

Reviewed by

for the award of the scientific and educational degree "Doctor" in scientific specialty 2.1. Philology -

Literature of the Peoples of Europe, America, Asia, Africa and Australia - Western European Literature

to Francesca Ivanova Zemyarska

with a dissertation entitled: "MASK AND FIELD IN THE WORKS OF MARGUERITE JURSENAR.

Supervisor:

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Francesca Zemjarska is an assistant professor of Western European Literature at the Department of Literary Theory, Sofia University. Kl. Ohridski. She is one of the prominent names in young Bulgarian literary studies. She is the author of numerous articles not only on the problems of her dissertation, but also on contemporary literature, especially contemporary Bulgarian literature. She has taken part in a number of national and international conferences, and her papers have been awarded in many of them. Specifically, publications on her dissertation have appeared in a number of prestigious journals, some of them refereed.

Although not directly relevant to the dissertation defense, it is important to note that Francesca Zemjarska is also an excellent teacher, well liked by the students, who actively stimulates their creative talents.

That being said, it is evident that Francesca Zemjarska not only meets, but exceeds the minimum requirements for the degree of Doctor of Science and Education. The abstract correctly and accurately presents the content and adequately states the contributions of the research.

The dissertation consists of an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. Its total length is 243 pages, of which 12 are bibliography, composed of 174 titles.

The focus of the study is Marguerite Joursenard, but no less so Bulgarian literary studies, because the dissertation skillfully dialogues with a number of theoretical studies that are important for its reading of Joursenard. The latter is of particular importance because it shows not only Francesca Zemjarska's excellent literary studies, but also her ability to build on, to impose her own theses that expand and enrich contemporary Bulgarian literary thought. The dialogues that Zemjarska leads give new meaning to various studies of the 1990s and show which ideas have proved to be sustainable and workable.

But - of course - it is the choice of the author itself that is the most beneficial, because in the Bulgarian context Marguerite Joursenard has been extremely little studied. In fact, *MASK AND POLE IN THE WORKS OF MARGUERITE JURSENA: INSCENING THE VOICE* is the first comprehensive study in this country of the work of the French-Belgian writer. Moreover, it is also an exploration of Joursenard's connections with Virginia Woolf and Thomas Mann, thus stimulating new angles through which to read Mann and Woolf. And it allows for interesting variations on modernism. All in all, the work thinks and the notion of world literature, considers Joursenard as a world writer insofar as it reads her not through the context of the national but through those markers that allow us to see her as a world artist. And as the PhD student concludes - "Through Joursenard's work, a vision of world literature is offered as a surrealist combination of ancient masks and contemporary bodies." On a slightly broader level, the dissertation also offers interesting visions, supported by concrete examples, of the role of autobiographical writing, but also of the functioning of literature as 'writing with imagination'. Thus, without aiming in that direction, it enriches the ways through which we think about and define literature since modernism.

Somewhat more specifically, in the spirit of thinking about world literature and the markers of universality on which it builds its space and themes, is the parallel drawn between Joursenard and Thomas Mann, for Zemjarska emphasizes the universal ideas of the human that we find in the texts of both authors, and which in their own way absorbed the idea of the disintegration to which the Second World War led. The doctoral student dares to speak of a new type of humanism, and this is an important feature through which to theorize the new time.

Also significant and contributory are the connections Francesca Zemjarska makes between the texts of Jursenar herself, emphasizing the re-readings, re-imaginings, and re-appropriations to show the complex dynamics of the becoming of these texts. The latter is related to the choice of logic by which to construct the chapters - chronology is questioned and the logic of the texts themselves is followed. This is because the work relies more on typology, which is undoubtedly beneficial, since even more generally, when novels and novelists are studied, the chronological principle is almost necessarily invoked with the presumption that we can talk about the novel through history and chronology, not typology. Whereas Francesca Zemjarska's dissertation proves the opposite. Thus, the first chapter deals with the author's early novel *Alexius or a Treatise on Vain Struggle* (1929), the second with the memoir trilogy *The Labyrinth of the World* (1974-1984), the third with *Creation in Black* (1968), and the last two chapters examine the collection of prose poems *Flames* (1936). The analyses of these works, as well as the dissertation as a whole, demonstrate a skillful combination of historicism and theorizing, of close and distant reading, resulting in some masterful, interesting analyses that contribute to the rediscovery of Marguerite Jursenard.

Of course, special mention should also be made of observations on the concept of voice, its insertion into Joursenard's complex philosophy, its linkage to categories such as gender, mask, and, most importantly, the conceptualization of a portrait of a voice as "a concept and an overall method in the work of a woman writer in which method monody is layered into polyphony." It is no coincidence that the problems of mask, gender and subject in Marguerite Jursenard are explored through their relationship to the voice. As if to make this happen, the dissertation draws on many of Jursenard's paraliterary texts - essays, notes, prefaces - which contribute to clarifying the concept. At the same time, in the spirit of the achievements of feminism, and of cultural studies, the idea that "gender is constructed through a discursive masquerade" is emphasized, which abolishes essentialism and introduces the notion of play. At the same time, writers such as Roland Barthes and Gérard Genette are also important in terms of the definition and functions of voice, insofar as an attempt is made to conceptualize the null figure, the unmasked speaking, the aim being to show that there is no such thing as 'direct authentic writing: the voice is always staged'.

If we try to summarize the achievements of Francesca Zemjarska's dissertation, beyond what has already been mentioned, it might be worth focusing on the question of why she thinks Marguerite Jursenard seems contemporary? The answer the text seeks lies in the possibilities of expanding the notion of world literature that Jursenard's work suggests - because we are talking about a writer who does not just capture the universal, does not just change spaces and languages, but also shows how any contemporaneity can be spoken through the themes, figures and masks of the past.

And in practically linking the times, she seems to be giving a nod to Franco Moretti, who argues that world literature has always been there. A prerequisite for this contemporaneity is the way in which Jursenard rethinks tradition - for her, it is indeed the product of dialogues, of hearing, of real and imagined connections with predecessors, of reading and inventing "the fathers", and in this way the writer supports later theses such as Harold Bloom's about the impossibility of erasing the voices of predecessors. Last but not least, Marguerite Jursenard turns out to be a writer who has a lot to say about one of the hangings of the 1920s and 21st century themes - that of the self, identity and the relationship with the other.

It is no coincidence that Francesca Zemjarska's dissertation focuses on the construction of the subject as a universal human, "marked by the masquerade of its gender difference, but also and above all capable of a sublimatory creative gesture in which to express the ongoing process of its becoming and dissolution."

Based on what has been said so far, on the knowledge demonstrated by the PhD student, on her ability to plot and to write not only analytically but also beautifully, I take the liberty of casting my vote for the award of the degree of Doctor of Science and Education in the scientific specialty 2.1. Literature of the Peoples of Europe, America, Asia, Africa and Australia - Western European Literature to Francesca Zemjarska

Prof. Dr. Amelia Licheva