

## Riccardo Mini – Thesis summary, Third-Year Report and Biographical Profile

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Title:

Жанр маленькой поэмы в произведениях Елены Шварц

Связь с традицией и элементы поэтических инноваций

The form of the *malen'kaya poëma* in the work of Elena Shvarts

Relationship to tradition and elements of poetic innovation

My dissertation aims to analyse the genre of the *malen'kaya poëma* (short *poëma*) within the poetic work of Elena Shvarts. The study develops in three main directions. Firstly, it follows the evolution of Elena Shvarts's career as a poet, with particular attention to the context of the Leningrad Underground and the main characteristics of Shvarts's poetics. Secondly, it revolves around a comprehensive examination of the genre of the *malen'kaya poëma*, including its historical antecedents within the Russian poetic tradition. Finally, ten out of the fourteen poems of the *Malen'kie poëmy* collection, published in the second volume of the poet's complete works, are analysed.

The multifaceted nature of Elena Shvarts's poetic heritage gives grounds for a detailed, genre-oriented analysis. Shvarts is one of the most relevant female poetic voices in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Russian literature, and is among the best-known representatives of the Leningrad Underground of the Seventies and Eighties. The study of her work sheds light on the continuity between the Russian poetic tradition of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the so-called Silver Age of Russian literature, and the poets of the “non-official culture”, or “Second culture”, which emerged in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the dissertation aims to be part of a more extended corpus of scientific works dedicated to the non-official Leningrad literature of the 1970s and the 1980s. The relevance of this endeavour is supported by recent studies within the domain of Russian, English, and Italian criticism. These studies aim at summarising, rethinking, and analysing that

part of Russian literature which, due to an inability to express itself in the official sphere, has long remained understudied.

The primary objective of this study is to define the genre of the *malen'kaya poëma* in Shvarts's work. Examining this genre in depth offers a privileged perspective on the poet's entire oeuvre, as well as revealing its key importance. As mentioned, the thesis unfolds across three principal dimensions, with the following specific aims:

1. To identify the main features of Elena Shvarts's poetics using examples from the *malen'kie poëmy*, the poems and the *poëmy*, as well as her prose and essays.
2. To retrace the sources of the genre of the *malen'kaya poëma* and explain Elena Shvarts's own interpretation of the genre. After identifying the characteristics of the genre with reference to theoretical and scientific literature, these characteristics are identified and analysed in comparison with selected works by the most influential poets for Shvarts, namely Marina Tsvetaeva, Mikhail Kuzmin and Velimir Khlebnikov.
3. To conduct an exhaustive analysis of a selection of *malen'kie poëmy* to demonstrate in which way the previously identified characteristics of the poetics and genre manifest within the poetic texts. This analysis accentuates Elena Shvarts's connections with the Silver Age while highlighting the distinctiveness of her contributions in terms of genre and thematical elements.

Therefore, the thesis is composed of three chapters dedicated to the study of the abovementioned questions. The first chapter, titled "Characteristics and specificity of Elena Shvarts's poetics", opens with an exploration of the poet's biography and the context in which Shvarts matured and developed as a poet. The biographical part is indispensable to show Shvarts's early approach to theatre and literature and, consequently, her early entry into the literary circles of the period. To understand Shvarts's evolution as a poet and her engagement with the non-official literature, her diaries function as pivotal resources. This section also features the main characteristics of the Leningrad Underground. Specially, this chapter gives an instance of the differences between the milieu of non-official literature during the 1960s and the end of the Thaw, when a young Shvarts entered these circles, and the 1970s, during which Shvarts was regarded as a key figure. As for the bibliography, particular significance is

attributed to essays written by the protagonists of this period and published in samizdat journals. Special attention is paid to works by Viktor Krivulin, Ol'ga Sedakova and Elena Ignatova. Equally fundamental are also the texts written after the collapse of the Soviet Union by the theorists and ideologists of the non-official culture, who carried out a veritable reconsideration, reflection, and in-depth study of the underground experience. Among these, the most important are the encyclopaedic *Samizdat Leningrada 1950s-1980s* by Boris Ivanov, Boris Ostanin, Dmitry Severyukhin and Vyacheslav Dolinin, alongside the essays by Viktor Krivulin. Furthermore, as for later studies, the book *Leningrado Underground*, by the Italian professor Marco Sabbatini, appears essential. Following this detailed introduction to the poet's biography and the non-official milieu, the first chapter is also dedicated to a comprehensive exploration of the fundamental characteristics of Elena Shvarts's poetics. Specifically, this section aims at understanding how Shvarts's poetics is based on contrasts and contradictions, and therefore finds its main expression in the juxtaposition of divergent elements, realities and categories that create a vast poetic universe. Indeed, Shvarts believed that verses should encompass the entirety of existence, and consequently gave life to a miniature world. It is also important to emphasise Shvarts's mastery on expanding and contracting the boundaries of this world. Of equal significance is her ability to skilfully expand and reduce the boundaries of this poetic world which, as a result, may seem boundless while also being very small, like a theatre. For this reason, Valery Shubinsky, Russian poet and critic, defined Elena Shvarts as a "poet-puppeteer" whose puppets display human traits, suffer and bleed. In addition, this section takes into consideration Shvarts's neo-romantic perspective on poetry, according to which poetry is an almost sacred activity. Within this framework, a parallelism is drawn between the figures of the god-creator of the world and the poet-creator of the poetic universe. As for the organisation of this world, it is evident that Shvarts's poetic world is based on the juxtaposition and coincidence of contrasts and contradictions; it is a world characterized by the interplay of abstraction and concreteness, light and darkness, the divine and the diabolical, the carnal and the spiritual, the physical and the metaphysical. Specifically, the baroque element in Shvarts's poetry manifests itself through the extreme importance attributed to imagery, the juxtaposition of contrasts and the endeavour to find harmony in disharmony, a compromise between chaos and cosmos. Finally, this analysis demonstrates how the literary device of metamorphosis underpins the previously mentioned thematic and stylistic elements. The chapter concludes with two sections dedicated to poet's relationship with the city of Leningrad-Petersburg, which functions as the

setting for most of her works, and the poet's characteristics use of authorial masks. To ascertain the principal attributes of Elena Shvarts's poetics, the self-exegetical short essays in which the poet reflects on her poetics hold paramount significance. In addition to these essays, it is essential to acknowledge the contributions of scholars and critics, notably the articles of Valery Shubinsky and Nina Guchinskaya's long essay "Vos'merka logosa", written in 1979, which, although focusing on Shvarts's poetry up to that period, is also a substantial resource for understanding the poet's later works. Furthermore, the reflections on Russian postmodernism by Mikhail Epstein are of notable importance.

The second chapter, titled "The *Malen'kaya poëma* as a genre in the work of Elena Shvarts", seeks to delineate the main features of Shvarts's short *poëmas* and identifies its sources in the Russian poetic tradition. The poet's preface to the collection of *Malen'kie poëmy*, first published in 1999, is of fundamental significance. After scrutinising the characteristics elucidated by Shvarts, the research transitions towards a comprehensive investigation of the sources. The most significant theoretical foundations are rooted in Mikahil Bakhtin's theories concerning genre memory and Boris Tomashevsky's theories regarding genre signs. The genre of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century lyric *poëma* is considered, with particular emphasis placed on the scientific work of Vladimir Markov and Leonid Dolgoplov devoted to this topic. Notably, these analyses discern three distinctive attributes of the *liricheskaya poëma*: the weakening of the *fabula* element, its inherent fragmentation and the lyrical development. Considering these analyses, a more in-depth investigation has been conducted on the structure of Elena Shvarts's *malen'kie poëmy*, with a specific focus on rhythm and polymetric versification, to illustrate the connection of these poems with the works of the Silver Age. When examining the polymetric verse used by the poets of the Silver Age and subsequently by Elena Shvarts, the insights of, once more, Vladimir Markov, and, most importantly, the scholarly works of Mikhail Gasparov, are of primary importance. The second part of the second chapter is dedicated to the examination of selected works by three prominent figures of the Silver Age: Marina Tsvetaeva, Mikhail Kuzmin and Velimir Khlebnikov. These three poets are cited by Shvarts as models for her poetic style and for the *malen'kaya poëma*. I then proceeded to demonstrate how the traits identified previously manifest in the writings of these three poets, followed by a comparison of their approaches with those embraced by Shvarts. I have specifically chosen to analyse *The Poem of the Mountain* and *The Poem of the End* by Marina Tsvetaeva, *The Trout is Breaking Through the Ice* by Mikhail Kuzmin and *Ladomir* and *The Gul-Mullah's Trumpet* by Velimir Khlebnikov.

From a critical perspective, the studies of G. S. Smith, Tomas Venclova and Vjacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov has been of particular importance. In the case of Kuzmin, I referred to the works of Nikolay Bogomolov, Lada Panova, and Gennady Shmakov. As for Khlebnikov, the insights of Angelo Maria Ripellino and Vladimir Markov were particularly noteworthy. The comparison between these poets and Shvarts has revealed some compelling elements. Regarding Marina Tsvetaeva, a comparable utilization of the lyrical subject has been emphasised. While in Tsvetaeva's work this is often intertwined with biographical elements, in Shvarts's poetics, the poet's "I" shines through, without specific or clear references to personal events. Additionally, both poets share a similar intonation in their lyrical discourse, frequently reaching epic and tragic climaxes (in Shvarts, there is often an ironic counterbalance that dismantles the solemnity of the moment). By quoting several examples, it became evident how both poets employ a rapid rhythm, phonetic organisation relying on alliteration and repetition, and the use of paranomasia. After establishing the fragmentary nature of Marina Tsvetaeva's *liricheskaya poëma* and of Elena Shvarts's *malen'kaya poëma*, it is also possible to identify parallels and connections concerning structure, syntax, and musicality within sections that are not necessarily linked by a shared theme.

Shvarts highlights Kuzmin's poetic style and structure in *The Trout is Breaking Through the Ice* as the primary model of the *malen'kie poëmy*. Notably, the connection between the two poets is evident in the fragmentary organisation of poetic material, which is bound together through the application of cinematic montage techniques and a wide range of rhythmic variations between different sections. It has also been noted that in *The Trout is Breaking Through the Ice*, as in Elena Shvarts's short *poëmas*, the theme of metamorphosis holds central significance. Metamorphosis serves as the foundation for structuring a poetic universe that, similarly in Kuzmin's poem, relies on the juxtaposition and collision of contrasting images.

As for Khlebnikov, the most significant considerations pertain to polymetric verse. After establishing the distinction between macro-polymetric versification and micro-polymetric versification with Gasparov and using Khlebnikov's verse as an example of micro-polymetric versification, it was shown how Shvarts elevates the use of micro-polymetric verse. Additionally, drawing again from the works of Mikhail Gasparov and Vladimir Markov, a problematisation concerning the classification of such a verse within the syllabo-tonic system or in the free verse domain emerged.

The third and final chapter, titled "The analysis of Elena Shvarts's *Malen'kie poëmy*", consists in the analysis of ten out of the fourteen poems included in the "*Malen'kie poëmy*" collection. The analysis has been conducted not chronologically, but following the order of appearance in the collection, established by Shvarts. Specifically, I selected the following ten poems: *Khomo musaget* (Homo musagetes, 1994), *Gorbaty mig* (The Arched Instant, 1974), *Chyornaya paskha* (Black Easter, 1974), *Grubymi sredstvami ne dostich blazhenstva (Horror eroticus)* (Bliss Cannot be Achieved by Rough Means (Horror eroticus), 1978), *O tom, kto ryadom (iz zapisok Edinoroga)* (About the One Who is Near (From the Notes of the Unicorn), 1981), *Martovskie mertvetsy* (Deads of March, 1980), *Nochnaya tolcheya* (Night Hustle, 1979), *Rozhdestvenskie krovotolki (Nishenka s chervontsem, derevo s darami)* (Christmas *Krovotolki* (Beggar with Ten-ruble, Tree with Gifts), 1980), *Kh'yumbi* (*Kh'yumbi* [from: Human Being], 1982), *Luna bez golovy* (Headless Moon, 1987). The reason of the selection is based on a chronological factor, as most of the texts date back to the Seventies and the Eighties, when Shvarts wrote as a non-official poet. Three of the four not-proposed poems were written in 1994. Two of them, *Pokhod yurodivykh na Kiev* (Holy Fools' March to Kiev, 1994) and *Preryvistaya povest' o kummunal'noy kvartire* (The Fragmentary Tale of a *Kommunalka*, 1994), in which the poet's ecumenism is particularly pronounced, represent, in my opinion, a formal and structural exception within the collection. The analysis is oriented towards an exploration of both stylistic and thematic elements and aims at showing in detail how the characteristics and theoretical frameworks articulated in the previous two chapters find expression in the *malen'kie poëmy*. In particular, the poems selected point out the variety and multifaceted nature of the themes, such as the interplay between categories, the bond between the physical and the metaphysical, and the poet's relationship with both the divine and her surrounding environment. All the elements highlighted have in common the juxtaposition of contrasts and the extensive use of the metamorphosis. Moreover, through the analysis of the texts, the structural characteristics mentioned in the second chapter – namely fragmentation, weakening of the fabula and lyrical development – will become evident.

The aim of the analysis is also to illustrate how Shvarts's poetics and the concept of "vision-adventure" reach their full potential in the genre of the *malen'kaya poëma*, through the characteristically rigorous structure and a recurring phonetic and metrical organisation that manipulates rhythm shifts.

## Third-Year Report

### 1. Doctoral Research and Thesis

During the current year, my progress on my doctoral project has included determining the general overview of my dissertation and, with the guidance and the approval of my advisors, Professors Alessandro Niero and Hana Kosáková, I have completed the writing of my dissertation. The dissertation focuses on the genre of the “malenkaya poëma” by the Russian poet Elena Shvarts and comprises three chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to context of the Leningrad Underground and the poet’s poetics, the key elements of which are highlighted. The second chapter outlines the basic features of the genre, investigates its sources in the Russian poetic tradition and establishes a comparison between Elena Shvarts’ poems and selected poems by Marina Tsvetaeva, Mikhail Kuzmin and Velimir Khlebnikov, poets belonging to the so-called Silver Age of Russian poetry. The third chapter is an analysis of ten “malenkie poëmy” by Elena Shvarts, similar in their structures and themes. I will submit the thesis by the end of October deadline.

### 2. Doctoral seminars

From October to December, I participated as an auditor to some of the second-year doctoral seminars in Rome, in which PhD Students from the Second Year discussed their PhD projects in front of a class and a discussant.

I attended the following lessons and seminars:

- 13th of December 2022: Prof Piotr Chruszczewski, “On the (possible) Future of our Language”, Sapienza University of Rome.
- 18th of May 2023: Prof Michele Sisto, “For a History of Literature translated in Italy”, Sapienza University of Rome.
- 15th of June 2023: Prof. Raffaella Vassena, “Russian Literature and Digital Humanities: archives, tools and methods”, Online Doctoral Seminar organized by AIS (Associazione italiana slavisti (Association of Italian Slavists)).

- 15th of June 2023: Prof. Cheti Traini, “Soviet Russia as told by some Italian writers-travellers”, Online Doctoral Seminar organized by AIS (Associazione italiana slavisti (Association of Italian Slavists)).

### 3. Research Stay in Prague

From the 19th of May to the 30th of June, I spent a Research Stay in Prague at Univerzita Karlova. Working with the resources of the Jan Palach Library of the faculty of Arts and of the National and Slavonic Library, I completed the first chapter of my dissertation.

On the 26th of June, I passed the state exam, discussing the first chapter of my dissertation, which had been previously handed in to the examination board.

### 4. Conferences and Teaching

- 30th of November 2022: I contributed to the doctoral conference “Screens. Rhetorics of (dis)connection”, Organized by State University of Milan, with the paper “Stikhi o gore-zloschaste i beskonechnom schaste byt mechenoi Bozhei rukoi” by Elena Shvarts: poetical re-reading of a tragic event).
- 2nd and 3rd of March 2023: I took part as an auditor in the conference “The Reception of East Slavic Literature in the West and the East”, organized by the University of Venezia Ca’ Foscari, the University of Verona and Sophia University of Tokyo, and which was held in Venice.
- 15th of May 2023: Integrative Teaching: I held a lesson for the course of Russian Literature III at the University of Bologna, usually held by Prof. Alessandro Niero, on the Russian writer Vasilii Grossman.



- 16th of May 2023: Integrative Teaching: I held a lesson for the course of Russian Literature III at the University of Bologna, usually held by Prof. Alessandro Niero, on the Russian poet Elena Shvarts.
- 6th and 7th of July 2023: I organised, together with the colleagues from my PhD cycle, the end-of-course conference “Rethinking Catastrophe in Precarious Times”. After drafting the Call for papers and selecting the papers, the conference was held in Rome and was attended by 2 keynote speakers, Professor Libuše Hečzková and Professor Francesco Muzzioli, and 22 PhD students. I contributed to the doctoral conference with the paper “Dva nadgrobia: Private Mourning and the Fall of Empires. History and Symbols in a poem by Elena Shvarts”.

## 5. Publications

- I translated from Russian the essay “Gorodskie uličnye pevcy 1920-ch godov i ich pesni-chroniki: k voprosu o social’nykh kontekstach funkcionirovanija (post)fol’klornych javlenij” by Mikail Lure. It was published with the title “I cantanti di strada degli anni Venti e le loro 'canzoni-cronaca': a proposito dei contesti sociali di funzionamento dei fenomeni (post)folklorici” (Street Singers in the 1920s and Their Songs-Chronicles) on the academic journal “ESamizdat”, ISSN 1723-4042 - (2022), pp. 321-335.
- My article “Le muse di Elena Švarc. Echi classici nel poema Chomo musaget” (Elena Shvarts’s Muses: Echoes of Classical Antiquity in the malen’kaia poëma “Homo Musagetes”) was published on the academic journal “EuropaOrientalis”, ISSN 0392-4580 – (2022), pp. 93-114.

- I translated from Russian part of the book of the Russian journalist Elena Kostyuchenko *Moja ljubimaja strana (I love Russia)*, which was published with the title *La mia Russia. Storie da un paese perduto* (translated from Russian by Maria Castorani, Martina Mecco, Riccardo Mini, Giulia Sorrentino, Francesca Stefanelli. Edited by Claudia Zonghetti), Einaudi, 2023. ISBN: 9788806260187.
  
- I translated from Russian the article “Vstreča s gorodom: o ‘Rimskoj tetradi’ Eleny Švarc” by A.S. Bocharova. It was published on the scientific journal “Slavia” with the title “L’incontro con la città: il Quaderno romano di Elena Švarc” – ISSN 2038-0968 (2/2023).
  
- My review of the book "SPQR in the USSR: Elena Shvarts's Classical Antiquity" was published on the academic journal "Studi Slavistici" with the title: "G. Barker, SPQR in the USSR: Elena Shvarts's Classical Antiquity, Legenda, Oxford 2022, pp. 372" - ISSN: 1824-2601 (XX (2023) 1), pp. 228-230.
  
- I translated from Russian the article “Blatnaja poëzija” by Nikolaj Chandzinskij. It was published with the title “La poesia della malavita” as the third chapter of the book *Una romanza crudele. Estetiche e folklore nella Russia del ‘900 (A Cruel Romance: Aesthetics and folklore in 20th Century Russia)*, Pacini Editore, 2023, ISBN: 979-12-5486-128-8.

### **Biographical Profile**

Riccardo Mini completed his Bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages and Literatures at State University of Milan in 2017 with a thesis titled "The work of Nadezhda Mandelstam in contemporary critics". In April 2020, he earned a Master's degree in European and non-European Languages and Literatures at State University of Milan. His interest focused on Gulag literature. In his thesis, titled "Poetics of the Arrest. Narrative of the arrest in the works of Solzhenitsyn, Nadezhda Mandelstam, Sinyavsky and Akhmatova", he compared the narrations of a common experience and investigated the variation of style and poetics. He participated in study-abroad programs at the Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium) and at Saint Petersburg State University. Currently, his research focuses on contemporary Russian literature, in particular on the Little Poems in the work of Elena Shvarts.

