m...m: “Thus the sailors wandering on sea” („Așa marinarii pe mare îmblând”) (Midnight enigma I, 12); “In sea he died” („În mare murea”) (When the sea, IV, 19); n...n: “mist and clouds” (From abroad I, 6); “dark night” („neagra noapte”) (Companion F.I I, 27); “the dark clouds” („norii cei negri”) (Mortua est I, 37); p...p: “eyelid in peace they give them” („Pleoapele-n pace le-nchină”) (The Hope I, 11); „r...r: “Leaping rivers” („Rîuri resăltînde”) (At Bucovina I, 9); s...s...s: “when suns die out and stars fall” („cînd soarii se sting și cînd stelele pică”) (Mortua est I, 38); “Did you go to extinguish a radiant star?” („Te-ai dus spre a stinge o stea radioasă?”) (Mortua est I, 37); v...v: “Life in eternal...a tempest dream” („Viața în vecie,... vis de vitejie”) (What I wish you, Sweet Romania? I, 16)

Musical proposals continue on the morphological level by musical characteristic of Eminescu's verse and due to melodious quality of the verbs that poet uses “which shape a verbal incantation and an emotional movement of invincible charm” (Popa, 1982: 129). They are filled with vibrations and arise in the same time echoes. Here we can refer to verbs as: “ring”, “mourn”, “hear”, „whisper”, “seethe”, “swish” etc.

Onomatopoeic sonority of certain nouns corresponds with the impression of a sound, of music. The horn generates a poetic state, portraying melancholy and severity through the musical feature of the instrument, its sound accompanies the deep human feelings: “Through the sounds soft waters/ seems that voice of horn comes near/ From distance/ Getting louder and louder” („Și prin sunet blânde ape/ Parcă vine mai aproape/ Glas de corn din depărtare/ Tot mai tare și mai tare.”) (Thousands of Stars.... Sweet Night... VI, 128); “In lonely woods/ A horn seemed playing” (“Din codrii singuratică/ Un corn părea că sună”) (Sarmis, IV, 411); “Among alder branches/ melancholic a horn plays” („Dintre ramuri de arin/ Melancolic cornul sună”) (Over the Peaks I, 206); “For the sound of the horn/ All in life turns up” („Căci la sunetul de corn/ Toate-n viață se-ntorn”) (Musatin and Woods, VI, 102)

The horn is a fundamental constituent of Eminescian lexicon, signifying an “inner dynamics in the relation cosmic self-poetic self-national self on musical comprehension of the world” (Irimia, 2005: 36) The sound of the horn , generalized in its own musicality becomes the echo of the cosmic harmony: “In hidden meadow/ Smooth moon stripes are flying/ When far away in the mountains, in the woods, dearly the horn vibrates?” („În poiana tănuită blânde zboară dungii de lună/ Când departe-n munți și codri duos buciumul răsună”) (Landscape, IV, 508); “But when I shall die,/ To hear the horn I want” („Când voi muri s-aud / Cântare de buciuum”) (I only Have One Wish III, 243)

The bell, though it is not a musical instrument play sounds which fits in a sonor sound. Through its heavy sound that spreads in space and time it emphasizes a melancholy: “Ringing bell/ The wind comes in” („Sunare de clopot/ Pătrunde al serii vânt ,”) (I only have one wish III, 235); “the ancient bell fills with its voice the night” („Clopotul vechi împle cu glasul lui sara”) (Eve on the Hill, III, 300); “Midnight vibrates the bell of brass?” („Se bate miezul nopții în clopotul de anamă”) (Midnight Vibrates..., I, 203); „A bell that rings, calling from afar” („Un clopot care sună, chemând din depărtări”) (Exercises and Debris V, 651). The whistle combines the musical feature with the “national specificity”, a process in which “the sound of whistle unites its musicality into the harmony of the spirit” (Ibidem, p.119): “From the hills of green/ A whistle plays” („De pe dealuri de verdeată/ Sună fluier”) (Murmur of the Forest II, 132);

“Voices of bells thrill the whole sky high above” („Valea-i în fum, fluierie murmură-n stând”) (Eve on the Hill I, 231); “Sorrowful whistle/ Doina in grievance” („Fluier de dor/ Doina de plângere...”) (Stars in the Sky V, 404). The sound of the guitar adds a musical component to the harmony of the world, materializing the poetic feeling complementary to medieval atmosphere: “In the charming nature I kind of hear the guitar/ Văratec, warm air fell me asleep with its rumor” („În farmecul naturii pare c-aud ghitana/ Văratec, caldul aer mă adormea cu zvonul”) (Dragos’ wedding, VIII, 94); “For poor he was lured with the guitar” („Căci biet ademenit el a fost cu ghitana.”) (North Diamond V, 302); “Over the long strings of the guitar let them fall/ In the grey night of the world’s snow” („Pe coardele-ntinse-a ghitarei să cadă/ În noaptea cea ninsă de-a lumii zăpadă”) (North Diamond V, 327).

The harp symbolizes harmony between sky and earth, its sound incorporating Universe in a musical harmony: “That mystic feeling which falls asleep into your harp/ In theatrical couplets shall you unfold it as the stuff?” („Acea tainică simțire care doarme-n a ta harfă/ În cuplete de teatru s-o desfăci ca pe o marfă?”) (Letter II, I, 137); “I am a harp which soaks in wind/ You are a song” („Eu sînt o arpă muiată-n vânt/ Tu ești un cânt”) (Replies, I, 479).

The lyre reveals poetical meanings placed on the concept of harmony and musical creativity: “Will I force my lyre to sing the love?” A chain/ which divides with brotherhood between two and three lovers? („Încorda-voi a mea liră să cânt dragostea? Un lanț/ ce se-mparte cu frăție într doi și trei amanți.”) (Letter II, I, 140); “Whose soul is struggling/ Whose soul screams in mourning/ Whose lyre plays ruefully? It is mine?” („Ce suflet se frământă,/ Ce suflet țipă-n doliu,/ Ce liră jalnic cântă?/ Sânt eu!”) (Andrieu Mureșanu, IV, 58). Likewise, in Blue Flower, the poetic language is highly melodious, both through maintaining the dogma of lyrics as through using the authentic forms of the verbs. Some words are used both as an adjective and as an adverb also: “Sweetly smoothing my hair” („Dulce netezindu-mi părul”) – “sweetly” is adverb”, and in “And you left sweet miracle” („Și te-ai dus, dulce minune”), “sweet” is an adjective.

Mihai Eminescu doesn’t willingly use euphonic ways, but they come naturally “as a consequence from the music of his soul, as an outcome of his poetic instinct but not of his conscious will” (Ibrăileanu, 1974: 144) Euphonic significance of Eminescu’s lyrics is an “utterance of Eminescu’s sensitivity, of his personality, of his reaction to reality/at his view about the world” (*ibidem*, p.161), thing that proves that “art is an expression up to the sound, to the atom” (*idem*). Through the sensitivity of lyrics, Eminescu creates transference from external physical space to inner space” (Popa, 1982: 138), revealing to us his own soul in its purest increasing the meanings of poetical ideas.

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