

Modernism, Avant-garde and Postmodernism in Russian Literature

Abstract

My Habilitation thesis is divided into four parts.

In the first part, **Research and Professional Achievements**, I detail: i) the major research directions I have followed from the beginnings of my doctoral studies at the University of Bucharest; ii) the ways in which my research, professional and academic pursuits have evolved subsequent to receiving my Doctorate in Philology, *summa cum laude*, for my thesis entitled *Metamorphoses in the Russian Literary Avant-garde* (2011, directed by Professor Virgil Şoptereanu); and iii) the most important findings obtained in each of my three lines of research: modernism, avant-garde and postmodernism. Here I contextualize my findings within the discipline of Philology, in particular Slavic Studies, with respect to their relevance and originality.

This first part has five chapters, the first three of which are organized according to my lines of research: the Russian literary avant-garde (Chapter 1.1), Russian literary postmodernism (Chapter 1.2), and Russian literary modernism (Chapter 1.3).

The title of my thesis follows the chronological and historical succession of the literary phenomena that I research: modernism, avant-garde and postmodernism. In my thesis, by contrast, I present these phenomena in the order that I have studied them, which does not coincide with their chronological evolution. My choice to start with the avant-garde is precisely to show how my research interests intersect and how these intersections support my research findings.

These first three chapters represent the nucleus of my research activity and are the foundation of my career as a scholar specializing in Russian literature. All three directions are explored in the range of my writings and scholarly activities: single-author books, book chapters, journal articles, book reviews, translations, as well as the academic conferences and symposia I have participated in. In addition, I have contributed to public intellectual discourse by writing articles in cultural magazines and being interviewed on podcasts.

The first part outlines my major contributions: two single-author books in my chosen scholarly domains; a reference work for teaching the Russian language to foreigners; three

chapters published in edited volumes; three volumes which I coordinated and edited myself; nine volumes for which I participated as a collaborating editor; scholarly studies and articles published in academic journals (which includes an article published in a journal indexed in Web of Science/ Clarivate Analytics); 13 articles published in academic journals indexed in various international data bases such as Ceeol, Scopus, Erih Plus; 23 articles published in various collections, Festschrifts, and memorial volumes; 10 prefaces and chronologies; 12 book reviews; 50 presentations at scholarly conferences, symposia and colloquia; two translations; and one critical edition. I have furthermore received five awards for my work, in both the scholarly and pedagogic domains.

In these first three chapters I emphasize my principle scholarly contributions, beginning with the book based on my doctoral thesis *The Russian Literary Avant-garde. Configurations and Metamorphoses* (University of Bucharest Press, 2011, 298 pp.). Not only did I investigate the Russian avant-garde in terms of its aesthetics and range of artistic experimentation, but I also took a wider, epistemological perspective in order to understand the vision of the world the Russian avant-garde authors presented. I analyzed the forms manifested in literary Russian avant-garde, and I identified their transformations from the moment of their appearance to their (apparent) disappearance. I followed in detail the orientation of the avant-gardists, their attacks on each other, along with their ideological-aesthetic differences. I put into relief the heterogeneity of the avant-gardists' programs which had a disputational-anarchic tone in its incipient phase, followed by its support of Soviet power, and finally to its ultimate disillusionment and (self)extermination.

My approach to the vision of this complex Russian avant-garde movement was historical. I discussed the Russian avant-garde as much in relationship, on the one hand, to the stances and features of the preceding period of modernism (symbolism and Acmeism) and, on the other hand, to the modifications of the cultural paradigms initiated by the later period of postmodernism, a phenomenon which continued, at the very least in its initial phase, the radical artistic discourse of the avant-garde. In this way, my initial study of the avant-garde ties together my subsequent look back at the modernism that preceded it and forward to my interest in the postmodernism that followed it.

My study of the avant-garde from a holistic perspective concentrated less on authors as individual artists and more on groups and literary circles and the relationships among them, on

aesthetic manifestos, on journals, and on the dynamics of the avant-garde as a movement. Thereafter I felt the need to stop and focus on a particular author relevant to the history of the Russian avant-garde. This need produced my second book *The Case of Daniil Harms. The Survival of the Russian Avant-garde* (Tracus Arte, 2019, 478 pp.). Here I analyzed the life and the work of Daniil Harms as an emblematic representative of the late Russian avant-garde, considered as a precursor to the European literature of the absurd. I valorized the importance of this otherwise neglected author as one of the best representatives of the late Russian avant-garde. He not only consolidated the heritage of the movement thereby assuring its survival but also influenced various movements in the Soviet underground of the 1960s to the 1980s, thereby extending his influence into Russian postmodernism. In addition to the numerous articles that I wrote dedicated to the representatives of Russian postmodernism I also contributed a chapter in the volume *Russian Postmodernism* (editor Antoaneta Olteanu, University of Bucharest Press, 2018, 188 pp.) entitled “The OBERIU Group, Avant-garde and Postmodernism” (pp. 65 -100). Here I demonstrated the degree to which the ideas and visions of the Russian avant-gardist world opened the way to postmodernism.

My first book investigated in depth the Russian avant-garde as a movement, my second book examined in the detail one of the movement’s most important representatives, after which my research extended into postmodernism. Then it became time to look back to modernism. This new research interest led me to help create two monographs dedicated to Slavic literature: *Russian Modernism in the Silver Age* (Ratio et Revelatio, 2020, 348 pp.) and *Symbolism in Slavic Literature* (Pro Universitaria, 2020, 264 pp.). The former monograph presents what is considered to be the glorious period of Russian literary modernism, a complex cultural-literary phenomenon known for its effervescence and its sobriquet “The Silver Age.” The latter monograph undertakes a comparative study of symbolism in seven Slavic literatures: Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Polish, Russian, Serbian and Ukrainian. In each of the two volumes I contributed both a preface and a chapter.

In Chapter 1.4 I describe my activities as a translator and my interests in translation theory. I describe the reasons for my decision to offer a new translation of the poetry of Vladimir Mayakovsky, an emblematic representative of the Russian avant-garde, and I selected poems from his expressionist-cubofuturist period. The result was the volume *Alone in the Crowd. Poems 1916-1919* by Vladimir Mayakovsky, with my chronology, preface, notes (translation Camelia

Dinu, Tracus Arte). Similarly, I translated for the first time into Romanian the work of the satiric Russian author Sasha Chorny and his children's book, *The dairy of fox terrier Mickey* (translation Camelia Dinu, illustrations Dan Ungureanu, Arthur, 2020).

In Chapter 1.5 I describe my cultural and editorial public-facing activities. To date I have: i) published 31 articles and essays in the cultural press on my specialties; ii) given public lectures at the University of Bucharest as well as at various cultural institutes; iii) peer-reviewed research and coordinated collections; and iv) participated in numerous cultural events as a specialist in my field.

In the second part of my thesis, **Pedagogic Activity**, I outline the concrete, operational dimension of the educational process I am involved in, a dimension of which represents my research interests. In this section I lay out the core courses I teach along with innovative courses I have introduced into the Russian language and literature curriculum, at both the undergraduate and master's levels. My course offerings are organized by three subfields in literary studies: the history of Russian literature, literary theory and comparative literature.

As far as the history of Russian literature is concerned (Chapter 2.1), I describe the courses I offer at the master's level: "Russian Literature in the Second Half of the 19th Century: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov"; and the optional course: "The Russian Avant-garde: Poetic Experimentation and Extravagance." Given my pedagogical interests in classical Russian literature, I coordinated a collection of essays dedicated to Dostoevsky: *Rereading Dostoevsky in Honor of his Bicentennial* (Litera, 2021, 400 pp.) on the two hundredth anniversary of his birth.

As for my teaching interests in comparative literature (Chapter 2.2) I describe two courses. To undergraduates I teach "Comparative Literature – The Slavic Space." For master's students I offer "From Modernism to Postmodernism in Slavic Literature." As a result of this teaching interest, I coordinated and edited the monograph, mentioned above: *Symbolism in Slavic Literature* (Pro Universitaria, 2020). I have also written articles and attended conferences in the field of comparative literature.

We now come to literary theory (Chapter 2.3), and here my interest manifests itself in a course I conceived for undergraduates "Concepts of Literary Theory – The Slavic Space." Once again, I have published articles that leverage my teaching interest in literary theory and participated in conferences dedicated to the subject.

My mentoring activities (Chapter 2.4) demonstrate that I am constantly engaged in

counseling and guiding students through their studies, be they undergraduates, master's students or doctoral candidates, and in fostering their research programs. I have organized research sessions for students at all levels in the Department of Russian and Slavic Philology, directed research projects at all levels and helped them bring the results of their research to public fora, and organized numerous departmental activities where students share their work. In addition, I have edited volumes that reflect the activities of student research, and I serve on the graduate committee.

In all I have: i) coordinated six research sessions for our students (2015-2021); ii) served on 42 undergraduate and master theses (2015-2021); iii) directed 51 students who have presented papers at colloquia; and iv) participated on 20 doctoral committees directed by Antonaneta Olteanu and Constantin Geambașu (2013-2020). I am currently a member of the doctoral committee (2021).

Above I mentioned the academic awards and prizes I have received in recent years. To date I have received four awards for my research and one university award for my teaching.

In the third part of my thesis, **Professional Plans for Evolution and Development**, I present the projects I will undertake to develop my research career and teaching interests and the ways in which I will implements these projects (Chapter 3.1). I also envision 12 research directions that will enrich my abilities to direct doctoral theses (Chapter 3.2). I will continue to research and publish in the three major directions I have explored to date – the Russian avant-garde, postmodernism and modernism – as well as in the three literary disciplines that define my pedagogical interests, namely the history of Russian literature, literary theory and comparative literature.

The fourth part of my thesis is the **Bibliography** associated with the first three sections.

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