

Standpoint  
for Francesca Zemyarska's dissertation  
"Mask and Gender in the Work of Marguerite Yourcenar: Staging the Voice"  
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Francesca Zemyarska's proposed dissertation "Mask and Gender in the Work of Marguerite Yourcenar: Staging the Voice" consists of an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion totalling 243 pages and a bibliography of 174 titles.

Zemyarska aims to:

- to investigate the problem of the relationship between mask, gender and subject in the work of Marguerite Yourcenar;

- to justify that the states and behaviours of the literary characters in Yourcenar are presented through the "staging of the voice"; - to justify the presence of "new humanism" in Yourcenar's work;

- to indicate Yourcenar's literary "relatives". The theoretical premise that guides the research is that "gender is constructed through a discursive masquerade, so that the idea of identification is seen not as monolithic, fixed or essentialist, but as playful". Hence the direct connection between mask and gender, and also between gender and voice.

The concept of identification is interpreted as an opportunity to experience in different perspectives, with which Zemyarska wants to support her understanding of the fundamental multiplicity and playfulness of the subject.

According to Zemyarska, the connection between mask and voice is a defining feature in Yourcenar's work, because the staging of the voice creates the fictional reality, the narrative time, and the heterogeneous subject. Zemyarska insists throughout the work that "the voice is always secondary and reconstructed, imagined through texts, archives, written traces", the consequence of which is that subjectivity manifests itself as indeterminacy, as "an amalgam of phantasmal and historical elements".

The dissertation is composed on the basis of a typological-thematic principle, which allows Zemyarska to discover and interpret the internal connections in Yourcenar's work, which, according to the dissertation, are not dependent on the time in which the individual works were published. Although the emphasis is on thematic themes and their variations, the chronology of the work is not neglected, it is simply subordinated

to the subject matter. Zemyarska knows Yourcenar's literary, memoir and critical texts, she reads them carefully, and it is this attitude of hers, I believe, that prompted her to organize her research, highlighting the themes that create unity in the genre-diverse work of the Belgian writer.

The thematic approach allows her to notice a basic concept in Yourcenar's work - the return to earlier works and "the addition of new paratexts: prefaces, notes, afterwords, supplementary fragments." Zemyarska examines how already used themes are modified to be included in new works. Her analyzes show convincingly that Yourcenar's work can be seen as a macrotext in which themes and literary techniques are repeated and reworked. Some of the themes preoccupy the writer from her early to her last works, and in the case of *Dreams and Fates*, an early work, revised, turns out to be her last.

Zemyarska connects this structural principle in Yourcenar's work with the presence of real and the establishment of imaginary literary, but also blood, origins and kinship. Among the literary affinities are the work of Thomas Mann, as well as the life and work of Virginia Woolf. Tracing how Yourcenar's attitude towards the work of T. Mann changes, Zemyarska arrives at the need "to read in dialogue between "The Magic Mountain" and "L'Œuvre au noir", insofar as Yourcenar's novel is a replica of Mann's." She is interested layers of time in Yourcenar because their interaction is related to the history of the subject.

She is interested in the layers of time at Yourcenar because their interaction is related to the history of the subject. Her analysis of the relationship between fact and fiction, archive and imagination, past and narrative, leads her to the conclusion of the subject as a dynamic category. Gradually, Zemyarska expanded her task and established connections between Yourcenar's novel and other works by Thomas Mann, the most direct connections, she believes, being with *Doctor Faustus* (1947). She believes that the oppositions that Yourcenar finds in T. Mann's work can also be found in "L'Œuvre au noir".

According to the doctoral student, the work of Yourcenar and Thomas Mann affirms "a new type of humanism that knows the horror of the Second World War and the demonic in man, but nevertheless does not lose faith in him." Zemyarska asks the question "is it possible to still think about man in a generalized plan and in universal terms, not just after the collapse of faith in the human after the wars, but also after the collapse of the possible Renaissance, Enlightenment and modernist utopias".

Following Yourcenar, the author believes that "this future person is possible only to the extent that he can work with the negativity, the breakdowns, the unconscious, the aggressive, the chaotic. Man is possible only in so far as he leaps over the chasms." Sounds appealing. The new type of humanism through chaos is a shared horizon in the work of Yourcenar and Mann. This humanism can be called "new" after the end of the Second World War, but is this definition still valid today?

According to Zemyarska, two basic concepts for her research, but also for Yourcenar, such as subject and humanism, allow the writer's work "to meet the discourse of world literature".

World literature, I summarize Zemyarska's thesis, presupposes a cosmopolitan community, it presupposes an attitude to modernity that is mediated by knowledge of history. Historical knowledge enables distancing from the present and from oneself by embodying past times and personalities. World literature also requires the realization of the "humanistic ideal of mastery of the ancient classical and modern European languages." Yourcenar embodies the humanist ideal.

"Through the example of Yourcenar's work, we can even more clearly point to a concept of world literature, which must use two components - imaginary and zonal, only then it acquires its relief." However, what is the zonal component in relation to Yourcenar? What is its reality? The ideal to which world cosmopolitan literature aspires is that of a "universal, multiple, and variable subject." However, is the concept of "cosmopolitan" more than, indeed attractive, but a fiction? And how does it relate to the concept of "universal"?

Where the universal becomes reality - is it anything other than the imposition of certain interests that are presented as universal values? I think it's important to remind myself from time to time that in literature, events and people are made of words, not flesh and blood.

Francesca Zemyarska has the ability to carefully read complex literary, essayistic and theoretical texts. This allows her to justify the research goals she sets for herself. She reads with a sense of dedication, "from the inside" of Yourcenar's work. And she looks at the work of Thomas Mann through the perspective set by Yourcenar. Zemyarska has a quality that is difficult to rationalize, but its presence in her text is distinct - it is called literary sensibility.

Contributions correspond to what was achieved in the dissertation. No plagiarism is detected in the work.

In conclusion: I vote with conviction that Franceska Zemyarska be awarded a doctorate in professional field 2.1. Philology.

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