

# The *Restitutio* Criterion in the Editing of Eminescu's Work

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**T**HE EDITORS of Eminescu's work had to cope, among other things, with the issue of the underlying criteria for selecting and ordering the texts. Titu Maiorescu, who edited the first edition, focused on the aesthetic criterion, which, nevertheless, was later considered insufficient by subsequent editors. The volume did not comprise the youth poems, published in *Familia* (Pest), the ones issued in *Convorbiri literare* (Iaşi) and *Familia* (Oradea) after 1884, as well as a series of texts such as “La steaua” (To the star), “De ce nu-mi vii” (Why don't you come?), “Kamadeva,” “Sara pe deal” (Evening on a hill), “Dalila,” “Nu mă înţelege” (You do not understand me) etc., texts which are no less important than the ones in his anthology. The importance of criteria when organizing a new edition is emphasized by Perpessicius: “Every edition seeks to meet both general requirements and the norms it envisaged. An edition which complies with general requirements and the norms envisaged is a successful one. An edition's failure originates less from fatal imperfections of human work, but from the fact that it

betrays its underlying criteria, by virtue of which it requests the right to citizenship.”

The second edition of Eminescu’s work was edited by V. G. Morțun and was published in Iași in 1890.<sup>1</sup> *Proză și versuri* (Prose and poetry), the title assigned by the editor, illustrates the latter’s intention to also include Eminescu’s prose, considering that it had been ignored until that moment.<sup>2</sup> The table of contents of this edition expresses the idea of *restitutio*, restitution, addition, completion to Maiorescu’s edition. The edition also comprises the following prose writings: “Făt-Frumos din lacrimă” (The prince of tears), “Sărmanul Dionis” (Wretched Dionis) and the study “Influența austriacă asupra românilor din Principate” (The Austrian influence on the Romanians in the Principalities), published in *Convorbiri literare*, having the merit of drawing attention to Eminescu’s journalistic work. The first part of the poetic sequence includes the following titles: “Făt-Frumos din tei” (Prince Charming of the linden tree), “Foaie veștedă (din Lenau)” (The withered leaf—from Lenau), “Diana,” “Dalila (fragment),” “Nu mă înțelegi,” “Sara pe deal,” “La steaua,” “De ce nu-mi vii,” “Kamadeva.” Next come the youth poems published in *Familia*: “De-aș avea” (If I had), “O călărire în zori” (A horse ride at dawn), “Din străinătate” (From overseas), “La Bucovina” (In Bukovina), “Speranța” (Hope), “Misterele nopții” (Mysteries of the night), “Ce-ți doresc eu ție, dulce Românie” (What I wish for you, my sweet Romanian land), “La Heliade” (To Heliade), “La o artistă” (To an artist), “Amorul unei marmure” (Love of a marble statue), “Junii corupți” (Corrupt youth), “Amicului F. I.” (To my friend F. I.). The last part comprises the texts which were issued after the poet fell ill: “Din noaptea” (Out of the night) (*Familia*, 12 February 1884), “Viața” (Life) (*Fântâna Blanduziei*, Bucharest, 1 August 1889), “Stelele-ner” (High o’er the main) (*Fântâna Blanduziei*, 1 August 1889).

Instead of a preface similar to the one provided by Maiorescu in his editions (four until this moment), V. G. Morțun published the letter the poet had sent to him in 1887:

*Botoșani, 10 November 1887*

*My dear friend,*

*The condition I suffered from for a long time prevented me from maintaining a regular correspondence. Now, as I have recovered somewhat, I would like to ask you to remember me and the almost absolute lack of subsistence means I have to cope with.*

*If it is possible for you to help me, please do it as soon as possible, as I feel the greatest poverty is impending.*

*Looking forward to receiving your answer, I remain your friend.  
Devotedly,  
M. Eminescu*

The publication of the letter stirred polemic reactions. The poet's dramatic confession contradicts T. Maiorescu's statements that Eminescu was not in dire straits, as mentioned in the periodical *Familia* (25 February 1890): "We have repeatedly announced that Mr. V. G. Morțun has published in Iași a volume of Eminescu's works which are not present in the volume edited in Bucharest. This volume has been published and is entitled *Proză și versuri*. The collection is preceded by a letter of the late poet towards Mr. Morțun, in which he asked for help, given the extreme poverty threatening him (10 November 1887). This letter is a sort of answer aimed at Mr. Titu Maiorescu, who wrote in the preface to the new edition of Eminescu's poems that the poet wanted for nothing."

As it can be noticed, the edition was supposed to be published two years earlier, as announced by various publications of the time. The periodical *Universul* (Bucharest, 1 September 1888) took up the news previously published by *Telegraful român*<sup>3</sup> (on 6 July 1888): "Next week, Mr. Morțun's publishing house will issue a volume by Eminescu, the great writer. This volume will comprise: 'Sărmanul Dionis,' a short story; 'Făt-Frumos din lacrimă,' a fairy tale; 'Influența austriacă,' a conference; the poems published in the volume edited by Mr. Sococ:<sup>4</sup> the master's first works published in the journal *Familia*, at the age of 16."

*Universul* resumes the topic on 2 and 7 September 1888, in October, showing certain annoyance towards the fact that the publication of the volume had been postponed: "These past few days we have announced that the deputy V. G. Morțun bought the rights to some of Eminescu's poems for 5,000 lei. We have been positively informed that this is not true; Mr. Morțun initiated the publication in a volume of some of the poet's works without even consulting him and without offering him any advance payment."

The explanation of the postponement probably also resides in the fact that Titu Maiorescu's *Poesii* (Poems) was reedited on September 1888, although, considering the table of contents of V. G. Morțun's edition, there was no obstacle for it to be published the same year.

The periodical *Românul* (Bucharest, 25 October 1888) presented as certain the news that "At the beginning of November, the volume of Eminescu's poems edited by V. G. Morțun from Iași will be published." *Familia* (23 October 1888) writes in the same vein: "Our distinguished poet, Mr. Mihai Eminescu, who started his career in our journal, where his name was made Romanian, apart from poems has also written articles for various publications. Although Eminescu's name is especially connected to poetry, his articles in prose also reveal a gifted

writer. These articles are soon to be published in a volume. Mr. V. G. Morțun collected them and sent them to Iași to be printed at his own expense. Those who wish to have Eminescu's complete works will undoubtedly order this interesting collection as well."

But the editing of Eminescu's complete works was far from being accomplished. Through his edition, V. G. Morțun contributed to a major area of study, which eventually led to Perpessicius's edition, a truly complete restitution of Eminescu's work, which took more than half a century to be completed. Of course, the project of editing Eminescu's complete works could not be put into practice before enough experience regarding the editing of the work had been acquired.

The delayed publication of the abovementioned volume and the suspicions regarding the editor made V. G. Morțun include in his edition a "Word to the Readers," in which he mentioned the sources used for the texts, adding that no material goal was pursued: "The present volume should have been published last year and the editor, who had no material goal in mind with this publication, just wanted to cover his expenses, allowing the author to benefit from all profits. But, as Mihai Eminescu passed away, the publication was stopped; however, in keeping with the promise made, the editor does not want to have any financial gain from this volume and will offer the net profits obtained from the publication to the company contracted to erect the statue of the immortal poet."

The reactions following the publication of the volume prove the precariousness of the *restitutio* criterion, at least in 1890 and in the given circumstances. In between recording the event and severely criticizing certain issues, there was a wide range of reactions. Writing about the publication of the volume, the periodical *Libertatea* (Botoșani, 22 February 1890) mentioned that "it comprised all of Eminescu's well-known writings, which have not been part of Socec's volume *Poesii*." It is a fact that not "all well-known writings" were included, as at that moment the chest with Eminescu's manuscripts was still in Maiorescu's possession<sup>5</sup> and the texts could not be consulted. In fact, in addition to the Socec edition, V. G. Morțun published only what had been published in various periodicals. Gheorghe Panu's periodical *Lupta* (Bucharest, 23 February 1890) was closer to the truth: "Mr. V. G. Morțun edited a volume comprising some of Eminescu's writings, under the title *Proză și versuri*." Other publications made reference to "the priceless book" (*Democrația*, Bucharest, 23 February 1890), to "this interesting book which also comprises one of Eminescu's autographed letters, which makes obvious the poverty the poet had to face in the year 1887" (*Democratul*, 25 February 1890), to the contents of the edition and to how to buy the book (*România, Națiunea, Telegraful român, Gazeta de Transilvania, Familia, Era nouă, Drapelul, Fulgerul, Revista politică* etc.).

Nevertheless, critical commentaries also appeared, some questioning the legitimacy of publishing Eminescu's letter: "But the question is: why has Mr. Morțun placed this letter at the beginning of the volume? To praise himself. To tell the world: Eminescu was threatened by extreme poverty and I am the one who saved him, who kept him from starving! To do good and brag about it is the sign of a mean spirit" (*România*, Bucharest, 15 March 1890). *Românul* (17 March 1890) appreciates that Eminescu's letter reproves the society in which the poet had lived: "It seems to us that, if this is shameful, it is more because of the society in which the poet lived than because of the poet himself. That is why nobody should be indignant, but they should believe that what Eminescu said was true."

The letter called the attention of several commentators, among them Anton Bacalbașa, who rightfully stated that some of the texts in V. G. Morțun's edition were not identical to the ones published in Maiorescu's edition. Certainly, "La o artistă," "Ce-ți doresc eu ție, dulce Românie" etc. "are far from those in Mr. Maiorescu's volume," although "without a doubt, the brilliance of talent can be sensed in these lines as well" (*Timpul*, Bucharest, 23 February 1890). It is obvious that the reviewer did not have a correct representation of the criteria underlying the two editions.

**T**HE *RESTITUTIO* criterion does not favor aesthetic value, but the necessity to have complete knowledge of one's work. V. G. Morțun's merit is to have drawn attention to certain texts which would have otherwise remained confined for a long time to the pages of the periodicals in which they had been published. There is no edition today to leave them aside. Anton Bacalbașa did not speak against their publication. Nevertheless, a few years later, after a series of posthumous works were published in the press, G. Ibrăileanu, exhibiting a strange obtuseness, clearly voiced his opinion against the initiative meant to give them prominence, considering that they distorted the poet's image, as established by Maiorescu's edition.<sup>6</sup> His opinion remained isolated. In a review published shortly after the volume was issued, the young Nicolae Iorga, understanding the importance of the *restitutio* criterion, enthusiastically welcomed V. G. Morțun's initiative, considering him "worthy of the gratitude of all well-educated people, who can thus readily read the pieces once scattered in periodicals" (*Lupta*, 25 February 1890). Another reviewer, N. A. Bogdan, appreciated the edition in the same vein: "His work is rather praiseworthy; nothing that Eminescu wrote as a poet should fall into oblivion, not even second-rate works or works written when he was very young, as they can still illustrate the stages the genius of the poet went through" (*Familia*, 15 July 1890).

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## Notes

1. The edition was facsimiled and copied by Eminescu Publishing House in 1990, marking a century since the first edition. This is accompanied by a very useful Addenda (“Mihai Eminescu și V. G. Morțun”) by Florin Rotaru.
2. The investigation of the circumstances in which the edition was published has been conducted by N. Georgescu, in a documented study: “V. G. Morțun sau un scandal rău acoperit,” *Cultura* (Bucharest) 5, 282 (15 July 2010): 10.
3. This is not to be confused with *Telegraful român* of Sibiu, which was founded on 3 January 1853. *Telegraful de București* became *Telegraful*, then *Telegraful român* (after 1 November 1878).
4. Maiorescu’s edition.
5. T. Maiorescu entrusted the chest of manuscripts to the Romanian Academy in 1902, a moment which represented the beginning of a new orientation in the editing of M. Eminescu’s work, in the sense of its complete restitution.
6. G. Ibrăileanu, “Postumele’ lui Eminescu,” in *Studii literare*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Minerva, 1979). For details regarding the publication of the posthumous works, see also our study “Problema postumelor eminesciene,” *Transilvania* (Sibiu) 8 (2009): 1–5.

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**Abstract****The *Restitutio* Criterion in the Editing of Eminescu's Work**

The article discusses the early history of the editing of the works of 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanian poet Mihai Eminescu, focusing on the criteria underlying this process, and particularly on the *restitutio* criterion. The latter represented the starting point for the 1890 edition, devised by V. G. Morțun. By contrast, Maiorescu's edition (1893) applied the aesthetic criterion, as the editor selected the poems he considered to be more valuable. V. G. Morțun selected a series of texts written early in the poet's career but also after 1883, a text from Eminescu's journalistic work, as well as some pieces of fiction. The criterion envisaged by the editor proposed a restitution of the texts left aside by Maiorescu's edition. Progressively, the *restitutio* criterion was to become a constant area of study for editors, especially after Maiorescu gave to the Romanian Academy (in 1902) the chest containing Eminescu's manuscripts, the source of a significant amount of previously unknown works. The most competent solution was to be Perpessicius's edition, a genuine *restitutio in integrum* of Eminescu's work.

**Keywords**

Eminescu, editions, criteria, *restitutio*, V. G. Morțun, T. Maiorescu, Perpessicius