

## LITERATURE, DISCOURSE AND MULTICULTURAL DIALOGUE IN THE WORKS OF JORGE LUIS BORGES AND MIHAI EMINESCU

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*Abstract:* This critical essay entitled **Literature, multicultural discourse and dialogue in the works of Jorge Luis Borges and Mihai Eminescu** illustrates the influence of the reading of the German philosopher's work Arthur Schopenhauer "The World as Will and Representation" over the fantastic fiction written by two intellectuals from cultural spaces at the Latin cultural borders. It is about two geniuses from different epochs, periods paradoxical similar through the atmosphere: on the one hand, Mihai Eminescu is considered to be the pioneer of two roads in Romanian narrative, that of fantastic fiction and that of the philosophical epics and, furthermore, by Jorge Luis Borges, the patriarch of the postmodernism in worldwide culture. The comparative critical essay **Literature, Discourse and Multicultural Dialogue in the Works of Jorge Luis Borges and Mihai Eminescu** aims to highlight the originality, the novelty of vision, the specificity of the sensitivity and of creativity of the fantastic prose of the two writers with elective affinities clearly stated showing:

- *Parallelisms and tangents in the spiritual biographies of the two writers : Mihai Eminescu and Jorge Luis Borges ;*
- *The libraries of their adolescence;*
- *The meeting in the labyrinth of reading with the author of "The World as Will and Representation" ;*
- *Their experience as librarians;*
- *The admiration for the works of William Shakespeare;*
- *The ability to describe unseen countries from the space of extreme Romanity;*

*Encyclopedic minds, Mihai Eminescu and Jorge Luis Borges were constantly concerned about their own cultural horizon expansion and they were possessed by a boundless thirst of knowledge. The originality and the modernity of their **Literature, multicultural discourse and dialogue in the works of Jorge Luis Borges and Mihai Eminescu** came from the creative assimilation of philosophical ideas, particularly from the work of Schopenhauer, which led the revolution of the concepts of composition, character building , dismantling fiction , decomposition of the act of creation practiced in open-ended works .*

*Keywords:* Mihai Eminescu, Jorge Luis Borges, multicultural dialogue, literature and discourse.

### **Parallelisms and Tangents in the Spiritual Biographies of the Writers Mihai Eminescu and Jorge Luis Borges**

The Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges wrote once that "a literature is different from another literature less through the text, and more through the way in which it is read". These biographical similitude should seemed simple coincidences, if in the poetry or in the essayistic and fantastic prose of the two writers Mihai Eminescu and Jorge Luis Borges should not exist so many tangents, already mentioned (Marinescu, 2004) and which the present material synthesizes them.

### a. The Adolescence's Libraries

Training in a bookish universe, appreciating the everlasting values of the old books, Mihai Eminescu and Jorge Luis Borges will always keep an attitude of pious gratitude for the libraries of their intellectual adolescence. Jorge Luis Borges wrote in *The Prologue* from *Evaristo Carriego* in 1930: "The truth is that I was spending my childhood in a garden, in the back of a lattice work with sharp tops points and in a library with never ending English tomes." (Borges, 1999 I: 31) As a child, the Argentinean writer learned to read excellently in English from his grand mother, Fanny Haslam and from his governess, Miss Tink. In *Schița autobiografică (The Autobiographical Sketch* – translated title) Jorge Luis Borges confessed: "If I would be ever asked which event was the main event in my life, I should say that it was my father's library. Sometimes, I believe that I was never out from that library." (Borges, 1981:15)

A library with many Romanian books translated from French and with the Romanian chronicles, which represented the printings of the moment has also Gheorghe Eminovici, the collector of duties on spirits, Mihai Eminescu's father. At Cernăuți, the author of the famous *Lepturariu*, Aron Pumnul, Mihai Eminescu's Romanian literature and history teacher had a Romanian personal library, from which he lent books to his pupils, who were gently guided. The passionately reading and meditations on the books ideas will transform Mihai Eminescu in a frequent buyer of old books. In the prose fragment entitled *Când eram încă la universitate (When I still was at the University* - translated title) Mihai Eminescu confessed that he has "a peculiar activity. I was always walking on the streets, entering here and there in an antiquity shop and rummaging or stirring up his stuff; I was buying from his books everything that it seems more bizarre and fantastic and, coming back home I was reading and writing in a copybook called *fragmentarium* all the fragments that I liked. I was living in a village near the university's city, and around my house was a lot of quiet, because through the hazard in that house were also living old persons. There, during the night, after covering the fireplace, I was reading and translating for my own pleasure, fact that I also mentioned above. Then, suddenly, it seems that I was entering in the labyrinths of those curious stories which I had already read, an image was following another, as fact was also following the others. Then I was turn off the candle, for not disturbing me in my gloomy visions and I was rapidly writing in the dark in *fragmentarium* the images and the visions which were showing signs in a blowing of a match. Today, stirring the papers, I have found that *fragmentarium* I am reading and reading without no pause and very strange... I am waking up in the same house I use to live in, it was night... Outside the wind was whistling through the secular trees from the park. An imagination after another is written and I can see that all these strange and broken fragments from all over the world are a beautiful story although a little strange. I am writing it. Here it is." (Eminescu, 1978 II: 548)

Fascinated in the reading labyrinth, Mihai Eminescu develops ambiguity, transforming the time for remembering in the present time of writing his own work with an open end and never finished. Literature's birth from readings and dreams is a trendy theme of the contemporary era, considered to be a postmodern epoch, and that is because everything was already written. Writing is rather a recombination and a rediscovery of the texts. In his *Amintiri (Memoirs* –translated title) Ioan Slavici confirms Mihai Eminescu's pleasure to live in spacious houses and to read quietly at home the books that he used to deify. The reading

taste was always accompanied by that of the Mocha coffee, which the poet used to cook by himself, hoping that reading time may be extended, that night may be turned into day and thus, by passing the sleep attempt, the lucid initiation can be achieved. (Slavici, 1998)

The libraries near the bed, which should be read in dark, which are changed periodically and which are defining the personalities: this is a common theme from the writings of the two authors, who are undoubtedly among the most famous readers of their century. The night reading with the siesta and the calm meditation, with the infinite set of connections between different pages of the book was a part of the reading ritual of Jorge Luis Borges. In an interview with Alberto Manguel, a Canadian English writer, fluent in Spanish, living in a small village in France and the reader for a famous blind person - Jorge Luis Borges-, Alberto Manguel remembered that when he was reading a text he did never reach its end. Interested in the construction of the texts read for him, Borges made connections with other texts because he had “a colossal memory”. (Manguel, 2002: 28-29) May be that is why Borges’ reader has the mission to create texts (see *Pierre Ménard, autorul lui Don Quijote - Pierre Ménard, the Author of the Quixote*-, translated title Borges, 1999I :281). It is also interesting Borges’ suggestion to read *Christ’ Imitation* by Kempis, as if it were written by Joyce. Another intuition of the Argentinean writer is that any reading of any work is a way to know the others. And that is because any masterpiece creates its precursors (see *Kafka și precursorii lui/ Kafka and his Precursors* – translated title- a writer whose work Borges enjoyed a lot). From the experience of reading from adolescence and from his whole life it starts the idea that all the books written or unwritten are already existing, because they are the result of an enormous, but not infinite combination of all the letters of the alphabet. (see *Biblioteca Babel/ The Library of Babel* –translated title Borges ,1999 I 304).

Borges’ surprising ideas appear, in a different context, as the intuitions of the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, whom Borges and Eminescu met in their adolescence readings. The combination between life, dream and books is described by German thinker as it follows:

“The life and dreams are just pages of a single book. The uninterrupted reading is called real life. But when the usual reading time (the day time) has elapsed and when it arrives the resting moment, we lazily continue to feuilleton the volume and to read another page, here and there, without order and without result; sometimes the page is unknown, but always it is from the same book.” (Schopenhauer, 1882bI:28) The strange *Cartea de nisip/ The Book of Sand* – (translated title - Borges, 1999II:309 preserves the same features in Borges’ description.

## **b. Schopenhauer, Eminescu and Borges:**

### **The Meeting from the Library**

The meeting in the reading labyrinth with the author of the work *Lumea ca voință și reprezentare / The World as Will and representation* – translated title- (Schopenhauer, 1882b) occurs in the moment when Mihai Eminescu and Jorge Luis Borges were both teenagers and they were students. The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer will become the favorite author of the two young writers, who will assimilate ideas from *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* and will be impressed by the spirit of the modern voluntarism creator.

The paper *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* published in 1819 by Arthur Schopenhauer is the work of a young man of 30 years old who had been working to design this paper for four years. It is normal for it to have so much influence over the souls in their formation age, spirits who read with great amazement.

Mihai Eminescu was 10 years old when Arthur Schopenhauer died in Frankfurt, in 1860. At 24 years old, Romanian poet has already read Schopenhauer, as it results from his letter to Titu Maiorescu. The metaphysical ideas of Schopenhauer will influence him in achieving his fantastic prose, which he almost entirely wrote during his studies and published it, till he was 26 years old. Mihai Eminescu's concerns for the fantastic prose appear under the influence of the readings from Arthur Schopenhauer's creation, just at the time when Titu Maiorescu was also interested in achieving Romanian translation of the work written by the philosopher that he used to call "Man of the Century". This translation was made partly in the form of the volume entitled *Aforisme asupra înțelepciunii în viață/ Aphorisms on Wisdom in Life* – translated title (Schopenhauer, 1890).

In *the Prologue* of the volume *Fireworks* (1944) Jorge Luis Borges wrote: "Schopenhauer, De Quincey, Stevenson, Mauthner, Shaw, Chesterton and Léon Bloy form the heterogeneous group of authors that I read constantly." (Borges, 1999I: 321) Not only Jorge Luis Borges recognizes to Arthur Schopenhauer the merit of having been his model as we have seen in the passage of autobiography reproduced in the previous chapter.

Both Eminescu and Borges will notice that as an admirer of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer is, above all, the master of the reliable intuitions, impeccably written from the stylistic point of view, observations that generalize conclusions about the real, tangible world.

Arthur Schopenhauer's success of his philosophical work does not start from the formulations for the first time of eternal human truths, but from the signaling the repeatability of these conclusions. The eclectic Arthur Schopenhauer proves, in fact, the routine of the brilliant observations, which is illustrated by the similarity between these periodic rediscoveries of the same moral, existential, psychological truths irrespective of the oriental or occidental area of the event.

In a letter sent from Berlin in 1874 to Titu Maiorescu, when Junimea's mentor was advising him to graduate his doctor degree and to become a professor at the new founded University of Iassy, Mihai Eminescu wrote that "to teach Schopenhauer's philosophy, so that it could be considered a complete course, as the author himself wished, I need to know some information that would require a special training, some knowledge of natural science and anthropology." (\*\*\*)*Studii*, 1933IV: 102-104.)

A contemporary researcher (Frisch, 1999) proposed an interesting hypothesis about Eminescu's preoccupation for Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy. Based on a Berlin address „Potsdamerstraße 276 E”, written in the manuscript ms. 2287, 57 v., address belonging to the friend and the editor of the complete works of Schopenhauer in six volumes, published in Leipzig between 1873 and 1874, Helmuth Frisch demonstrates that Eminescu would have visited Julius Frauenstädt. The fact is that Eminescu received as a gift from Iacob Negruzzi this edition of the complete works of Arthur Schopenhauer and these six volumes were placed in a special place "on the poet's working table". (Ștefanelli, 1883:98)

The work of the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who have influenced all European artistic thinking (and not only) during 1860 and 1930 was soon completely translated in Romanian. Arthur Schopenhauer is the greatest forgotten writer of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, although his work has exerted a fertile attraction over the European spirit which it has influenced the crystallization for a long time. It is very well known that in Romanian culture the former evangelists of German philosopher's ideas were the intellectuals' members of the cenacle *Junimea*. In the atmosphere of the cenacle *Junimea* it was discussed for the first time in our country about his work. Titu Maiorescu, Romanian translator of German philosopher's ideas from *Aphorisms*, shared his enthusiasm about the work of Arthur Schopenhauer with another friend of *Junimea* cenacle, who will become one of the first translators of the German philosopher in Voltaire's language and land. It was **I.A. Cantacuzino** or **Zizine**. By 1878 he would have retired from the politics and two years later, in 1880, he published in Paris the first translation of Arthur Schopenhauer's *Aphorisms* under the title *Les Aphorismes sur la sagesse dans la vie*. He continued to publish in the next years French translations of the work of Arthur Schopenhauer.

The fact that Mihai Eminescu directly met Romanian translator in French of Arthur Schopenhauer's work results from a telegram that Titu Maiorescu sent him from Bucharest in the 5<sup>th</sup> /17<sup>th</sup> of October 1877 to "Mr. Eminescu, at the *Curier* editorial in Iași". Titu Maiorescu wrote to the poet: "They are proposing you to collaborate on the newspaper *Timpul /Time-* (translated title) together with Zizin Cantacuzino and Slavici for 250 francs per month. Rosetti and I were asking you to accept and immediately to leave to Bucharest (M.L.R., ms. 11658, f. 73 v reproduc în Eminescu, 1998: 17)

As for Jorge Luis Borges, he read his German philosopher's work during the time he went to Europe together with his sister, Norah to study in Geneva. He studied German because this is the language of philosophy, and because he was very intrigued by the "phrases too long" from *The Critique of the Pure Reason* he read with a great enthusiasm Nietzsche and Schopenhauer when he was only 19 years old. Later in the already mentioned *Schiță autobiografică / Authobiographical Sketch* – (translated title) Jorge Luis Borges wrote: "Today, if I should have to stop at a single philosopher, I would choose him (Schopenhauer – our note). If the enigma of the universe can be expressed in words I think that in his work we could find these words." (Borges, 1981)

Not by chance, between the biographical sources of his work *Istoria eternității/ The History of Eternity* (1936) Argentinean writer will mention the work *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* by Arthur Schopenhauer.

### c. Destinies among the Books in the Temple of Knowledge

The experience as a librarian is common to the two writers, lovers of old books. Mihai Eminescu, "PhD in Philosophy" by *Jurnalul Consiliului de Miniștri / The Journal of the Council of Ministries* nr. 21 from 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1874 was appointed temporary librarian at the Central Library in Iași to replace Samson Bodnărescu, from the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1874. (Monitorul, 1874/188:1145) On August the 30<sup>th</sup> 1874 Eminescu takes the oath in front of the rector Ștefan Micle "to fulfill scrupulously the duty that his function requires, without passion, without hate, without favor, unsympathetic, without any direct or indirect interest". AS, 2588/1874: 482). That seemed to be the ideal place to study for a

man who liked to seek the truth, to write as a contributor to the Brockhaus Publishing House from Leipzig encyclopedic articles about Romania's cultural life and history and who wanted to improve his knowledge by graduating his doctor degree in Berlin.

"I feel happy that I chose a place in harmony with my lovely and willing to research nature. Protected against the care for tomorrow, I will immerse as a Buddhist in the past, especially "in our past so great in deeds and people." (AS, 2588/1874:482)

Convinced that without a collection of manuscripts and without a complete inventory of all the books, the library can't become useful in the intellectual efforts, Mihai Eminescu becomes a conscientious manager concerned with enriching cultural library's funds (enrichment that he achieved sometimes from the modest amount of 200 lei, representing his monthly salary), drawing us a list of books that the state should buy and made in collaboration with this antiquarian booksellers. Beyond Octav Minar's stories about Eminescu's trial (Minar, 1914) contemporaries memories about Eminescu as the librarian were talking about as taciturn endowed with an exceptional memory concerning books' settlement in the shelves of the library and a rigorous mental storage capacity about the reading preferences of the readers, and his departure from the Central Library of Iași represents a complex of unfavorable circumstances, that do not overshadow the poet's bookish concerns. Thus, Mihai Eminescu was a provisional librarian only 10 months, but the atmosphere he encountered in that place will help him to deepen his research.

Immediately after his father's death on February 24<sup>th</sup> 1938, Jorge Luis Borges became a librarian at the Municipal Library "Miguel Cané", situated in a district far away from his home in Buenos Aires, the library situated on 4300 Carlos Calca street. Argentinean author remembered the way he used to learn Italian and to read *Divine Comedy* and *Orlando furioso* during the two hours long journey by tram from his home to his work place. When the leadership of the country will be taken by Peron on February 24<sup>th</sup> 1946, in August the same year a municipality decision transforms the librarian Jorge Luis Borges into an inspector of poultry and rabbits in the market place from Cordoba Street. The return of Jorge Luis Borges among the library's volumes will be possible after the shooting of Peron, the dictator, when the new government hereby nominates Borges as the new Director of the national Library from Buenos Aires. Like two of his predecessors in this position José Marmol and Paul Groussac, Jorge Luis Borges is almost blind. "Now that my eyes can hardly decipher what I write, I am preparing to die a few leagues away from the hexagon in which I was born. (...) The Library exists *ab aeterno*... wrote the author in *The Library Babel* in 1941. (Borges 1999I:304-305)

Inspired by this atmosphere, Argentinean writer recall the sad and depressing experience as a librarian that the other Borges, the writer, put in ton paper in the *Eseul autobiografic /Autobiographical Essay* –(translated title) from *Aleph și alte povestiri/ Aleph and the Other Stories*– (translated title). It was the time when Borges was hired at the Municipal Library "Miguel Cané": "Those little gifts of the managers of the library were only to highlight the depressing existence, the life as servants which I lived." (apud. Barnstone, 2002:35)

The library is a space of separation from the concrete mundane existence. It is a gateway to the world of fantasy enabling the two writers to visualize the labyrinth of their own lives in a bookish manner. Nothing from what really happens in the real existence is not

without a fictional correspondence. Mihai Eminescu imagined that the genius (lacking the guardian angel and his own star) is a mistake in the eternal fate's list, an error that makes even the Good God, the reader of the Great Book of the world, a book which is read in the darkness:

„Dar în acest cer mare ce-n mii de lumi lucește	But in this sky, which is shining in thousands
<b>Tu nu ai nici un înger, tu nu ai nici o stea,</b>	worlds
<b>Când cartea lumii mare Dumnezeu o citește</b>	You don't have any angel, you don't have any
Se-mpiedică la cifra vieții-ți fără să vrea..	star
<b>În planu-eternității viața-ți greșeală este...</b>	When God reads the large book of the world
	He stumbles over your life's figure unwillingly.
	In the eternal plan your life is a mistake

.(*Povestea magului călător în stele / The Story of the Magician Traveller in the Stars-* (translated title) in Eminescu, 1978 I:295)

#### d. Schopenhauer, Eminescu and Borges: Creation's Problems

Regarding the effort to write properly Arthur Schopenhauer was a model for both Borges and Eminescu, who continued his ideas applying them in their works. "There is nothing easier than to write such a way that no one may understand; just as, on the contrary, nothing is more difficult than to express important thoughts so that every one can understand them." (Schopenhauer, 1890:283)

It seemed also hard for Eminescu to write about „doruri vii și patimi multe”/ "living longings and many passions" expressing the whole truth in a comprehensive and intelligibly manner:

„Ah! Atuncea ți se pare	Ah, one feels than tehn in tunder
Că pe cap îți cade cerul	Round one's head the heavens roll;
Unde vei găsi cuvântul	How should man fiind trus expression
Ce exprimă adevărul?”	To describe his teeming soul?
( <i>"Criticilor mei"/ "To the Critics"</i> – (translated title)1883 in Eminescu, 1978 I:164)	

The reception of the writer's most important thoughts means the refusal of the reader's monotone thinking because the latter has the opportunity to have a dialogue beyond time, to think something else than usual. "the problem is not so much to see what no one has seen yet, but especially to think what nobody has thought yet (starting from what everyone sees)" (Schopenhauer, 1890:76)

In Jorge Luis Borges' creation there is a parable of the man who wants to change his life into words and who is losing each time the essence or the pitch and marrow from his writing. The poem *La luna / The Moon* (translated title) brings into the reader's attention the fact that the tradition retains the parable of a man who tried to write a book in which the universe to be "counted". When he was ready to finish the enormous and difficult manuscript, the man was stupefied to find out that he didn't forget anything except the moon: „Que se había olvidado de la luna". (Borges, 1972:166)

For Argentinean writer, to become a poet to write the description of the Moon was an Obligatory activity. Moreover, Borges wrote that in Geneva or in Zurich when he first read Schopenhauer in German and the fate decided for him to become a poet, a sort of an Adam, in a Paradise of metaphors (Borges, 1972:168): "When in Geneva and in Zürich, the fate/ wanted met o become a poet/ I imposed on myself, as the others, the secrete obligation to describe the moon. (...) I thought that the poet is the man which, as the red Adam from the Paradise, / baptize each thing after its name/ precisely, truly and unknown."

Speaking about the role of his philosophy Arthur Schopenhauer was right when he wrote: „The whole world has leaned from me something that it will never forget.” (Schopenhauer,1995:15)

#### e. India’s Fascinations and Mysteries

Eminescu’s and Borges’ passion for India began naturally in al library by reading Schopenhauer’s works. The meeting of the German philosopher with India materialized at that time by writing a philosophical version of Buddhism and its life solutions for the Occidental society of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, Schopenhauer using in his speech many quotations from all the major creations of the world. Renouncing to the exotic and strange terminology in the transcription into Latin letters, hard to be pronounced for the Europeans unacquainted with Sanskrit language, Arthur Schopenhauer keeps in his texts only the well-known names - Nirvana, Brahma, samsara – which he explained in detail.

Mihai Eminescu- a passionate connoisseur of the oriental philosophy, with which he had the first contact during studentship age in Germany – also keeps Sanskrit terminology in titles of his poems as *Ta twam asi* and *Poveste indică/ Indian Story* (translated title -Eminescu, 1978 II:38) and developes the theme of India in a playful, parodic way in the well known lines in which he tells the journey from Berlin to Potsdam together with the blonde, blue eyes Milly.

However Romanian poet was a thorough, serious man, endowed with the habit of the well done job. Eminescu’s passions for India, Indianite and Sanskrit language have been cataloged by many of his contemporaries as eccentric. George Călinescu was even writing about Eminescu’s ”language mania” and he recalls that during Eminescu’s intellectual exhaustion, the poet had made a Sanskrit business card (Ms. 2266, f. 21)., difficult to understand for the people around him, who have seen with a sneaking suspicion in that object a sign of poet’s sufferance, who allegedly was soliloquizing in a language understandable only for him. If Schopenhauer said (Schopenhauer, 2012a: 186) the relationship between Buddhism and his philosophy, it seems that even Eminescu was influenced by the exotic wisdom which revealed itself to be a valuable vein of inspiration. In the manuscript ms. 2275 p. 62, there are variants of the destinies that the divinity describes for Hyperion, Plato and Buddha are among the wise men mentioned. In the manuscript ms. 2277 p. 126 it appears the explanation for this juxtaposition between Plato and Buddha. It is about the world of Illusion as a denial of the material world any od the senses, common to the philosophical intuition of the two illuminated scholars. Although Jorge Luis Borges was not concerned with the study of Sanskrit language, information about India occur in a various pages of his prose with a strong bookish



character. It seems to Argentinean writer that India is a land in which people understand differently comparing to Europeans the word history and its essences.

”For example, I don’t think that in India people have the same sense of history” said Jorge Luis Borges in one of his lectures at Harvard in 1967-1968. ”one of the thorns in Europeans+ instep who are writing or have written histories on Indian philosophy as it were contemporary.”(*Muzica din cuvinte și traducerea/ The Music of the Words and Translations* (translated title) in Borges, 2002:69-70)

Borges is concerned with the differences between the mentalities of the two cultural areas. “A proverb says that India is bigger than the world” writes the author in *Omul din prag/ The man in the Threshold*” (translated title- Borges, 1999 II:106). For him, the information about India come in also on the British way, as it is shown in the following excerpt full of autobiographical flavor. In the atmosphere of Argentinean aristocracy with which Borges was familiar, the information about India are arising in the moment of the purchase of the Exotic objects. The references to the culture of this land are frequent in the work of Borges and they represent a testimony of the fact that his passion for tigers appeared in his childhood, together with “the English reading of the *Jungle Book*; this testimony is made in his work entitled *Blue Tigers*, where the author writes about the *Jungle Book* and about Shere Khan. Borges’ representations about India come also through Kiplings’ books.

The life’s infusion is a part of the magic of these demiurges writers. In the pages of the two authors, the biography and the history inundate the literary part and the reader’s wisdom is checked in the end of this reading’s vortex, though the expressing of a structured point of view or a clear view, illustrating a conclusion: India has trickled its mysteries in the fabric of Eminescu’s and Borges’ texts, as an evidence of the fascination that this magic place had on their literature.

#### f. A Mutual Friend: William Shakespeare

The admiration for the work of William Shakespeare is another biographical coincidence in the case of Mihai Eminescu and Jorge Luis Borges. ”A firii dulce limbă”/ the sweet language nature” often invoked by Eminescu resembles to the nature’s wise voice from the work of the bard from Stratford-upon-Avon. In *Povestea teiului /The Story of the Linden Tree* (translated title Eminescu, 1978 I:80) Eminescu wrote in Shakespearean spirit recalling Ophelia’s story:

„ Dansul, muzica, pădurea,  
Pe acestea le-ndrăgii  
Nu chiliile pustii  
Unde plângi gândind aiurea.”

The dance, the music and the forest  
These are the things which I loved most,  
And not the empty cells  
Where you’re crying thinking wroglly.

(Eminescu, 1978 II: 475)

In the poem *Icoană și privaz/ Icon and Window Sash* (translated title) the nature’s wisdom is again exalted compared with the toil land the sacrifice of the creator for his ideal:

„Și eu simt acest farmec și-n sufletu-mi admir Cum admira cu ochii cei mari odat- Shakespeare.	I also feel this charm and in my soul I admire it As with his astonished eyes, Shakespeare once admired it,
Și eu, eu sunt copilul nefericitei secte Cuprins de-adânca sete a formelor perfecte”.	And I, I am also the child of an unhappy sect, I am thirsty because of the deep thirst of the perfect forms.

(Eminescu, 1978 II: 420)

As in *Hamlet*, in the poem *Confesiune/ Confession* (translated title) the skull is for Eminescu the symbol of the human nothingness. Romanian poet called William Shakespeare „geniala acvilă a nordului”/ ”the brilliant eagle of the North” in an article published in the review *Familia/ Family* (translated title) , article entitled ”*Teatrul românesc și repertoriul lui*”/ ”*Romanian Theater an Its Repertoire*” (translated title). William Shakespeare is the spiritual magister of Mihai Eminescu, as it is obvious from the verses of the posthumous poem entitled *Cărțile/ The Books*:

„Shakespeare! adesea te gândesc cu jale, Prieten blând al sufletului meu; <b>Izvorul plin al gândurilor tale</b> <b>Îmi sare-n gând și le repet mereu.”</b>	Shakespeare! I am often thinking mournfully about you You, gentle friend of my unhappy soul; <b>The full spring of your thoughts</b> <b>Often arise from nowhere into my mind and I</b> <b>always repeat them.</b>
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(Eminescu, 1978 II: 359)

The bold emphasis letters from Eminescu’s cited verse make the reader to think about the existence of an embryonic metaphor, which might draw the attention to the Argentinean writer. Anglophone through out his intellectual education, Jorge Luis Borges has a story entitled *Memoria lui Shakespeare/ The Memory of Shakespeare* (translated title) published in 1980, in which the main character confessed: ”There are Goethe’s ardent admirers, of the *Poetic Edda* and the later *Nibelungenlied Story*. Shakespeare was my destiny.” The main character, Hermann Soergel, is a German scholar who has dedicated his life to the study of William Shakespeare’s work and who is living the strange experience of receiving as a gift the Bard’s memory, which has the appearance of a great river and which reveals all the life circumstances of the British creator. Shakespeare’s ”full spring of thoughts” that ”often arise from nowhere into my mind” and he “always repeat them” gives birth to a special situation. “In the first stage of the adventure, I felt the happiness to be Shakespeare; in the last stage I felt pressed and feared. At fist the two memories do not mingled their waters. With the time, Shakespeare’s great river has threatened and nearly drowned my modest trickle of water. I fearly noticed that I was beginning to forget the language of my parents. And, as my personal identity is base don memory, I feared not losing my mind.” (Borges, 1999II:346-347)

This experience of the identification with the memory of the British genius, which is the subject of Borges’ fantastic story can give rise to a natural question: did Borges read

Eminescu's poem or was Eminescu's poem read to Borges, for us to possibly believe that the metaphor of the Romanian poet could be considered the embryo of the fantastic story *The Memory of Shakespeare*? It is pretty hard to answer this question definitely. And, on the other hand, the coincidences in the literature world is the object of the fascination in comparative literary studies, revealing unsuspected spiritual kinship and unknown elective affinities. In a memorial page it appears a Borges' story about *The Memory of Shakespeare*. It seems that the famous Argentinean writer was inspired by a dream, in which he seems to be in London, he seems to have to work in the British Library, that he had no money and yet rented a room somewhere above a pharmacy, where the owner was a rude big man. This character has suggested him to buy with 1,000 pounds sterling *The Memory of Shakespeare*, but to forget about who sold it to him and he lived in that rented room. Borges relates:

"I took the stack of banknotes from him, I read a page that shone as the divine glory, then I picked up the phone and gave a telegram to Buenos Aires where I closed the bitterness of saving account for my old age. By doing all this however, I do not remember a word from the daylong text of the memory of Shakespeare and because of so many shocks, I woke up unlike the nightmares, which I have to wait them to end, even if I recognized this time, from the story with the memory of Shakespeare. I went quickly as a new and empty handed person." (Barnstone, 2002: 90)

#### **g. The Encyclopedic Spirits: The Key of the Words and of Foreign Languages Study**

Encyclopedic spirits, Mihai Eminescu and Jorge Luis Borges were constantly concerned about their own widening of their cultural horizon and they were possessed by a boundless thirst for knowledge. Enthusiasts for the most interesting and new areas of science and art, eager to read and to meditate on the readings shaping their spirit at a given moment they found in reaching a refuge from the vicissitudes of history and a solution for discerning the meanings of the troubled times whose effects they lived.

But the key of their encyclopedic spirits is represented by the foreign languages study. The passion for Shakespeare and especially, the similar treatment of Shakespeare's motifs by Eminescu and Borges opens this derived chapter. The languages in which Borges read or it was read for Borges and the languages in which Eminescu's work has been translated is an issue worthy of our attention, which would help us better understand whether through reading it was possible the meeting between the two writers. In his native Argentina, Borges learned Spanish as a native language, Italian at his Youth age by himself and he studied also English in his family, since his childhood. In the period 1914/1918 during his stay in Geneva he learned French. When his family was set for a year in Lugano, Borges wrote sonnets in English under Wordsworth's influence and poems in French, which were marked by the lyrical experience of the symbolist poets. On this occasion he learns the language of the poets Goethe and Heine and that of the philosophers Schopenhauer, Nietzsche or Kant. He is familiar with modern poetry through the readings from the works of German expressionists. In 1919, during the trip in Spain, to Madrid and Barcelona, Borges was starting to know the work of ultraistic avant-garde representative writers. It may be possible that in this time of spiritual modeling of his literary tastes, Borges have read also Eminescu's translations as they were fulfilled in the main languages of the European culture, during the Argentinean writer youth. One fact is however undoubtedly: Borges quotes the texts which were read to him. However, if the

meeting did not occur through reading, the thematic interferences reveal the universe of elective affinities.

#### **h. Intercultural Dialogues: Borges about Romanians**

The question is whether for Borges the Carpatho- Danubian space has ever been a familiar one or not. In a story entitled *Borges și Orientalii/ Borges and the Orientals* (translated title), a confession of the Argentinean writer about our country deserves to be quoted: "I have no too much opportunity to meet Romanian people. But about your country, with a so Latin name, Romania, I could find out many things to be praised." (Borges, 1988:138) In his famous prose, as for instance *The Immortal* the author appeals to the intertextuality's convention. The character remembers: "In 1638 I was at **Kolosvár** (Hungarian equivalent of the town Cluj Napoca - our note) and after that at Leipzig"... "I was Homer, in short, I'll be Nobody like Odysseus, I'll be at land I will die" (Borges, 1999 II:24) There is no doubt that the seventeenth and eighteenth century maps, which Jorge Luis Borges consults have the role to inspire the Argentinean writer in choosing the Hungarian name for Romanian city of Transylvania. In another prose entitled *Teologii / The Theologians* (translated title), Jorge Luis Borges wrote the invasion of the Huns who burned everything in the moment of their passage and to whom it escaped miraculously a work of Plato called *Civitas Dei*, after they have destroyed many codices and many church books with a schedule of sermons. The plot of the story is linked to the idea of circular time, which the author associates two mythical symbols of the Carpatho- Danubian space: the snake and the wheel, which in old representations could be Glykon, the God serpent, surnamed the Friendly or the Benevolent serpent, adored in the late Greek religion as a hypostasis of Asclepius. After Alexandros from Abunothios, the pseudo-prophet established his cult in the second century, the snake as a symbol of healing, the Hellenistic daimon, the protector of Fortune is met both in the Roman and late Greek colonies. In Dobrogea in 1962 was found a statue which depicts Glykon represented in the form of a sinuous coiled form of a wheel and having a sheep head: this representation has been called the fantastic snake. Jorge Luis Borges' character talks about the wheel and the fantastic snake that had taken the place of the cross. The inhabitants of these lands, the heretics, who believe in the circularity of the time, are wearing a symbolic name. A century later, Aurelian, the vicar from Aquileia, found out that on the *Danube banks* (our note L.M.) the monotonos called also the annulars, the new sect preached the idea that history is a circle and there is nothing that it hasn't been and it is not. Up to the mountains, the wheel and the snake had taken the place of *the Cross* (our note L.M.). Everybody was scared, but all were beginning to give credence to the rumor that John of Pannonia distinguished because of a treaty on the seventh attribute of God will put an end to that so abominable heresy." (Borges, 1999II: 32)

In another story entitled *Deutsches Requiem*, the main character named Otto Dietrich zur Linde says that his father distinguished himself in the siege of Namur in 1914 and "two years after that, he distinguished also in the crossing the Danube" (Borges, 1999II: 62)

In one of his lectures about "the poetry and the beauty as a physical sensation" Borges quotes from a story of Kipling's *The Kind of Man* from *Limits and Renewals* (1932) three prayers of three seamen, which he remembered as "Phoenicians". In reality, A.M. Vinelli has

published a "statement" explaining that even in error, Borges' memory is a prodigious one. In reality, the three sailors were one of them Phoenician, another one called Sulinor, from the Danube region, and the third was Betico, a Spanish man from Balearic Islands. The author underlined the typical qualities of Romanian people / including hospitality that is in great honor and the links that Borges sets between different types of people. The conclusion is that the literary perception of the Carpathian -Danube in Borges' literary geography is a bookish one, in which Latin names of some places in the Carpathian- Danube territory are kept into an exotic variant Magyarized, obviously depending on the materials consulted. The specific of the mythological subjects chosen and placed here represent a gate that allows to the author his access to the narrative fantastic, a world with full aesthetic autonomy to the real world. Like Eminescu, Jorge Luis Borges dives deeply into the world of the past discovering like a really illuminated writer that history is a book, that the transmigration is a theme justified by the profound aspirations of human contemplation and that the philosophy's absorbing into the narrative is an innovative way of writing.

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