

ELENA GURO'S CITY SERIES  
IMPRESSIONS BY DAY AND BY NIGHT

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И что же еще? Еще принять мир смиренно со всеми... незначущими подробностями... из отточков (осколочков) едва видимых, едва ощущаемых, складывается шествие жизни.

Loin de la vision objective, l'impressionnisme en effet est une plongée dans la conscience (Albérès, *Histoire du roman moderne*).

A simultaneous attraction and horror characterise Elena Guro's attitudes toward the city in her works devoted to St. Petersburg. Written mainly in the period 1905–1910, her city texts form a small but significant portion of her writings. They include *The Hurdy-Gurdy* (*Шарманка*, 1909), the poem *The City* (*Город*), diary entries and unpublished materials.<sup>1</sup> Guro's presentation of the city is refracted through highly subjective, fragmented personal impressions, conveyed in cinematic flashes that depict the city's color, mood, rhythm, sounds and atmosphere.

The aim of this paper is to elucidate aspects of Guro's poetics of the city that have not been discussed, in order to give a more coherent picture of the paradigm of her 'impressionist' vision and her method of apprehending the 'objective' moments of everyday life of the city, as they present themselves to the perceiver's senses (Todorov 1984: 34). Guro's method involves immediate perception and its continuous transformation, presented as a sequence of spatial mo-

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<sup>1</sup> *Город*, written in 1910, was published posthumously in *Футуристы: Рыкающий Парнас* (1914). Urbanism as a theme has been discussed by Jensen 1977. All the references to *Шарманка* will be indicated in the text of this essay by page numbers.

ments apprehended in an instant of time, which is comparable to the concept of "series" in painting (Florence 1968: 31).

Like her Futurist colleagues Guro came to literature from painting. Her basically visual orientation in her descriptions of Petersburg by day and night has been noted by Vladimir Markov, who calls Guro "probably the most representative of all Russian impressionists", regardless of how one interprets the term. And we should note that the term 'impressionism' was used by many Russian Futurists when referring to their own literary work (Markov 1968: 15, 3).

The concept of "series", as applied to Monet's work, is helpful in understanding Guro's method of writing. Phoebe Pool argues convincingly that Monet's "series" pictures are "the very essence of Impressionism" (Pool 1969: 227). In them Monet attempts to depict "instantaneity" through the subtle changing sensations and variations of the same subject in a succession of different light, weather, atmosphere, and states of consciousness (Isaacson 1978: 40-41). The emphasis is on the fleeting and ephemeral beauty of daily life in its change, flux and instability. Arnold Hauser, in *The Social History of Art*, focuses on this unfinished and fragmentary character of dynamic reality and the dissolution of colored surface into spots and strokes of color. He also underlines the fact that:

Impressionism is an urban art, and not only because it discovers the landscape of the city and brings painting back from the country into the town, but because it sees the world through the eyes of a townsman and reacts to external impressions with the overstrained nerves of modern technical man. It is an urban style, because it describes the changeability, the nervous rhythm, the sudden, sharp always ephemeral impressions of city life (Hauser: 168)

The artistic experience of the city, in Robert Herbert's words, is a "plunge into contemporary life" (Herbert 1988: 33), with its crowds, incessant movement, the roar of traffic, its constant variety which, despite the proximity of many people, produces a feeling of isolation and seclusion, a sense of distance and estrangement.<sup>2</sup> It represents an outlook on life "in which the most subtle moods are combined with the most rapid alternation of sensations" (Hauser, 176). Paris in the

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<sup>2</sup> See Richardson 1982: 195-210. Richardson has in mind Edouard Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) and his *Un bar aux Folies-Bergère* (1882) and Edgar Degas' *L'Absinthe* (1876) among others.

art of Edouard Manet and his followers is seen through scenes of the city, its traffic, people, cafés, cabarets, bridges, squares. Emphasis is on light, time and the activities of people in motion. The active is transformed into the ephemeral in a suspended state of being (Clark 1985: 63).

In order to understand Guro's technique of writing and her interest in the poetical embodiment of contemporary everyday life, and in how that life presents itself to the perceiver's senses in a particular illumination at a specific moment in time, we should look briefly at some tenets of literary Impressionism which Dmitri Chizhevsky characterizes as follows:

In respect to outer forms: 1) vagueness of the total picture, and 2) in opposition to this, the prominence of detail and trivia... 3) the renunciation of the formulation of thoughts ...4) in opposition to that, the creation of a "general mood" through which, if need be, certain "results" of the artistic presentation may be suggested to the feelings of the reader, to the capacity to feel, if not to the intellect. However, 5) certain small features, lines, particularities, details, speak to the feeling of the reader — these are the bearers of the soft and gentle shadings, the "differentials of mood"... (Chizhevsky 1967: 54).

Many of these points could be applied to Guro's work. Her city is depicted as it is reflected in the perceiving individual's imagination. The reality of the city changes as the light changes; a diffused light often blurs the outlines of a specific scene; the qualities of light are frequently sensual. There is no strict chronology of events, which instead are fragmented and loosely joined without a definite narrative thread; discontinuity characterises both themes and structures. There is an orientation toward the insignificant and the everyday; objects are animated. Colors and sounds are used to evoke a mood. City scenes are portrayed both at a distance, from a window, or from the perspective of a protagonist who is in the process of moving into a city room or out onto a city street. There is a continual interaction between the inner and outer worlds which helps create a picture of the city.<sup>3</sup> While the perceiving consciousness remains at times fixed in space the surrounding world of the city street, personified houses, street signs, lights, the incessant hum of traffic, project a state of

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of windows and frames, and the distinction between the outer and inner world in Guro's work, see Banjanin 1983: 5–17.

frenzied and disjointed motion, of transience and flux (Kronegger 1969: 528-544).

Guro's style is characterised by the decomposition of the text into minimal units — miniatures — by the use of unconnected phrases and single words, ellipses, and neologisms, as well as by her predilection for impersonal verbs and constructions, and the imperfective aspect of verbs (Brown 1968: 54, 58). The early critics of Guro's work, Chardžiev and Gric (1938: 40), characterised her prose sketches as pictorial and musical etudes with an "impressionist fixation of spiritual states". Another admirer of Guro's work, Viktor Chovin (1914: 7), emphasises her attraction to the "always anxious intensity of the city" and to the din of its streets. While Chovin discerns seeming spatial discontinuities in the organisation of Guro's narrative, he is aware of the "unusual beauty of the inner structure" and its outer form which give lyrical intensity to her work.

This lyrical intensity is discussed by Fiona Björling in *The Uses and Abuses of Syntax in Russian Modernist Poetry*. Björling argues convincingly that the term 'impressionism' encompasses "a representation which conjures up 'reality' synthetically rather than analytically". The word 'synthetic' is understood to mean a simultaneous synthesis or assemblage, occurring 'at once', or 'momentarily'. Defined in this way, impressionism is more appropriately related to the spatial structures of art than to the sequential dynamic of a narrative text (1980: 526-527). In his seminal study *Spatial Form in Modern Literature*, Joseph Frank defines an image as "a unification of disparate ideas and emotions into a complex presented spatially in an instant of time". The emphasis is on the instantaneous presentation (1968: 9). The reader is expected to apprehend instantaneously the pattern of internal references which will enable him to understand the meaning and relationship between word groups that have no apparent comprehensible relationship to each other (Frank 1968: 9, 13).

Using a different metaphor to express a similar idea, Chlebnikov and Kručenyč, in their pamphlet *The Word as Such* (*Слово как таковое*) published in 1913, argue that poetry should be "read in the twinkling of an eye". They attribute this quality to Guro, whose prose is poetic. Guro says in her unpublished diary:

Free rhythms. Prose into verse, verse into prose. Prose that is almost verse... Sections of stories taken as color and leitmotifs...! Concentration of the *story* in two or three words... To speak the words, as if they did not

coincide with the meaning, but are provoking certain images, about which nothing at all has been said...(Dnevnik, CGALI, f. 134, op. 1, ed. chr. 3).

We should recall that Monet in his attempts to transmit the changing, subtle sensations of a landscape in constant variation, sought to convey "instantaneity" especially in the spread of light (Pool 1969: 260). In a literary text, for the reader, each individual reference is necessarily held in suspension until the whole pattern of internal references is apprehended. In modern poetry and lyrical prose, the reflexive relations of syntactical constructions, in the work as a whole, require of the reader to connect various references in an instant of time (Frank 1968: 13).

Although Björling concentrates on 'impressionism' in Guro's poetry, her conclusions can be applied to a discussion of Guro's prose as well. The "spatial dynamic" in Guro's prose can be observed in the following passage:

Streets curved around the city without beginning or end. Windows. Droplets. Window-sills. Cats, pigeons. Ahead it unfolds, shuts itself up, opens up. Turn after turn. Reflections, resonant voices. Secrets, unknown desultory thoughts, scraps of flowers, scraps of conversation.

Улицы изгибаются по городу без конца и начала. Окна. Капли. Подоконники. Кошки, голуби. Развертывается впереди, замыкается, открывается. Поворот за поворотом. Отблески, гулкие голоса. Тайны, обрывки незнакомых мыслей, цветов, разговоров (Шарманка, 10).

The emphasis is on the single word, "a word which neither completes nor initiates a verbal phrase" (Björling 1980: 526). The reader's attention is held to the small details of the picture. Yet all the details, which can be apprehended synaesthetically (sight, sound, touch, smell are evoked), are offered as pieces without structure, which need to be assembled into a larger whole.

In *Before Spring* (*Перед весной*), Guro projects impressions of the city by day and by night, representing reality "synthetically":

An amber reflection falls onto the street... Watery gold trembles on the ground. In polished puddles the reflection of letters of signboards and golden stripes... Flowers in a large glass 'carreau'. White, transparent porcelain-like cyclamen, wrinkled velvet, dark violets. Nice, fleurs de Nice... Nice... Half of a question mark in gray puddles. A sick woman; her legs wrapped in tiger skin. A gentleman in an English felt hat. Color photograph... bunch of flowers... Italy.

Янтарный отсвет падает в улицу... Водянистое золото дрожит на земле. В полированных лужах буквы вывесок и золотья полоски... В большом стеклянном 'cageau' цветы. Белые прозрачно фарфоровые цикломены, сморщенный бархат-темные фиолетки. Ницца, fleurs de Nice... Ницца... Полувопрос в серых лужах. Больная; ноги укутаны тигровой шкурой. Господин в английском фетре. Цветная фотография, букеты... Италия (Шарманка, 8-9).

In this passage, the dominant mode of perception that unfolds in front of the narrator is visual ("amber reflection", "watery gold", "polished puddles", "letters of a signboard", "golden stripes", "transparent porcelain", "gray puddles", "bunch of flowers"). A general mood of lightness is suggested by the "sun's bright emptiness", alluding to soft and gentle shadings of feeling. The narrator of *Before Spring* has been drawn outside, first during the day and later at dusk. The story has no real plot development and consists of disjointed fragmentary descriptions of city streets, houses and passers by, presented as "light thoughts that touch everything lightly". The narrator's jumbled train of thought is interrupted by a flashback memory of Nice and Italy. The motif of brightness and emptiness characterises the inner state of the narrator, as well as her room and the street. The boundary between animate and inanimate realms is blurred ("din of street sings", "watery gold trembles", "a half of a question mark [is] in gray puddles"). Guro's method allows her to record impressions of variety and perpetual movement. In presenting these impressions as they occur, Guro projects the conventions of painting, in capturing spatial relations from the fixed view point of the narrator (Uspenskij 1970: 58).

The conventions of painting in Guro's work emerge in the fusion of pictorial devices and text within a single work into a single visual entity, as well as by the role of recurrent leitmotifs (Gray [1962], 1986: 109). In a number of instances sections of Guro's prose and poetry are separated from each other by drawings of leaves, stars, fir trees, branches, circles with dots, masks, or even small whole pictures, making it impossible, at times, to distinguish whether an untitled section of prose or poetry is a separate unit in itself or part of a longer work (Chardžiev 1970: 9-50). This permits the reader to re-define the whole with each rereading. This is true of *Songs of the City* (Песни города) in particular.

Musical effect is achieved through the repetition of words or phrases, or of sound leitmotifs: "Щелковый воздух нежно щеко-

чет щеки" ("The silky air gently tickles the cheeks", Шарманка, 31); or through a specific reference to music: "the city hums with its bells at vespers" (27); "houses sing a stony song" (58); "the air now sings loudly" (56). Another example can be found in a diary entry: "The city bathed in fantastical illumination... it floated in bliss as I did... Street lights were playing their twilight symphonies (CGALI, f. 134, op. 1, ed. chr. 3). In *Before Spring* the sound of the hurdy-gurdy, which probably inspired the title of the entire book, is referred to in several passages, as is the rumble of city streets.

In *Songs of the City*, as the title suggests, the focus is on the city and music, on the city and art. Each fragment represents a "song" about a different aspect of the city. In the same work we discern another feature of Guro's writing that incorporates another art form prominent at the beginning of the century in Russia, the street sign. The signboard offers analogues to avant-garde art, to Cubo-Futurism for instance. In Guro's archive we find numerous examples of her interest in signboard and advertising art, which emerge as the visual topography of the city, reminiscent of a Cubist vision. Juliet Stapanian, in her methodical and analytical study *Majakovskij's Cubo-Futurist Vision* (1986: 104), states that:

The pictorial and sculptural styles of signboard art voicing contemporary life itself also grasped the serious attention of the Russian avant-garde. Interest in the prosaic medium of street signs contributed to the strong, Neo-Primitivistic tonality underlying many Cubo-Futurist works.

The sense of contemporary life in Guro's work is similar to that of Majakovskij. Nikolaj Chardžiev points out the similarity between Guro and the early Majakovskij in the use of language and imagery connected with the city. While Chardžiev concentrates on the image of the poet, the similarity emerges even more clearly in the images of drainpipes, street lights, city skies, city streets and sounds, and in the animation of inanimate objects (Chardžiev 1970: 194). Although Guro did not go so far as Majakovskij in portraying the feverish tempo of contemporary life with the images of "angles, fractures, zig-zags", she does convey the intensity and the nervous mood and rhythm of the city (Katanjan 1948: 57).

This is especially apparent in an unpublished prose piece entitled *The Street* (Улица, 1905-1906), which in draft versions was called

*Street Lights* (Фонари) and *The City* (Город).<sup>4</sup> In this prose piece Guro appears to follow the aesthetic of fragmentation, displacement and shift (*sdvig*) associated with Cubist art. This is most apparent in her use of street signs. At the centre of this text is a street at night, with emphasis on the blaze and glare of electric lights: "The street seethes with black and fiery patches". "Fiery patches" represent the lights as well as color, and an aspect of the street scene:

Electric letters howl at the back gaps of the sky, shouting out advertisements in red, green and yellow patches... The lights gallop. The street goes mad in splashes of light and mud...

Электрические буквы орут в черные провалы неба. Выкрикивают объявления красными, зелеными, желтыми пятнами... Огни скачут. Улица сумасшествует в брызгах огня и грязи...

In the manner of Cubist and Futurist art, colors and objects become the material of images expressed in words. Patches of color, which Guro abstracts from the illuminated words of advertisements, are used to create color schemes which help make new pictures, new combinations, in association with speed and sound ("lights gallop"). We recall that Majakovskij uses the image of a galloping painted letter in his poem *The Street*. Guro's "electric letters" reflect a similar device in painting where an isolated letter is used within a larger composition, and is related to the Cubist painters' attraction to signs and signboard art (Stapanian 1986: 73). The "galloping" lights echo the well-known Futurist emphasis on motion. The word "galloping" is transferred from horses to lights. As Stapanian states (1986: 75), the shift in application "contributes to a sense of dynamic distortion in the lyric picture".

Guro's word units in the above quote are not only visually suggestive, but each word or phrase constitutes an image. They function as what Stapanian calls the "word-as-image" and "the word-as-object", which brings Guro's work close to the Cubist painter's shift and split of images along an "irregular grid-like structure" (1986: 13). Guro overlaps different image-frames to create continually shifting new combinations. Colors are deployed as an icon for city lights and colored signs and billboards. In her use of color to represent emotion she prefigures by some eight years the methods of the Italian artist

<sup>4</sup> CGALI, f. 134, op. 1, ed. xr. 7, 11, 337-350. All quotations from *Улица* are from this text. See also Banjanin 1986: 230-246.



Carlo Carrà. In an article written in 1913, *The Painting of Sounds, Noise and Smells*, Carrà urges the use of “reds that ‘shouuuuuut’, greens that ‘screeeeeam’, and yellows that are “as violent as can be” (cited in Stapanian 1986: 24) — proposing these colors for a new art that treats “all colours which are seen in movements, colours experienced in time and not in space”.<sup>5</sup>

The representation of signs and advertisements in *The Street* shows how Guro uses light and its attribute, colour:

Red biting splashes [of light] burn... They penetrate the brain... Red rotten teeth become hot in the black jaw of a dimly lit entrance. The jaw [hole] swallows up, throws up the blackness of the crowd. Red-rosy luxuriant evil blotches hiss invitingly: ‘Please, please! Come in! Don’t be shy! Ha, ha, ha! We have the latest. Regulation!... Hygiene!...

Красные брызги колют, жгут... Вонзаются в мозг... Раскалились красные гнилые зубы у черной пасти тусклого входа. Провал поглощает, изрыгает черноту толпы. Краснорозовые, роскошные злые кляксы шипят, приглашая: — Пожалуйста, пожалуйста! Входите! Не стесняйтесь! Ха, ха, ха! У нас самое последнее слово! Регламентация!... Гигиена!...

The initial image is probably a sign, advertising a house of prostitution. The blotches of red colour are “biting”, “rotten”, “luxuriant and evil” reflecting the observer’s negative attitude toward the scene. The colors red and black are contrasted. The “red-rosy luxuriant evil blotches” that invite customers hiss like a snake. The imagery is similar in tone to Blok’s in his poem *Humiliation* (*Унижение*). In an earlier passage in *The Street*, the madness and ugliness of the city are compared to those of a slaughterhouse (this is also true in her poem *The City*), as is the “well-groomed meat” of women who offer themselves:

Here, look, I am plumper from this side! Look at my breasts! I have a bust! What a bust! And I have eyes!... They press forward with their breasts. In a pink bare light, bosoms and behinds shine... They turn around in a shameless way. There is a smell of perfume and flesh...

Вот глядите, с этого бока я потолще! Поглядите груди! У меня бюст. Ах, бюст! А у меня глаза!... Налезают грудями. В розовом

<sup>5</sup> The association of speed, sound and colour in Guro’s text are carried further in the mind of the narrative *I* which perceives the city and its lights as things gone mad. This sensation is a projection of the narrator’s own inner turmoil.

обнаженном свете блестят груди, зады... Вертятся в бесстыдном  
колыханьи. Запах духов и тела...

Even the color of the light in the above passage suggests nude human flesh, and in a synaesthetic image (breasts, behinds, shameless sway, smell of perfume and flesh), evokes its sensual qualities.

In addition to deploying colors as an icon for colored signs and billboards, Guro also concentrates on the pictorial aspect of the signboard, its use as an advertisement, and as a picture whose symbols, as "iconography of the street" (Stapanjan 1986: 107), provide information about the goods they signify:

On the signboard are intoxicating, amazingly tasty loaves [of bread]; plump, rosy... Painted on the door of the tavern is... a fish on a plate with a necklace of round rosy sliced potatoes fried in lard.

На вывесках упитительно, изумительно вкусные хлебцы; толстые, румяные... На двери трактира нарисована... рыба на тарелочке, в ожерельи шариков румяного, поджаренного в хрустящем сале, картофеля (Шарманка, 27-28).

Objects in this sign appear as combinations of images that are meant to be "read" except that they also evoke sensory response (taste, color, texture, sound). Majakovskij's admonition, in his poem *To Signs (Вывескам)*: "read iron books!" calls attention to the poetry of city streets, in which as Stapanian underlines (1986: 109), the streets become new libraries and signs the new books. Street signs offer a new artistic potential of different materials in which the interrelationships of design, color, ornament and texture become part of the picture/ text.

Guro's *Songs of the City* predate Majakovskij's poems; the device of the signboard that she incorporates is more frequently associated with the later Russian avant-garde (Majakovskij, Burljuk, Larionov, Maškov, Končalovskij, Lebedev, Chagall, Ermolaeva and others). The signboard also has the utilitarian function of delineating goods in an elegant, colorful and revealing manner. It has to be seen quickly and clearly from near and far. In Guro's text the small loaves of bread evoke in the observer contrasting sensorial reactions, adding to the expressiveness of the signboard art. Alla Povelichina has called attention to the widespread art of the signboard in the 1900s (see commentary to the exhibit *Петербургские Вывески*, Leningrad 1969). Guro reflects this larger interest, but adds to it her personal touch.

Guro's insistence on the animation and personification of objects and the world around her comes close to later Futurist experiments, particularly those of Majakovskij and Chlebnikov. In Guro's aesthetics, objects reflect their environment as well as environment's emotional tone. As she says: "Each object has its own soul, either put into it by its creator, the author, or formed from later deposits upon it, from surrounding life" (letter to Nadežda Fedotova, CGALI, f. 134, op. 1, ed. chr. 23, 1.4).

These deposits from surrounding life are perceived at various times of day and evening from the perspective of an observer looking out from behind a window. Like a mirror the window can reflect the outside world, or it can dim or enhance the contours of the external world:

The fiery ray of the rose-colored evening glow splashed into the room. Through the flowers. The windows blazed with transparent golden-pink sparks... (CGALI, f. 134, op. 1, ed. chr. 2).

Горячий луч розово вечерный брызгнул в комнату. Сквоз цветы. Окна загорелись прозрачными розово-золотыми искрами...

The flowers through which the "evening glow splashed" provide another spectrum of color. Before the lights are turned on in the city at night, "the cold freezing windows" and "the dim hollows of panes" project terrible and terrifying emptiness.

At night Guro depicts a transformed city. "The burning square of windows" and the streets "riddled with lighted windows" as well as the rooms, are perceived as a stage for "evening performances". Jurij Lotman in his *St. Petersburg Symbolics and Problems of City Semiotics* (1984: 39-41) argues persuasively that theatricality is a peculiarity of Petersburg space which creates a sense of decor motivated by its architecture. The theatricality of Petersburg space, Lotman adds, accounts for a continual interrelationship between a "spectator", who is supposed to be invisible, and participants on the stage creating a "picture" of the city. In Guro's work Petersburg is a theatre, while the streets and windows are its principal stages. The transformation of streets and windows into a "theatrical stage" is achieved through the effect of light.

Like the impressionist painters, Guro attempts to capture impressions of the city through variations in light and atmosphere. The lighted windows of shops at dusk uncover other performances. Although different sections of *Songs of the City* focus on either the morning or

the evening in the city, the closing fragment ends in a frozen tableau, on a Monday morning. Sights, sounds, movement and thoughts are immobile and frozen. Only the smoke, the smell of bread and the sight of cats licking their sides are an indication of life. The atmosphere of the city changes as the light changes.<sup>6</sup>

In *The Street* the city is reflected in the narrator's imagination through a prism of changing light. There is a correspondence between real movement — the crowd on the street and the scurrying, swarming insects attracted by the city lights, — and the visual effects the light produce. The lights are animated and personified, as in the street itself. "Oppressive", "merciless", the lights examine the passers-by as if they were goods to be sold for profit. Madness overcomes Guro's city in which "houses dance in electric lights, in lightening flames, in fiery holes", "ragged nerves scream" and city lights "shout" in their fury, and laugh and mock the passers-by suggesting that they be kicked, beaten and driven into the street. Even "crucified air shouts with a cruel metallic light". This vision of the city has an obvious negative connotation. In this respect too, Guro prefigures Majakovskij's *A Cloud in Trousers* (1915).

Only in the final paragraphs do we find out that the narrator is in a room from which she has been observing the street. The entire scene has been given from what Uspenskij (1970: 64) calls a "bird's-eye viewpoint", which serves as its "frame". In other words Guro's disjunctive story is contrasted to the frame which unites it (Steiner 1982: 131). Guro's narrative persona, as perceiver, is outside the "frame", as is the reader. The "bird's eye" view only increases the sense of distance (Steiner 1982: 85). Within this paradigm the "frame" can be understood as a threshold which offers both a protection from the exterior world and an entrance into that world. This way the emphasis is on both the perceiving first-person "I" and on the "eye" that is the visual organ through which the perceiver sees (Caws 1981: 16–17).

In conclusion we can say that the city in Guro's work evolves as a system of signs — as a text dependent on the comprehension of the

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<sup>6</sup> The predominant colors of Guro's city are dark (темный), white (белый), gray (серый), gold (золотой), pale blue (голубой), black (черный), red (красный), dark blue (синий), green (зеленый). It is basically in her unpublished materials that we find rare references to the sun, rain, mud, slime.

pattern of its internal references, in Evgenij Kovtun's words, its "building blocks".<sup>7</sup> Guro's text shapes its own manner of expression and aesthetic perception. The impressionist aspect of her work has been characterised as "the dissolution of the environment in the subject and his mood" (Ender 1978: 72). More precise as a description than "dissolution", however, is the concept of "series". Guro's city-text emerges as a "series" in which she depicts "instantaneity" through the subtle changing variations of the same subject, thus allowing the possibility of new forms, visions, interpretations and readings.

The city, viewed under different lights and from shifting points in space, provided her with a rich encoded repository of signs. She sought to render her city legible to her readers by means of basically visual and aural perceptions (Sharpe-Wallock 1987: 16). Traffic, street lights, signboards, stores, buildings, crowds, prostitutes, artists, dreamers, snatches of conversations, etc. are the details and trivia of her representation and are used to present and reflect intangible states of consciousness. An original quality of impressions emerges.

Through her fragmented prose Guro creates a vision of the city which conveys the intensity of emotion that the city inspired in her. Although her images and details are drawn from a concrete urban landscape, her city texts cannot be measured "objectively" because what they portray appears in the form of a reflection, as a contour, or a sensation in the perceiving consciousness. The details of this representation, the random things and events, "tossed like sand in an hour-glass", the marginalia of everyday life, are contiguous in space and time, yet shift back and forth in space and in time (Pomorska 1975: 23–28). In reading Guro's city we can perhaps borrow Baudelaire's term for modern city life, which he calls an "immense dictionary".<sup>8</sup> The significance of the word "dictionary", as applied to Guro's city, can be understood in the sense that she "translates", appropriates, and shapes the insignificant, random details of everyday

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<sup>7</sup> Kovtun 1977: 320. Although Mr. Kovtun is referring to Guro's *Небесные верблюжата* and *Бедный рыцарь* the same technique is applicable to *Шарманка*. He has in mind children's building blocks.

<sup>8</sup> In *Le peintre de la vie moderne* Baudelaire calls moderne life "an immense dictionary". This modifies his formulation of 1846: "Pour Eugène Delacroix, la nature est un vaste dictionnaire" (Baudelaire 1961: 891). See also Baudelaire's "Salon de 1859" and Mannoosh 1987: 168–188.

life, transforming them in her unique idiosyncratic poetic perception and imagery, into a colorful design in her own words, of "barely visible, barely felt" nuances.

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