

Atinati Mamatsashvili

Ilia State University

Tbilisi, Georgia

Small Literatures in the Global Context of Historical Crisis

The modernist Experience in Georgia in the years 1910 – 1920

When reflecting on small literatures, in particular to what extent their characteristics fit into the global pattern, the question of the historical – political mutations specific to the space in which they emerge and develop arises from the outset. The literatures of small nations, those which are – as Kundera puts it – «confrontées à l'arrogante ignorance des grands» and «voient leur existence perpétuellement menacée» (Gauvain in Bertrand & Gauvain 2003: 31), are formed in a particular climate and do not quite free themselves from what binds them to their past, but also to contemporaneity (Brozgal & Kippur 2016). Thus, even purely aesthetic texts, devoid of any extra – literary imprint, bear the mark.

It is in this precise context that we will examine the Georgian avant – garde and modernist movements that emerged in the 1910s, in the midst of the crisis of world events (the First World War). The creation in 1916 of the Symbolist group “The Blue Horns” was initiated by the founders, of whom some had recently returned (due to the War) from France – the country that, together with Belgium, directly influenced Georgian Symbolism. This crisis was followed by a second one – this time on a more local scale (the Bolshevik Revolution), which resulted for Georgia in the political recovery of independence in 1918 and the simultaneous flourishing of the aesthetics of the avantgarde. There was a third stage in the development of avant – garde movements – the occupation of Georgia by the Red Army in 1921. From this moment onwards, the avant – garde gradually plunged into an aesthetic crisis, which was caused, on the one hand, by the ideological pressure they were under (the gradual banning by the Bolshevik authorities of "formalist, decadent" and "petty bourgeois" tendencies, which became more pronounced around 1928), and, on the other hand, by the idea opposing the Bolshevik authorities (i.e. the shift of avant – garde aesthetics towards nationalism and patriotism).

Our contribution will be articulated around these three moments of historical crisis that take place on a global scale and to which the modernist and avant – garde movements attempt to respond in their own way on a local level. This response is based on the critique of this crisis and on an aesthetic of 'negation' (Larsen 1990: 6 – 7) that will constitute a 'discourse of crisis' (Liska 2007: 200) versus the political – historical events. In order to better understand these changes in the modernist literary trend, we will place the latter in the broader context of the development of Georgian literary historiography.

To answer these questioning, the works of three writers will be discussed: Titsian Tabidze's Poems (1916 – 1918), Paolo Iashvili's 'Multicoloured Balloons' (1924), and Mikheil Javakhishvili's 'The Thief' (1928). Composed between the 1910s and the end of the 1920s, they show the different stages of what constitutes the experience of modernism in Georgia and refer to a crisis that is at the same time historical, aesthetic and political and that affects the local and more generally – European space, simultaneously.

Selective Bibliography:

Bertrand, Jean – Pierre & Gauvain, Lise (dir.), 2003, *Littératures mineures en langue majeure*, Montréal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, Peter Lang, <https://books.openedition.org/pum/15718>

Broomans, Petra, Voorst, Sandra van, Smits, Karina (eds.), 2012, *Rethinking Cultural Transfer and Transmission. Reflections and New Perspectives*, Barkhuis Publishing.

Calin, William, 2016, *Minority Literatures and Modernism. Scots, Breton, and Occitan, 1920 – 1990*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press.

Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari, Félix, 1975, *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1975.

Glesener, Jeanne, 2012: «On Small Literatures and their Location in World Literature: A Case Study on Luxembourgish Literature», *Interliteraria*, 12 – 01, Vol. 19, p. 75 – 92.

Larsen, Neil, 1990, *Modernism and Hegemony. A materialist Critique of Aesthetic Agencies*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

Lia Brozgal and Sara Kippur (eds.), 2016, *Being Contemporary. French Literature, culture, and Politics Today*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press.

Liska, Vivian, 2007, «The Unlimitliness of German Expressionism», in *Modernism*, Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska (eds), Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, p. 195 – 206.

Biography:

Atinati Mamatsashvili is Professor of Comparative Literature at Ilia State University (Tbilisi, Georgia) and visiting researcher in Luxembourg in the framework of the project ECRIVAINS, supported by the Fondation luxembourgeoise pour la Mémoire de la Shoah and the Œuvre Grande Duchesse Charlotte. She was a visiting researcher at the Centre national de littérature supported by the Fonds National de la Recherche du Luxembourg (09/2020 – 08/2021). Her research focuses on literature and totalitarian regimes (Nazi and Soviet), French & Francophone literature and antisemitism. Among her latest publications: *Littérature et totalitarisme II: vers une conceptualisation du phénomène* (together with Anke Bosse), Presses Universitaires de Namur, 2020 ; *Des écrivains face aux persécutions, au massacre de masse et au génocide* (together with Luba Jurgenson), Paris, Petra, 2020; *Écrire une ville, habiter une ville: représentations spatiales des persécutions en Europe occupée (1940 – 1944)* (together with Helga Mitterbauer and Arvi Sepp), Cahiers de la Mémoire contemporaine, 2021.