



EUGEN D. POPIN - INTERVIEW WITH DIANA CÂRLIGEANU

**Eminescu – Sonete/Sonnets – Diana Cârligeanu
(pen name K.V. Twain) April 2025**

EP: The year 2025 marks the 175-year anniversary of Mihai Eminescu's birth. In your opinion, what hasn't been done for the great Romanian thinker and remains, therefore, to do from here on?

DC: A striking fact, to me, is that we have many valuable Romanian-language books about Eminescu's life and oeuvre, but they haven't been translated into languages of large circulation—not even into English. On the biographical side, two books coming to mind are the charming one authored by Teodor Ștefanelli and the one written by Tudor Arghezi (actually a collection of essays, also important on account of representing the opinions of another major Romanian writer.) On the exegetical side I would mention Zoe Dumitrescu-Bușulenga's study, "Eminescu—Cultură și creație" ("Eminescu—Culture and Creation") and that of Rosa del Conte, "Eminescu sau despre Absolut" ("Eminescu or About the Absolute"), written in Italian, translated into Romanian, but never—to my knowledge—transposed into other languages. The last one does currently have a complicating factor: a translator wouldn't know how to choose, say, the English titles of poems never translated into English and couldn't quote never-translated verses. What is needed, in my view, is a translation program that seeks to place such volumes as the above-mentioned

ones on the international market. It would, of course, be preferable that the translations be high-quality. I am not aware of any intention, in Romania, to create and finance such a program... So I express these thoughts with the hope that they will have an echo in the minds and hearts of some Romanians in the cultural field. Eminescu has not truly entered the circle of the great thinkers and creators discussed on a global level, and the blame must be placed on Romania and Romanians: way too little has been done to facilitate the understanding of this great figure.

EP: You have publicly declared your intention to translate Eminescu's entire poetic oeuvre into English, including a critical apparatus. Please tell us about this project.

DC: I believe that many Romanians might not be aware of how little has been translated into English, of the entire poetic corpus... The maximum reached up till now belongs to the teenager Corneliu M. Popescu (who perished in the 1977 earthquake) and totals 70 poems—about a fifth of Eminescu's poetic oeuvre. That means that the remainder of four fifths is yet to cover. My plan is to translate the entire corpus, attaching a critical apparatus so as to aid the understanding of the man and creator Eminescu. This pioneering project is estimated at eight bilingual volumes and four years of work, doing only this. There is currently no financing for it; my work to date has been pro bono.

EP: What can you tell us about the sonnet volume, published this year with Eikon Press?

DC: This is meant to be the first volume of the desired Poetic Oeuvre in English, and contains the translation of all 31 of Eminescu's sonnets—plus nine variants which are included in the critical apparatus. The volume has other sections as well: introduction, an ample and well-researched chronology, perspectives, appendix, bibliography. The introduction includes a brief history of English translations, an explanation of my attempt, a description of the present volume, and some technical notes about the

type of sonnet Eminescu penned. The appendix contains Eminescu's first sonnetistic exercise, which occurred in 1869 and was occasioned by a series of concerts held by the soprano Carlotta Patti (c. 1840-1889) in Bucharest. I explained that only two out of the 31 sonnets are reworkings: *Weary with Toil* is derived from Sonnet XXVII by William Shakespeare, and *Venice* is a reworking, in many steps, of Venedig—a sonnet by the obscure Italian-German poet Gaetano Cerri (1826-1899). The other volumes planned are to follow the same model as the first, with all sections bilingual.

EP: Can you share with us what the next volume will be?

DC: Yes. It will be *Memento Mori*, the panorama of 217 stanzas and 1302 verses that some have called untranslatable. I am the first person to do an integral translation, in any language. (I finished it a while back, in 2023.) It is slated to come out later this year.

EP: You've mentioned that Eminescu reworked a Shakespearean sonnet. What can you tell us about the Eminescu-Shakespeare connection?

DC: Eminescu himself told us about it, in articles, manuscript notes and the poem *The Books*—where the English bard is referred to as “attentive comrade of my soul.” I have already translated that poem, which is to be included in a future volume of the Poetic Oeuvre. Eminescu studied Shakespeare's works in his youth, using intermediary languages, and translated a fragment from *Timon of Athens*: that translation remained unfinished. Zoe Dumitrescu-Buşulenga said that the English genius exerted a “catalytic influence” upon the Romanian genius, and the connection between them is an illustration of the way in which “geniuses meet one another.”

EP: What are the main difficulties in translating Eminescu's poetry and what are the key differences between your translations and previous ones?

DC: Translating poetry involves preserving the meaning *along with* a prosodic scheme which is as

close as possible to the original one. Difficulties can appear in the finding of rhymes, the conveying of archaisms and dialectical items, and the preserving of the number of syllables (*Hyperion* is penned in ballad style, with a succession of 8-7 syllables that must be maintained). Short verses can be surprisingly difficult to translate, as there is no “maneuvering space.” Previous translations have had important shortcomings: excessive archaisms, too-banal language, massive deviations from the original prosody, and various steps outside of Eminescu's lexical or imagistic register. There is a wide range of archaisms which overburdened the verses in the past and which do not show up in my translations, e.g. *wouldst*, *shouldst*, *could'st*, *wilt*, *shalt*, *o'er*, *e'en*, *ne'er*, *thou*, *thy*, *thee*, *thine*. By my reckoning, I am bringing improvements with respect to precision, euphony, and stylization. Overall, Eminescu sounds more modern—and is thus easier to read and comprehend—in my renderings.

EP: What are your thoughts on Eminescu's importance, for both Romanians and the universal culture? Can we hope to see a more serious understanding, by the foreign public, than has existed to date?

DC: Eminescu was an ultra-rare case of human and creator, combining a hyper-brilliance with a high morality and a great passion for the well-being of his nation and country. He has bequeathed to us a cultural legacy with which a person could easily spend a life much longer than that of the creator. Other great Romanian thinkers have understood the phenomenon we are faced with: Blaga spoke of an Eminescu Idea, Noica of the Eminescian Miracle... Having pored over Eminescu's notebooks, the philosopher Constantin Noica compared them to those of Leonardo da Vinci and of Paul Valéry. I know for a fact that the Anglophone sphere has much cultural openness, studying past centuries and even the ancient world, and I believe that it would react positively to this little-known genius of Eastern Europe who embedded, in his works, Romanian folklore, German philosophy, Indian thought and ideas such as the doctrine of reincarnation—scientifically validated through Ian Stevenson's research and well-known to the ancient world

(Pythagoras, Empedocles, Shakyamuni Buddha all remembered previous lives)... In the 19th century Eminescu was wondering, apropos of reincarnation, how many individuals there might be in a single one: it's an intellectual daring that many do not possess today. (Interestingly, among Western thinkers it was probably the German philosopher Schopenhauer that showed the greatest passion for Asian thought, often mentioned in his opus "The World as Will and Idea.") I believe that the Poetic Oeuvre with a critical apparatus which I have proposed could greatly aid the understanding of Eminescu by the foreign public, but—as explained at the beginning of this interview—it is not the only thing that would help.

EP: Do you have a favorite sonnet or poem? What particularly draws you to Eminescu's oeuvre?

DC: His entire body of work is fascinating and can be seen as a unitary whole, but I am particularly drawn to those works which have an obvious philosophical substrate, e.g. *Glosa, Tat Twam Asi, Ode (in ancient meter)*. Of the sonnets, I would pick *However Many Stars*... I haven't formally studied philosophy, but I have done much reading in this area and adjacent ones, as I am greatly interested in the fundamental questions about the universe, time, man, history.

EP: Thank you for this interview. I wish you success in reaching the end of this most precious initiative!

DC: Thank you very much. I truly hope to see the project come to fruition someday... for Eminescu, for the Romanian culture and the global one, for the much-menaced human spirit.

