

2000: Year of Eminescu



Catherine Lovatt

The year 2000 has been crowned a year in memory of the Romanian poet Mihai Eminescu. A national figurehead, his poetry has been passed down through generations to epitomise the essence of Romanian consciousness.

Born in 1850 in Botoşani (he spent part of his childhood in Ipoteşti, where his museum is), Eminescu has been regarded as one of the great European poets, comparable to Byron or Lermontov, despite only living to the age of 39. His early life saw him gain a job as an actor and prompter with Iorgu Caragiale's theatre group, which enabled him to travel the length and breadth of Romania. With his father's assistance he was also able to attend lectures in Vienna on philosophy, history, law, political economy and Romance philology. His initial employment at the theatre encouraged the creativity and romanticism in his own character and shortly afterwards he made his literary debut in *Familia*, a review based in Oradea. ("Who is Mihai Eminescu?")

His career developed quickly after his enrolment at the University of Berlin in 1872. He first became director of the Central Library in Iaşi and was then invited to Bucharest to work for a leading newspaper of the era, *Timpul* (the Times). During this period his work was published in several highly acclaimed journals such as *Convorbiri Literare*, where many of his love poems appeared. However, in 1883 he published *Luceafărul* (The Evening Star) which was to provide a model for Romanian poets in the twentieth century and which established the future direction of Eminescu's own poetry.

Eminescu had a two-pronged approach to his writing. On one level he would mould himself towards the individual such as Shakespeare, concentrating on personal emotions. On the second level he would explore Romanian folklore examining existential perceptions such as time, emotion, space, beauty, idealism and realism, myth and sentiment, the spirit and the soul, love and hatred. Eminescu would consider these often unexplainable phenomena in the wider context of the universe in which he found a complex system of obsessions and relations. *Luceafărul* combined the complexities of the universe with those of immediate surroundings, combining myth with realities.

It is through this latter approach that Eminescu has come to epitomise one expression of the Romanian identity. Today, many Romanians consider Eminescu to be the 'National Poet' of Romania and an integral component of Romanian culture, just as Shakespeare or Byron offer an association with national identity in other cultures. Therefore, although Eminescu concentrated on the essence of being Romanian his system of existential perceptions can be transferred into a universal context.

Although the philosophies of Eminescu are, to some degree, transferable they also demonstrate the ambiguity of culture. It is difficult to arrive at an exact definition of culture: a set of traditions, history, art, literature, myth. There is no solid precedent for defining culture. Instead there is a societal need to belong and to distinguish one group from another. This results in a search for definition through the arts, for example. Consequently, Eminescu as the 'National Poet' in Romania is considered quintessential for the self-definition of Romanian national identity in a society where regional identity often supersedes that of national identity.

For many people outside Romania knowledge of Romanian poets and culture is limited. Mihai Eminescu is considered one of the most renowned poets of his time and his influence extended after his death. His existential approach gave an eloquence to his verse and provided a framework for future poets. His exploration of Romanian folklore underlined the essence of Romanian nationality and has been transformed over the decades to enhance the development of Romanian culture. A year in celebration of the life of Eminescu is merely testimony to the influence he had and still holds.

[Catherine Lovatt](#), 20 January 2000

[Archive of Catherine Lovatt's articles on Romania and Moldova](#)

Resources on Eminescu

[In Celebration of Mihai Eminescu](#)

[Selected Works of Ion Creangă and Mihai Eminescu](#) (East European Monographs, No 327)

Roy MacGregor-Hastie, [The Last Romantic: Mihail Eminescu](#)

[The Legend of the Evening Star](#)

[Mihai Eminescu: Poems](#)

[Poems of Mihail Eminescu](#)

Other Eminescu links

The [Discovering Eminescu Project](#) invites you to "get emotionally involved while reading his poems." A large site including photos and 45 translations into English and a handful into other languages.

[Translations by A.G. Sahlean](#) (and others), including a fragment of *The Legend of the Evening Star*.

A [short biography](#) and chronology of Eminescu's life, written in imperfect but enthusiastic English.

[Photos from Ipotesti](#), where Eminescu spent part of his childhood, including the Ipotesti Memorial (The National Centre for the Study of Mihai Eminescu).

The [Mihai Eminescu Museum](#), Iași.