

EMINESCU'S BIOGRAPHY AS A MELODRAMATIC NARRATIVE

MARIA-CORINA DIMITRIU*

Abstract This paper investigates an overlooked dimension of Eminescology, exemplified by minor exegetes who sought to present the life and work of Mihai Eminescu in an accessible, engaging form aimed at the general public, an endeavour that earned them considerable popular success. We argue that the socio-cultural context following the poet's death fostered the emergence of amateurish, non-academic exegeses, distinct from the canonical critical discourses yet deeply influential in shaping collective perceptions. Focusing on the works of Octav Minar and N. Zaharia, the present study identifies the main rhetorical and narrative strategies employed to ensure a large appeal: the authentication and amplification of already validated cultural myths, the simulation of scientific rigor to enhance credibility, and the systematic use of melodramatic patterns in reconstructing Eminescu's biography. Through these techniques, Minar and Zaharia contribute to a mythologizing process that fuses literary culture with consumer sensibilities, producing a sentimentalized, iconic image of the poet that would come to dominate the popular imagination throughout the 20th century.

Keywords Eminescology, Octav Minar, N. Zaharia, popular literary criticism, melodrama.

1. Introduction. Controversial Figures of Emerging Eminescology

Surveying the spectacular history of the reception of Mihai Eminescu's work and personality, Iulian Costache draws from the outset a distinction between "major Eminescology," represented by canonical critics and exegeses, and "minor Eminescology," developed by marginal figures, contested by the cultural elite of their time, and overlooked by literary history.¹ The existence of these two poles of reception, and, by implication, of two distinct cultural circuits, entails a contrastive distribution of Eminescu's mythology, with a "weaker pole," built on minor, popular, and seductive forms, and a "stronger pole," which reclaims Eminescu in a solemn register, through

* *Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iași. mariacorinadim@yahoo.com.*

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3558-5219>.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26424/philobib.2026.31.1.03>.

¹ Iulian Costache, *Eminescu. Negocierea unei imagini* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2008), 18.

arguments addressed to the intellect.² While canonical criticism, though inexhaustible, is constantly revitalized through literary scholarship and sustained in university syllabi, the field of marginal exegeses has remained largely unexplored, falling into that “shadow zone” of texts lacking critical credibility.³ A reassessment of these texts proves nonetheless indispensable for understanding the polymorphic configuration of the Eminescian myth, especially since such texts held the widest visibility in the early twentieth century, shaping the public’s taste and sensibility.

In line with the recent interest of literary sociology in non-canonical discourses that nonetheless resonate with the public, this paper aims to reassess two controversial yet remarkably prolific and popular figures from the early phase of Eminescology: Octav Minar and N. Zaharia. Authors of genuine bestsellers⁴ on the life of Mihai Eminescu, published by prominent publishing houses of the time, these amateurs were fiercely criticized by contemporary official critics, G. Călinescu and Șerban Cioculescu famously dismissing them as Eminescian “gravediggers,” “delinquents,”⁵ “parasites of literary history,”⁶ or “bizarre beings, half maniac, half falsifier,”⁷ who promoted a distorted image of Eminescu by appealing to a public “eager for minor-key mythologies.”⁸

A librarian at the Romanian Academy and compiler of bibliographies for readers,⁹ N. Zaharia, described as “interested in too many things,”¹⁰ yet valued by contemporaries as a “skilled populariser” and a “meritorious autodidact,”¹¹ approached Eminescu’s life through a psychoanalytic lens. Călinescu responded with ironic indulgence, calling his works the “ravings of a feeble mind,” produced by a “poor, uncultivated, maniacal man” overwhelmed by excessive reading and guilty only of “a good faith unsupported by intellect.”¹² Little is known about Zaharia’s life; his name is absent from most literary histories, including the *General Dictionary of Romanian Literature*. Petre Ciobanu attempted to reclaim him in a 1998 article, where Zaharia is described as an “unjustly overlooked forerunner of Romanian literary criticism,” noteworthy for his courage in systematically addressing the complex subject of Eminescu’s biography for the first time, as well

² *Ibid.*, 268.

³ Mircea Angheliescu, *Mistificațiuni. Falsuri, farse, apocrife, pastișe, parodii, pseudonime și alte mistificații în literatură*, 2nd edition (Bucharest: Spandugino, 2016), 5.

⁴ Antonio Patraș, “Istoria literară ca bestseller. Cazul O. Minar,” *Caietele Sextil Pușcariu* VI (2023): 422, DOI: 10.33993/csp.2023.6.421.439.

⁵ ⁵ Șerban Cioculescu, “Un recidivist încurajat: Octav Minar,” in *Aspecte literare contemporane. 1932-1947* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1972), 624.

⁶ G. Călinescu, “Morbul eminescologic,” in *Opere. Publicistică I (1920-1932)*, ed. Nicolae Mecu (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Naționale pentru Știință și artă, 2006), 1164.

⁷ G. Călinescu, “Octav Minar, necrofor eminescian,” in *Opere. Publicistică I (1920-1932)*, ed. Nicolae Mecu (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Naționale pentru Știință și artă, 2006), 898.

⁸ Costache, *Eminescu. Negocierea unei imagini*, 269.

⁹ ***, “N. Zaharia,” *Înfrățirea*, No. 1011 (1924): 2.

¹⁰ Marin Bucur, *Istoriografia literară românească* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1973), 244.

¹¹ C. G., “N. Zaharia,” *Năzuința*, No. 9 (1924): 52.

¹² Călinescu, “Octav Minar, necrofor eminescian,” 898-899.

as for qualities such as scholarly rigor and essayistic flair.¹³ Nevertheless, the article seems to have gone largely unnoticed.

Octav Minar, by contrast, is referenced in literary histories almost exclusively as a forger and document falsifier, primarily due to his publication of a falsified photograph depicting Eminescu in a dressing gown and slippers in the courtyard of the asylum at Neamț Monastery, along with a series of implausible letters allegedly exchanged between the poet and Veronica Micle.¹⁴ A lawyer and professor, holding a doctorate in literature and philosophy, Minar, whose real name was Octav Popovici,¹⁵ presented himself as the owner of a private collection of classified literary documents. However, he published these documents only in fragments, rarely providing facsimile versions, which further fuelled suspicion among contemporary elites.¹⁶ The condemnation he faced from official critics was even harsher than that directed at Zaharia: Minar was accused not only of bad faith but of deliberately distorting information for commercial gain, with serious negative implications for the reading public.¹⁷ These accusations ultimately forced him into early retirement from cultural life, and he fell into near-total obscurity, even the precise year of his death being unknown.¹⁸ Only in recent years have there been attempts to rehabilitate this controversial figure, most notably in Dan Toma Dulciu's introductory study to the 2014 edition of *Eminescu, Poet-Philosopher: Culture, Personality, Poetry*, and in some recent papers by Antonio Patraș and Roxana Patraș (2023).

Slightly subjective in his study, Dan Toma Dulciu acknowledges Minar's ability to adapt to the sensibility and educational level of the broad public, thereby sustaining public interest in Eminescu's life and work. His writings are not positioned in opposition to those of official literary historians but are seen as serving distinct, and in some respects complementary, purposes; Minar's aim, Dulciu suggests, was to present Eminescu to a different target audience than that of rigorous scholarly research.¹⁹ Dulciu also reconsiders the accusations of forgery, noting that since neither the authenticity nor the falsity of the disputed documents has been definitively proven, the possibility of their authenticity remains viable: "an unproven forger is... an honest editor."²⁰ In a more nuanced rehabilitative spirit, Antonio and Roxana Patraș see Minar as an exponent of a

¹³ Petre Ciobanu, "Prima lucrare monografică despre Eminescu (Mihai Eminescu «Vieța și opera sa» de N. Zaharia)," *Ramuri*, No. 11 (1998): 11.

¹⁴ Călinescu, "Octav Minar, necrofor eminescian," 900-902.

¹⁵ Sorina Ianovici-Jecza, "[Octav Minar]," in *Dicționarul general al literaturii române 5* (Bucharest: Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2018), 415.

¹⁶ Bucur, *Istoriografia literară românească*, 228.

¹⁷ Cioculescu, "Un recidivist încurajat: Octav Minar," 624-626.

¹⁸ Dan Toma Dulciu, "Studiu introductiv," in *Octav Minar, Eminescu, poet-filosof. Cultura – personalitatea – poezia*, ed. Dan Toma Dulciu (2014), 36, https://www.academia.edu/7115823/Octav_Minar_Eminescu_Poet_Filosof_Cultura_Personalitatea_Poezia_Mss_XX538_Studiu_Introductiv_Dan_Toma_Dulciu.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21-25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

modern cultural sensibility, emphasizing his role as a cultural “entrepreneur.”²¹ Minar’s merits lie not only in his ability to identify and meet public demand, which secured him considerable success, but also in his pioneering of a new literary genre, the romanticized biography,²² and in his role in stimulating the interest of major critics in Eminescu’s life.²³

This study continues the aforementioned research and aims to investigate the strategies employed by Octav Minar and N. Zaharia in constructing Eminescu’s image and, by extension, shaping the Eminescian myth. Our starting hypothesis is that, whether through an actual study of literary works appealing to contemporary audiences or through an extraordinary intuition regarding the balance of historical and fictional elements capable of engaging and retaining this public, the two amateur exegetes crafted the poet’s biography according to melodramatic patterns, relying on readers’ immediate emotional response. In this regard, we adopt Peter Brooks’ understanding of melodrama as a mode of imagination and representation that transcends its original genre context, rooted in the social and ideological upheavals of the French Revolution, and becomes an aesthetic system applicable across diverse cultural products, just like tragedy, comedy, and realism.²⁴ In analysing Octav Minar’s works, Dan Toma Dulciu notes their appeal to an audience “fond of melodramatic readings,”²⁵ while Antonio and Roxana Patraş explicitly discuss the stylization of Eminescu’s biography in melodramatic terms.²⁶ However, the specific semiotic practices of melodrama and their detailed operation in these authors’ texts warrant further exploration. In Zaharia’s case, this perspective gains relevance given that psychoanalysis itself has been understood as a way of dramatizing the conflicts among the human psyche’s agencies in melodramatic terms.²⁷ By highlighting the melodramatic architecture underlying the works of these two authors, we aim to deepen our understanding of Eminescu’s mythologization within the less-studied sphere of “minor Eminescology” and understand the position of these works in the early twentieth-century cultural landscape, the functions they performed, and their relationship to canonical Eminescology.

2. Cultural Context

The general public is typically not engaged with events in the cultural or literary field. However, certain historical contexts have sparked widespread interest in this domain, giving rise to an audience eager to access it, though lacking the necessary training to read professional critical texts.

²¹ Roxana Patraş & Antonio Patraş, “Literary History as Bestseller: The Life and Opinions of a Fraudulent Philologue,” *Romanica Cracoviensia* 23, No. 4 (2023): 572, doi:10.4467/20843917RC.23.058.19371.

²² *Ibid.*, 571.

²³ Patraş, “Istoria literară ca bestseller,” 427-428.

²⁴ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination. Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), VII-IX.

²⁵ Dulciu, “Studiu introductiv,” 25-26.

²⁶ Patraş & Patraş, “Literary History as Bestseller,” 574.

²⁷ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, XI.

Much like literature, literary studies found themselves confronted with a polarized readership: on the one hand, specialists; on the other, curious readers drawn by the sensational aspects of writers' lives. As the emergence of a new position within the field of reception prompts a reconfiguration of the cultural field itself,²⁸ literary criticism also undergoes a form of polarization, albeit less pronounced than in the case of literature, through the development of a commercial pole, challenging the exclusivity of symbolic capital. In other words, literary criticism gains the possibility, though not the obligation, of descending from its ivory tower and becoming a marketable commodity, insofar as it can respond to the demands of the reading public. Although the texts that embrace this status do not qualify as genuine works of literary criticism, their purpose remains similar to that of criticism and literary history: to serve as intermediaries between the public and the actual literary works.

In the Romanian cultural space, this consumer-oriented circuit of literary exegeses emerged in the period immediately following Mihai Eminescu's death, at the beginning of the twentieth century, amid the convergence of two favourable series of factors. On the one hand, the promulgation of the Law on Public Instruction by Alexandru Ioan Cuza in 1864 led to an exponential rise in education levels and, consequently, in literacy rates. Between 1864 and 1890, the ruling class's strong belief in education as key to national progress spurred the founding of numerous schools and printing houses, fostering a collective interest in culture and reading.²⁹ This, in turn, contributed to the formation of a growing readership and increased the writers' public visibility.³⁰ Admittedly, this newly formed audience was not particularly refined, often seeking more accessible reading material. Nonetheless, Eminescu succeeded in reaching this public, especially through his sentimental poetry.³¹

On the other hand, as Mihai Zamfir explains, Eminescu's biography epitomizes a Romantic myth, that of the young genius: a short life ending in madness, angelic beauty, a yearning for total and universal knowledge, an interest in occultism and esotericism, lack of success during his lifetime, and a grand, tragic love.³² Such a figure, capable of evoking fascination, resonated with an educated but non-specialist audience, which rendered the interventions of amateur exegetes such as N. Zaharia and Octav Minar not only possible, but welcome and, to some extent, necessary. In fact, in analysing the audience of Eminescu's romances, Iulian Costache noted that its intermediary position between the high-cultural, scholarly circuit and the folkloric, popular one

²⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Regulile artei. Geneza și structura câmpului literar*, 2nd edition, trans. Laura Albușescu & Bogdan Ghiu (Bucharest: Art, 2012), 253-254.

²⁹ Alex Drace-Francis, *The Making of Modern Romanian Culture. Literacy and the Development of National Identity* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006), 151-157.

³⁰ Leon Volovici, *Apariția scriitorului în cultura română*, 3rd edition (Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2023 [1976]), 105.

³¹ Costache, *Eminescu. Negocierea unei imagini*, 269.

³² Mihai Zamfir, *Din secolul romantic* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1989), 236-243.

encouraged the emergence of kitsch phenomena and the “translation” of high culture into a minor, accessible code for wider consumption.³³

3. Strategies Embraced by Minor Eminescology

If, as previously stated, major Eminescology builds on precision and does not make any concession to the public, the representatives of minor Eminescology aim to reach the widest possible audience, positioning themselves as “manufacturers” who employ “formulas” and “production techniques” designed to ensure the success of their product.³⁴ This observation holds in the case of Octav Minar and N. Zaharia, whose effort to mythologize Eminescu is based on three main strategies: the authentication of myths already validated by collective cultural memory; the reinforcement of the reader’s self-satisfaction by presenting content under the guise of scientific rigor; and, crucially, the use of melodramatic patterns in response to the dominant sensibility of the time.

In terms of the relationship between what the public knows or thinks about Eminescu and what Minar and Zaharia offer, their success, as previously noted, stems from their ability to deepen the image readers already hold of the poet. The miracle of the bestseller, though it retains an element of the inexplicable, is always “the miracle of an encounter.”³⁵ An author succeeds when the audience sees their worldview reflected in the work with a high degree of coherence,³⁶ when the text gives clarity, even if not rationally grounded, to ideas already circulating in the collective imagination.³⁷ The act of mythmaking can only operate by affirming values already established through a form of cultural consensus.³⁸ It is in this spirit that the works of these two amateur exegetes should be read. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Eminescu had been embraced by the public as a writer of sentimental love poetry.³⁹ In stark contrast to the official critics, who largely ignored these poems as concessions to popular taste, Minar and Zaharia fully embraced this aspect of Eminescu’s poetry, implicitly aligning with their readership.

By choosing a title such as *How Eminescu Loved (Cum a iubit Eminescu, 1911; 1925)*, Octav Minar makes the strategic decision to start from the image of Eminescu as a writer of love poetry, knowing that the way the poet experienced love in his life holds great interest for the general public, precisely because of a pre-existing representation of love in his poems. Nothing could be more captivating than the love life of the most widely read author of sentimental poems. Thus, in presenting the relationship between the poet and Veronica Micle, Minar consistently illustrates his assumptions through love poems allegedly written by the two lovers, starting from the well-

³³ Costache, *Eminescu. Negocoiera unei imagini*, 270.

³⁴ Frederic Rouvillois, *O istorie a bestsellerului*, trans. Emanoil Marcu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2013), 101.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 280.

³⁶ Paul Cornea, *Regula jocului. Versantul colectiv al literaturii: concepte, convenții, modele* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1980), 82.

³⁷ Roland Barthes, *Mitologii*, trans. Maria Carpov (Iași: Institutul European, 1997), 274.

³⁸ Marin Mincu, *Paradigma eminesciană* (Constanța: Pontica, 2000), 295.

³⁹ Costache, *Eminescu. Negocierea unei imagini*, 269.

known and beloved poems, to propose both new compositions (plausible in tone and content) and a narrative meant to offer details about their supposed genesis. Similarly, in his volume *Love and Poetry (Dragoste și poezie, 1923)*, Minar imagines a veritable lyric dialogue between Mihai Eminescu and Veronica Micle, under the pretext of an album belonging to Veronica in which she collected the poems they supposedly dedicated to one another, annotating some of them with brief comments about the emotional circumstances in which they were written.⁴⁰ Although highly questionable in terms of both the album's actual existence and the authenticity of some of the poems it includes, this construct weaves the love poems of Mihai Eminescu and Veronica Micle into a coherent and dramatic narrative, thus enhancing their emotional charge.

N. Zaharia employs a similar strategy of contextualization in his voluminous work, *Mihail Eminescu. His Life and Work (Mihail Eminescu. Vieța și opera sa, 1912; 1923)*. He focuses exclusively on Eminescu's love poems, justifying this choice with the assertion that "in those of a philosophical nature we do not find much originality."⁴¹ By tapping into the public's curiosity about the poet's romantic life, Zaharia seeks to infer Eminescu's conception of love and womanhood from his sentimental poetry, or even to identify the muse behind certain romantic pieces. For instance, poems such as *To an Actress (La o artistă)* and *The Love of a Marble (Amorul unei marmore)* are linked to the poet's adolescent love for actress Eufrosina Popescu.⁴² Nonetheless, the majority of Eminescu's love poems are integrated into the narrative of his relationship with Veronica Micle, which both representatives of popular Eminescology seek to valorise from a mythicizing and idealizing perspective, as will be discussed later.

Another method used to establish a connection with the public and ensure its loyalty is the repeated emphasis on the scientific character of these volumes. Undoubtedly, the general readership of the time lacked the training necessary to engage with professionally produced literary criticism. However, these were educated readers, with a strong sense of self-worth, who felt entirely entitled to take an interest in Eminescu's life. Accurately discerning the psychological profile of this audience, both Octav Minar and N. Zaharia delivered romanticized, poeticized, and anecdotal versions of the poet's biography, while simultaneously underlining the scholarly rigor and thus the credibility of their narratives. In justifying the approach taken in his volume *Eminescu. Aspects from the Life and Work of the Poet (Eminescu. Aspecte din viața și opera poetului, 1914)*, Octav Minar places himself from the outset in polemic opposition to "literary legends and improvisations" which, in his view, have come to "take the place of true history, criticism, and aesthetics," and he promises to analyse Eminescu's biography from the standpoint of a "specialist," grounded in indisputable documents and contemporary testimonies.⁴³ While this volume still reflects an attempt to structure information rigorously and to adapt to the conventions of critical discourse, works such as *Love and Poetry* or *How Eminescu Loved* reveal their sentimental tone right from their titles. Even so, within these works

⁴⁰ Veronica Micle, *Dragoste și poezie. Ale lui pentru mine, ale mele pentru dânsul. 1889*, ed. Octav Minar (Bucharest: Socec & Co. S. A., 1923), 111.

⁴¹ N. Zaharia, *Mihail Eminescu. Vieța și opera sa*, 2nd ed. (Bucharest: Editura Librăriei Socec & Co., 1923), 289.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 223.

⁴³ Octav Minar, *Eminescu. Aspecte din viața și opera poetului* (Bucharest: Clasic și Modern, 1914), 5-6.

as well, there are many passages meant to reassure readers of the accuracy and reliability of the information, through the constant invocation of documents and the declared distance from the “unconscious wanderings of the masses,” which would suffer, allegedly, from a “lack of more thoroughly documented knowledge” of the poet’s life.⁴⁴

Similarly, in N. Zaharia’s case, the concern for validating his critical discourse is evident from the introductory chapter of his aforementioned work, entitled “How a Biography Should Be Written,” in which he seeks to justify his methodology and dispel any doubts regarding its effectiveness.⁴⁵ This effort is also reflected in the numerous testimonies cited throughout the volume, as an expression of the author’s intent “to strictly adhere to the principle of proving everything we claim,”⁴⁶ in the extensive bibliography appended to the study, as well as in the references to various psychoanalytical theories, including his own works in psychology, which are meant to suggest solid academic training in this field. Beyond legitimizing the endeavour itself, these rhetorical strategies also function as a form of flattery aimed at the audience, reinforcing its sense of self-worth by delivering accessible content under the guise of scientific credibility.

Regarding the information for which the authors cannot indicate precise sources, the impression of methodological rigor is nonetheless maintained through the invocation of documents or oral sources that cannot be verified. For instance, when discussing the poet’s incompatibility with the “Junimea” circle, an issue for which only vague evidence existed, Octav Minar supports his claims by referring to letters in which Eminescu allegedly confides his antipathy toward Maiorescu to Veronica Micle. Minar asserts that he wrote his exegeses with these documents laid out on his desk and, for added credibility, even emphasizes their physical presence by describing a bundle of letters tied with a red ribbon, on the cover of which Veronica Micle herself is said to have written a few lines.⁴⁷ Although the authenticity of these letters remains questionable to this day, the existence of tensions between Eminescu and Maiorescu, especially regarding the poet’s romantic life, is confirmed by several letters published in 2000, edited by Christina Zarifopol. In a letter from June 1882, for example, Eminescu expresses a mildly ironic attitude toward Maiorescu’s attempts to distance him from Veronica Micle: “Who took it upon himself to lecture you about your relationship with me? Maiorescu. He may be a critic, he may be a man of letters, but the love I bear for you and your childish and genuine selflessness which have remained mine—he would not have found that in any of the ladies that have paraded through his life.”⁴⁸ Elsewhere, Eminescu describes Maiorescu as a man of “absolute bad faith.”⁴⁹ When

⁴⁴ Octav Minar, *Cum a iubit Eminescu. Amintiri, scrisori și poezii inedite*, 3rd ed. (Bucharest: Librăria Nouă, 1925), 12.

⁴⁵ Zaharia, *Mihail Eminescu. Vieța și opera sa*, 13-18.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴⁷ Octav Minar, *Cum a iubit Eminescu. Pagini intime: scrisori, poezii și amintiri inedite* (Iași: Renașterea Cărților Românești, 1911), 93.

⁴⁸ Mihai Eminescu, *Dulcea mea Doamnă/Eminul meu iubit. Corespondență inedită Mihai Eminescu – Veronica Micle*, ed. Christina Zarifopol-Illias (Iași: Polirom, 200), 298.

⁴⁹ Mihai Eminescu, *Eminescu în corespondență I*, ed. Dimitrie Vatamaniuc (Bucharest: Muzeul Literaturii Române, 1997), 74.

compared with statements such as the claim that Maiorescu “was and remains an incorrigible egotist” who “sought to impose his way of seeing upon me,”⁵⁰ the difference lies not so much in substance as in the intensity of expression. In the case of other letters, Sorin Alexandrescu has observed that Minar engages in a kind of “photomontage,” meaning that he merges paragraphs from several authenticated letters into a single, composite letter.⁵¹ In other words, Minar does not stray far from the truth, but instead amplifies the tensions and intensifies the effect, both to furnish irrefutable support for his views and to enhance the dramatism of his biographical narrative.

The other method used to authenticate the information is the invocation of oral sources. The advantage of employing such sources lies in their limited accessibility in the short term, in the unlikely event that readers might have attempted to verify them, and their complete unverifiability in the long term, as those who personally knew the poet eventually take to the grave the secrets they may or may not have shared with the enthusiastic exegetes. Among Octav Minar’s “informants,” one must mention, above all, the elderly Costache Crețu, “the housekeeper of the Eminovici family,”⁵² to whom are attributed most accounts of Eminescu’s childhood, as well as Mother Fevronia the Serb from the Văratec Monastery, “who hosted Veronica Micle and in whose house the poetess passed away.”⁵³ She is cited as the source for the claim that Veronica Micle died of cerebral congestion and for the categorical rejection of the suicide hypothesis. N. Zaharia is even more vague about his oral sources, mentioning, for example, that some of the information about the poet’s distant relatives was gathered from “testimonies of local villagers.”⁵⁴ Beyond the advantage of unverifiability, citing such sources also creates the impression of privileged access to exclusive information, the revelation of a great secret, which serves to stimulate the reader’s curiosity.

As the preceding analysis has shown, Octav Minar and N. Zaharia prove to be highly adept at winning their readership. Their efforts undoubtedly include a full range of strategies, some of which pertain even to the form in which their material is presented. For instance, their preference for publishing “little brochures,” as G. Călinescu ironically called their short texts,⁵⁵ signifies yet another means of reaching out to the general public, who is more likely to engage with such synthetic accounts of the subject than with complex academic works. Nevertheless, both authors also published more substantial volumes, marked by clear scientific ambitions. Another feature common to both approaches is the alternation between text and image, as well as between critical commentary and poetry, a pattern particularly noticeable in Minar’s work. It is no coincidence that his first book about the poet is a commemorative album, *Eminescu comemorativ* (1910), conceived as a collage in which highly condensed biographical information is supplemented by photographs of the poet, the places where he lived, his acquaintances, statues erected in his honour, as well as

⁵⁰ Micle, *Dragoste și poezie*, 34-35.

⁵¹ Sorin Alexandrescu, “Probleme de autenticitate în corespondența Eminescu publicată de Octav Minar,” *Revista de istorie și teorie literară* 13, no. 2 (1964): 377.

⁵² Minar, *Eminescu. Aspecte din viața și opera poetului*, 6.

⁵³ Micle, *Dragoste și poezie*, 84.

⁵⁴ Zaharia, *Mihail Eminescu. Viața și opera sa*, 23.

⁵⁵ Călinescu, “Octav Minar, necrofor eminescian,” 899.

by poems and musical scores set to his lyrics. Minar's effort to disseminate cultural information through discursive forms accessible to the public is also evident in the fact that he directed the first movie about the poet's life, *Eminescu-Veronica-Creangă* (1914), and authored one of the first novels about Eminescu's life, *The Venetian Symphony* (*Simfonia venețiană*, 1936), which he explicitly subtitled as such. Although we will not examine these works in detail, since they are not framed as exegeses, it is worth noting that they reveal the fundamentally modern sensibility that Minar displayed in his role as a cultural entrepreneur.

In terms of content, however, the primary means of adapting to the public's sensibility, which brings the works of Minar and Zaharia close to the 19th-century popular novel, is the use of melodramatic patterns in reconstructing Eminescu's biography, with particular emphasis on the poet's relationship with Veronica Micle. The signifying practices specific to the melodramatic imagination will be addressed in the second part of this study.

4. Melodramatic Patterns in the Biographical Narrative

Melodrama, originally a popular drama form designed for boulevard stages and intended to entertain a broad audience, has been defined as a genre that emphasizes actions and situations, involving ethically polarized characters, typically including a suffering hero or heroine and an antagonist who embodies persecution. The melodramatic perspective on life is fundamentally humanistic and moralizing, with narratives invariably culminating in the glorification of good after a series of trials and the punishment of evil.⁵⁶ A common thread among melodrama theories is its adaptability: although melodrama had modest survival as an autonomous genre, it has gradually permeated other genres,⁵⁷ driven by the perennial "need for sentiment"⁵⁸ that readers from all times experience in relation to literature. Consequently, melodrama has become a defining form of modernity⁵⁹ and, ultimately, a universal mode of representation and signification.⁶⁰ Starting from the hypothesis that the melodramatic mode infiltrates not only various forms of art but also the critical and biographical discourse, this section aims to analyse in detail the use of melodramatic patterns in the works of Octav Minar and N. Zaharia.

⁵⁶ Frank Rahill, *The World of Melodrama* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), XIV.

⁵⁷ Louise McReynolds and Joan Neuberger, „Introduction”, in *Imitations of Life. Two Centuries of Melodrama in Russia*, ed. Louise McReynolds & Joan Neuberger (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 9-12; Michael Hays & Anastasia Nicolopoulou, „Introduction”, in *Melodrama. The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*, ed. Michael Hays & Anastasia Nicolopoulou (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), VII-XI.

⁵⁸ Mădălina-Mariana Dumitrache, *Melodrama. O interpretare socio-culturală* (Bucharest: Editura Universitară, 2008), 9.

⁵⁹ Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity. Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 131.

⁶⁰ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, IX.

4. a. Ethical Polarization and Absolute Moral Alternatives

A defining characteristic of the melodramatic mode, abundantly manifest in the works of the two representatives of minor Eminescology, is the Manichaean distribution of moral values, which leads to pronounced ethical polarization of characters and a stringent dichotomy between good and evil.⁶¹ Melodrama responds to the ethical ambiguity and moral relativism endemic to the modern condition by articulating an idealized utopia of moral clarity,⁶² thereby mitigating the existential anxiety engendered by axiological uncertainty.⁶³ This approach becomes particularly relevant in shaping Eminescu's biography against the backdrop of the mystery surrounding essential phases of his life, as well as the controversies regarding his relationships with the members of "Junimea" or Veronica Micle. Given that readers are generally unwilling to engage with the complexities of these issues and prefer straightforward answers, Minar and Zaharia advance a series of ethically transparent scenarios. They construct a narrative that, though implausible, is desired by the public, wherein historical figures occupy clearly defined positions and act according to easily identifiable principles of either good or evil.

The core of the melodramatic construction of Eminescu's biography is, unsurprisingly, his relationship with Veronica Micle. Against rumours casting this relationship as immoral, an idealized image of pure, uplifting love emerges, one defined particularly through its contrast with the general malice and envy that love must overcome. A primary mechanism of polarization is the mirrored depiction of Eminescu's relations with the "Junimea" circle, on the one hand, and with Veronica Micle, on the other. Octav Minar addresses this even before recounting the love story itself, crafting a context that heightens its dramatic tension. Building on the well-known opposition of Titu Maiorescu to Eminescu and Veronica Micle's relationship and potential marriage, Minar portrays Maiorescu and the other members of "Junimea" as agents of absolute evil, emphasizing their "calamitous role" in the relationship of the two lovers.⁶⁴ Minar's accusations go so far as to deny any meaningful contribution of the "Junimea" circle to Eminescu's formation.⁶⁵ Conversely, Veronica Micle is credited with all the merits of creative inspiration: "From their urging, I have not written a single line, nor have I been inspired. Only you, my sweet friend, have been my inspiring muse!"⁶⁶ In a similar vein, many letters, especially those collected by Cristina Zarifopol, show Eminescu absolutizing Veronica Micle's role in his life and creative work, confessing, within extended love declarations, that she was his sole source of happiness.⁶⁷ Minar's approach does not fundamentally depart from truth but rather strategically amalgamates statements made in separate contexts to construct a morally polarized narrative. Accordingly, the amateur critic

⁶¹ Ibid., 36.

⁶² Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 46.

⁶³ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 20.

⁶⁴ Minar, *Cum a iubit Eminescu* (1911), 33.

⁶⁵ Octav Minar, *Critica literară în secolul al XIX-lea* (Bucharest: Socec & Co. S. A., f. a.), 39-40.

⁶⁶ Micle, *Dragoste și poezie*, 36.

⁶⁷ Eminescu, *Dulcea mea Doamnă/Eminul meu iubit*, 60.

asserts that Eminescu was truly close only to Veronica Micle and Ion Creangă, who embody a model of understanding and humanity that contrasts with the cold, intellectual, and cynical atmosphere attributed to “Junimea”.

Another absolutist division aimed at glorifying Veronica Micle’s role emerges from the way she is portrayed in relation to the other women in Eminescu’s life. In Minar’s volumes, the “rivals” are Cornelia Emilian and the poet’s sister, Harieta Eminovici, who accused Veronica Micle of immorality in her relationship with Ștefan Micle and of aggravating Eminescu’s condition in his final years. Following the melodramatic convention, which involves personifying evil in one-dimensional characters,⁶⁸ transformed into pure symbols within a polarized moral system,⁶⁹ Octav Minar depicts these two women solely as adversaries of Veronica Micle, openly acknowledging his strategy: “Veronica is defeated by human selfishness and envy, personified in the two women: Henrietta and Cornelia Emilian.”⁷⁰ Another melodramatic trait identifiable here is the explicit naming of opposing moral forces, reinforced by the frequent use of ethically charged terms.⁷¹ Polarization thus becomes evident at the linguistic level, with two clearly distinguishable semantic fields. The positive adjectives applied to Veronica Micle are often superlative, repeatedly portraying her as “the most beautiful and educated woman of her time.”⁷² Cornelia Emilian and Harieta Eminovici, in contrast, are described as “passionate and reckless women,”⁷³ and their actions are frequently associated with terms such as “venom,” “malice,” and “envy.”

In N. Zaharia’s work, Veronica Micle is depicted in contrast to the other women with whom Eminescu had romantic ties throughout his life. Drawing on the well-known line from *Geniu pustiu*, in which Toma Nour confesses his anguish of being unable to love, Zaharia suggests a similar emotional pattern in Eminescu. He cites a confession allegedly made by the poet to Zamfir Arbore: “As for myself, though I have been in love many times, I can honestly say I have never truly loved. [...] But perhaps, just once, I may have.”⁷⁴ This testimony serves as the foundation for an entire chapter on Eminescu’s love life, where Zaharia presents all his other relationships as fleeting or superficial, emphasizing repeatedly that Veronica Micle was the only woman he ever truly loved. Even when referring to Mite Kremnitz, whose presence coincided with some of the poet’s most beautiful poems, Zaharia insists on labelling their relationship a “passing infatuation.”⁷⁵ For Zaharia, the ultimate proof of genuine love lies in sacrifice and selflessness,⁷⁶ qualities he uniquely attributes to Veronica during the poet’s final years. It is not coincidental that both Minar and Zaharia seek to rehabilitate Veronica Micle at a time when she was still largely viewed as a morally

⁶⁸ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 16-17.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁷⁰ Minar, *Cum a iubit Eminescu* (1911), 112.

⁷¹ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 55.

⁷² Micle, *Dragoste și poezie*, 97.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁷⁴ Zaharia, *Mihail Eminescu. Vieața și opera sa*, 249.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 247.

compromised figure who had betrayed her husband and distracted Eminescu from his intellectual pursuits. The need to introduce a redemptive heroine, with whom the melodramatic hero may experience pure love, drives this revised portrayal of Veronica, which becomes central in the process of mythmaking.

4. b. Virtue as Innocence, the Imbalance of Forces, and the Triumph of Good

Another fundamental dimension of the melodramatic imagination is the association of virtue with innocence.⁷⁷ The reader's affective identification with the positive heroes largely stems from their portrayal as possessing pure souls and noble intentions in a world dominated by corruption and petty interests.⁷⁸ Negative characters, conversely, are depicted as holders of power who abuse it, and are often represented as members of the ruling class, through an evident adaptation of melodrama to the social context of modernity.⁷⁹ To achieve the desired effect, melodrama initially embraces the anxieties of the modern individual: the forces of good are powerless and defenceless, while evil prevails for most of the narrative. Ultimately, the triumph of good serves a redemptive function, providing the comforting certitude that moral justice still exists in the world.⁸⁰ The perspective offered by Octav Minar and N. Zaharia on the love story between Mihai Eminescu and Veronica Micle, as well as on Eminescu's life in the broadest sense, closely follows this pattern. Moreover, the biographical narratives they propose complete the melodramatic scenario by introducing the moment of public recognition of virtue, after a series of repeated humiliations.

The effort to rehabilitate Veronica Micle, mentioned in the previous section, is evident from Octav Minar's focused depiction of her adolescence. As in any melodrama, the heroine initially occupies a privileged position, being portrayed as the most beautiful and intelligent student in her school. Her transformation into a victim is marked by her marriage to Ștefan Micle, with Minar presenting this situation in explicit terms, citing a letter in which she describes herself as "a victim of naivety and sincerity."⁸¹ Furthermore, the author casts Veronica Micle in a sacrificial role, emphasizing that although she was "sacrificed" to a man she did not love in order to save her family from poverty, she remained "a model wife" throughout her life⁸² and renounced her own happiness to stay faithful to her husband until his final moments.

Given the contemporary rumours surrounding the relationship between Eminescu and Veronica Micle, a crucial aim of both authors was to demonstrate the purely platonic nature of their bond before Ștefan Micle's death. For the public to empathize with the victim, her innocence must first be firmly established. Thus, both Octav Minar and N. Zaharia actively counter "unjust

⁷⁷ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 50.

⁷⁸ James L. Smith, *Melodrama* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 24.

⁷⁹ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 44.

⁸⁰ Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 294.

⁸¹ Minar, *Cum a iubit Eminescu* (1911), 25.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 30.

accusations,⁸³ highlighting the respect Eminescu and Veronica showed toward Ștefan Miclă⁸⁴ and vehemently denying any intimate involvement between them during the early period. To substantiate this claim, they quote a November 1879 letter from Eminescu, in which he speaks of fulfilling a long-cherished, deeply desired dream only two months prior,⁸⁵ as well as a testimony from Ioan Slavici suggesting that the couple's first intimate moment occurred after the poet's move to Bucharest.⁸⁶ Likewise, N. Zaharia describes Eminescu as "modest and delicate," discreet regarding his sentimental life. His carefully selected poems are praised precisely for their portrayal of love scenes marked by "complete absence of vulgarity," a certain "naivety and innocence," combined with "deep feeling and tenderness."⁸⁷ In the context of passionate violence and social uninhibition following the trauma of war, such a portrayal of pure, spiritualized love resonates deeply with the audience, immediately arousing sympathy for the protagonists. This type of representation also aligns with the cultural elite's preferences of the time. For instance, academician Nicolae Iorga praised Minar's work,⁸⁸ in a period when E. Lovinescu's candidacy to the Academy was rejected exactly due to a passage in his novel *Bălăuța* describing a moment of physical intimacy between Eminescu and Veronica Miclă.⁸⁹ These factors illustrate both the general and the educated public's preference for an idealized, platonic image of love between the two lovers, further explaining the success of Minar's and Zaharia's volumes.

Eminescu is also positioned as a victim in relation to his contemporary society. Building on the hypothesis that genius is "a neurosis," and that men of genius are "superior degenerates," N. Zaharia depicts Eminescu as a timid, hypersensitive artist, lacking practical sense and disconnected from the world, which subjects him to suffering and injustice from those around him. Thus, in his first brochure on the poet's life, *Mihail Eminescu. Pessimism, Madness, Genius, and His Artistic Personality (Mihail Eminescu. Pesimismul, nebunia, geniul și personalitatea sa artistică, 1910)*, Zaharia highlights biographical elements such as Eminescu's dismissal from his position as school inspector in 1876, framed as "political persecution," his hardships as editor of the newspaper *Timpuț*, and other episodes in which the poet was compelled to seek financial assistance, overwork, or suffer rejection.⁹⁰ Subtle accusations are also directed at Maiorescu and the "Junimea" circle for their failure to recognize Eminescu's true value. However, the main axis of polarization opposes the innocent and defenceless poet to a petty society ready to crush anyone unwilling to play its power dynamics. Similarly, Octav Minar devotes attention to the lawsuit brought against Eminescu by Dimitrie Petrino during the former's tenure as director of the Central

⁸³ Zaharia, *Mihail Eminescu. Vieța și opera sa*, 238.

⁸⁴ Minar, *Cum a iubit Eminescu* (1911), 90.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 103-104.

⁸⁶ Zaharia, *Mihail Eminescu. Vieța și opera sa*, 223.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 266-267.

⁸⁸ Patraș, "Istoria literară ca bestseller," 428.

⁸⁹ Antonio Patraș, *Scritorul și umbra sa. Geneza formei în literatura lui E. Lovinescu 2* (Iași: Institutul European, 2013), 183.

⁹⁰ N. Zaharia, *Mihail Eminescu. Pesimismul, nebunia, geniul și personalitatea sa artistică* (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice Carol Göbl, 1910), 3-7.

Library in Iași, recounting the events in detail in his volume *Eminescu Facing Justice (Eminescu în fața justiției, 1914)*. As in earlier works, Minar's intention to construct an antagonistic narrative that emphasizes the poet's innocence is visible even at the semantic level: "He finds a victim in the gentle being who has never been able to defend himself, Eminescu."⁹¹ The emphasis falls on Eminescu's suffering, as a man devoted to the world of beauty and ideas, who is forced not only to descend to the level of petty social struggles but is also unable to prove his innocence.

In melodrama, the prolonged persecution of the heroes culminates in the revelation of truth, which brings their triumph primarily in the form of final recognition by the community. Just as the unfavourable position of the forces of good throughout the narrative was marked by social disapproval and rumours, so too must their ultimate victory be acknowledged and validated by society, as a reparative act akin to the catharsis in tragedy.⁹² In the case of Eminescu and Veronica Micle, however, this recognition was not part of the actual story but only became possible posthumously. Thus, the emergence of perspectives such as those advanced by Octav Minar and N. Zaharia can also be regarded as an attempt to complete an unfinished melodramatic scenario. Setting aside later rehabilitations, Eminescu spent his final years in misery and poverty; his relationship with Veronica Micle remained stigmatized by vice and immorality throughout their life; and Veronica herself died condemned by the poet's close circle, burdened by the reputation of a woman of loose morals and overshadowed by speculation of suicide.

By intervening in a context where evil seemed to have the final word, and by offering an unexpected redemption of the protagonists in the form of posthumous rehabilitation, Minar and Zaharia touch one of the most sensitive chords of the public: the need to believe in beauty, truth, purity, in the power of good to prevail, and in the existence of transcendent forces that ultimately reward virtue and punish those who persecuted it.⁹³ The works of these two amateurs provide the long-awaited ending to a biographical drama that held readers in suspense. Considering Umberto Eco's observation that a popular creation is incomplete until every crisis receives a resolution and every reader's unease is defused,⁹⁴ it can be argued that Eminescu's biography truly becomes mythic only when exegetes such as Minar and Zaharia supplement the factual record by embedding it within a melodramatic structure.

4. c. The Allure of Sensationalism and the Rhetoric of Excess

The widespread popularity of melodrama has often been attributed to the intense emotional charge it constructs and its capacity to elicit powerful affective responses from readers. In modern societies, where individuals are constantly exposed to sensory and emotional overstimulation, audiences can only be moved through increasingly intense stimuli, capable of reaching their newly

⁹¹ Octav Minar, *Eminescu în fața justiției* (Bucharest: Editura Librăriei Școalelor C. Sfetea, 1914), 20.

⁹² Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 31-32.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹⁴ Umberto Eco, *Supraomul de masă* (Constanța: Pontica, 2003), 16.

heightened thresholds of sensation.⁹⁵ This phenomenon is particularly relevant in the early 20th century and the interwar period, when collective exposure to extreme violence and death during the First World War led to a gradual process of emotional desensitization. As a result, capturing the public's emotional engagement became more challenging than ever. Within this context, the melodramatic mode, relying on extreme situations, heightened suspense, sensational events, exaggerated passions, and abrupt oscillations between emotional extremes,⁹⁶ emerges as one of the few narrative forms capable of captivating such an audience. Its ability to make readers experience unfiltered joy and despair, stripped of any nuance that might dilute the emotional intensity, is a defining feature of its appeal,⁹⁷ consistently employed by Minar and Zaharia. These narrative strategies are naturally accompanied by rhetorical excess marked by hyperbolic and grand expressions, designed to elevate the ordinary to the level of the extraordinary. In this sense, melodrama can also be seen as a response to emotional repression, a literary space in which ideas and feelings conventionally deemed inexpressible are granted full articulation.⁹⁸

At the heart of the sensational dimension of melodramatic events lies, as Peter Brooks observed, a principle of polarization that operates not only along a horizontal axis (good versus evil) but also vertically, through the intensity of emotional experience. Characters in melodrama do not merely represent opposing ethical poles but are also subject to drastic shifts between moments of exaltation and collapse, transitions that usually occur suddenly, without gradual progression.⁹⁹ This dynamic is particularly evident in the way Octav Minar shapes the love story between Mihai Eminescu and Veronica Micle, in direct correlation with the spatial contexts in which it unfolds. Thus, the Iași period is presented as a privileged phase of their relationship, enveloped in a lyrical and idealized atmosphere. Minar depicts the city of Iași in the 1870s and 1880s as a place of cultural glory, a poetic and refined environment that enhances the emotional resonance of love. Against this backdrop, the romance that began in Vienna blossoms, being described by the author as “the most tender love story to have existed in our literary history.”¹⁰⁰ This is the era of platonic love, exalted through its connection with nature and expressed in sentimental poems. This luminous stage is nevertheless followed by a sharp decline with Eminescu's relocation to Bucharest. In stark contrast to Iași, the capital is portrayed as a space of alienation, degradation, and exhaustion. The couple's relationship deteriorates under the strain of distance, uncertainty, and personal crises. Overwhelmed by financial hardship and the intellectual burden of his work as editor of *Timpul*, Eminescu leads what Minar calls “a detestable life,” becoming incapable of experiencing passionate love any longer.¹⁰¹ The contrast between the two cities is deliberate: the brightness of Iași is tragically intensified when viewed in relation to the

⁹⁵ Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 89-90.

⁹⁶ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 11-12.

⁹⁷ Smith, *Melodrama*, 19.

⁹⁸ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 40.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰⁰ Micle, *Dragoste și poezie*, 29-30.

¹⁰¹ Minar, *Cum a iubit Eminescu* (1911), 113.

destructive nature of Bucharest, while the latter gains depth as a space of emotional ruin when mirrored against the former.

In his novel *The Venetian Symphony*, Minar introduces a third, imagined stage in which the lovers once again achieve emotional fulfilment in an exotic, timeless setting: Venice. This fictional sequence, inserted between the desolation of the Bucharest period and the tragic end marked by Eminescu's deteriorating health and death, has been interpreted as a symbolic echo of the Iași idyllic period, offering a fleeting restoration of love.¹⁰² In this context, one should also note Minar's acute attention to the spatial dimension of narrative: setting is not a mere background, but a dynamic agent shaping the development or disintegration of romantic feeling. Thus, the narrative structure crafted by Minar adheres closely to melodramatic logic: a sequence of extremes (idealization, downfall, temporary restoration, and final tragedy) designed to heighten emotional engagement and deliver an intense affective experience for the reader.

Beyond the polarization of key moments in the lives of the two lovers, both Octav Minar and N. Zaharia present Eminescu's entire biography as a succession of sensational episodes, a series of dramatic reversals and turning points that decisively alter the course of the poet's life. In cases where multiple versions of an event exist, the most dramatic and emotionally charged one is always preferred. Both authors, for instance, favour the version in which Eminescu's death is attributed to a head injury inflicted by Petrea Poenaru. Even when it comes to widely known biographical events, the manner in which they are recounted reveals a deliberate search for dramatic effect, functioning as a strategy to stir the reader's emotions. According to the principles of melodrama, the two amateur exegetes operate by transforming the ordinary into the significant¹⁰³. This effect is primarily achieved at the rhetorical level through the use of highly charged, emotionally resonant language to describe the poet's experiences.

For example, when discussing the legal action brought against Eminescu by D. Petrino, Minar asserts that the Liberals sought "to strike at the very existence of the poet," and that such confrontations "spiritually killed Eminescu."¹⁰⁴ Similarly, in his attempt to counter Titu Maiorescu's claim that the poet's fate was unrelated to external circumstances, N. Zaharia emphasizes that Eminescu "was often deeply wounded," and that the suffering expressed in his poetry is far from impersonal, instead arising "from the depths of a tormented soul," from an "entire chain of misfortunes that so heavily mark the lives of certain people."¹⁰⁵ Described in such terms, the hardships endured by the poet are amplified to the level of tragedy, and his biography takes on the shape of an existential struggle against society, from which Eminescu frequently emerges defeated and humiliated. His posthumous recognition, on the other hand, functions as a long-awaited moment of redemption for a public that has followed the hero into the depths of suffering. At the same time, it stands as the ultimate affirmation of Eminescu's genius, in keeping with Zaharia's claim that "from

¹⁰² Patraș, „Istoria literară ca bestseller”, 432.

¹⁰³ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 14.

¹⁰⁴ Minar, *Eminescu în fața justiției*, 11-13.

¹⁰⁵ Zaharia, *Mihail Eminescu. Pesimismul, nebunia, geniul și personalitatea sa artistică*, 3-5.

the moment an ordinary man dies, the memory of his existence fades; whereas the man of genius, forgotten throughout his life, becomes increasingly known after his death."¹⁰⁶

Last but not least, the sensational effect specific to melodrama, fully exploited by both exegetes, derives from the triumph over repression and silence, from the expression of the deepest feelings¹⁰⁷. Indeed, discussing the language of melodrama, Singer argued that it is not so much a rhetoric of exaggeration as one of disinhibition¹⁰⁸, the sensation of excess resulting precisely from verbalizing what is typically left unspoken. In the writings of Octav Minar and N. Zaharia, this tendency toward complete emotional verbalization becomes evident in two key contexts: declarations of love and the passages where Eminescu expresses his suffering caused by his contemporaries.

Even before presenting what he claims to be the most moving fragments from Eminescu's private correspondence, Minar insists that the poet set aside any social convention in his letters, writing "without restraint everything that weighed on his soul."¹⁰⁹ Similarly, N. Zaharia highlights Eminescu's sincerity as the essential quality of his writing, claiming that the poet avoided all artifice and always wrote from the depths of his soul.¹¹⁰ Such affirmations demonstrate that both authors are fully aware of their strategy: they deliberately depict Eminescu as someone who fully externalizes his emotions, allowing the public to empathize with him more easily. To go beyond the letters to Veronica Micle, Minar cites a letter from Eminescu to his brother in which the poet allegedly writes: "A kind of annihilation of the will characterizes me. Eyes once used to wise, ancient letters now refuse to follow the path that leads to happiness, according to some, or to ruin, in my view. [...] Love, the all-powerful god, has seized my heart, and against my will I have become his slave."¹¹¹ Here, we see a total renunciation of pride and reserve, and a raw verbalization of love's overwhelming effects. Equally transparent are Eminescu's expressions of suffering in his confessions about his condition as a journalist at *Timpul*, as reproduced by Zaharia: "I feel I can go on no longer. I feel morally exhausted and in need of a long, long rest to come back to myself. [...] I am worn out; I no longer find myself and no longer recognize myself."¹¹² The authenticity of such letters and confessions is ultimately of secondary importance. Whether fabricated or selected from a broader epistolary and anecdotal corpus, these excerpts confirm the preference of both Minar and Zaharia for a dramatic and pathetic mode of expression, favouring emotional transparency. In doing so, they succeed in reaching a readership that longs for authenticity in a world constrained by etiquette and emotional restraint.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰⁷ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 41.

¹⁰⁸ Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 52.

¹⁰⁹ Micle, *Dragoste și poezie*, 40.

¹¹⁰ Zaharia, *Mihail Eminescu. Vieța și opera sa*, 318.

¹¹¹ Micle, *Dragoste și poezie*, 30.

¹¹² Zaharia, *Mihail Eminescu. Pesimismul, nebunia, geniul și personalitatea sa artistică*, 6.

Conclusion

Although a complete history of the mythologization of Mihai Eminescu's life and work is a utopian scholarly objective, no serious analysis can overlook the phenomenon of minor Eminescology, which emerged in the aftermath of the poet's death and enabled unprecedented communication between the cultural field and the general public. It functioned in two key directions: adapting critical discourse to the comprehension level of a large audience, while simultaneously shaping the sensibilities of this audience. Though dismissed by official critics, these minor works are of great value when approached through a sociological lens, becoming implicit testimonies of the public's reception of Eminescu in the early 20th century and of the strategies adopted to engage with such audiences. The present study aimed to examine these strategies and explore how emerging Eminescology has negotiated its status within the broader social and economic landscape.

First, the paper has demonstrated that the works of Octav Minar and N. Zaharia rely on the authentication and deepening of already-circulating mythologemes. They drew upon the widely familiar image of Eminescu as a writer of sentimental poetry and integrated his most well-known and beloved love poems into coherent, emotionally resonant biographical narratives.

Second, we analysed the ways in which both authors presented their content straddling the boundary between fact and fiction under the guise of scholarly inquiry. We highlighted the use of fabricated or creatively adapted documents and the invocation of unverifiable oral sources as tools for gaining the trust and curiosity of a general readership.

Finally, the central section of the paper was devoted to the melodramatic core structuring the biographical narratives crafted by Minar and Zaharia. Drawing on recent theories regarding the persistence of melodramatic modes of signification in various artistic forms of the modernity, we examined key traits such as the polarized distribution of characters (with tensions staged between the Eminescu–Veronica Micle couple and antagonistic figures such as the members of “Junimea” circle, other women in Eminescu's life, and contemporary society at large), the idealization of innocence and purity in the protagonists, who remain misunderstood and socially marginalized, and an emphasis on sensational episodes and emotional extremes, supported by a rhetoric of excess and unrestrained emotional expression. Through these strategies, both Minar and Zaharia contribute to the rehabilitation of Veronica Micle and facilitate the crystallization of the Eminescu myth within public consciousness by eliminating any details that might compromise the poet's idealized image. Accordingly, this section may also be read as an overview of how the melodramatic paradigm permeates critical and historical discourse, enabling the transition from a technical, specialist-oriented criticism to a more flexible and accessible form of exegesis aimed at a general readership.

In future studies, we will continue to investigate this thread of minor Eminescology, tracing its subsequent developments both in the form of romanticized biographies, which have maintained a steady tradition from the interwar period to the present, and in more accessible critical works with a journalistic touch, often more appealing to the general public than canonical exegeses. At the same time, noting certain similarities between the works analysed in this paper and those written by the official critics of the time, we believe it would be worthwhile to explore

the extent to which the melodramatic modes of signification may have left their imprint on canonical criticism as well. Such an inquiry could illuminate how the two circuits of Eminescology, while distinct in terms of scholarly prestige and discursive register, may not, in essence, be as divergent as they appear.