

## FOREWORD

### The French and francophone novel of the extreme contemporary: forms, aesthetics, genealogies

The volume we are presenting to the public is part of a project launched in 2013 by Professor Jerzy Lis of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, dedicated to questioning today's novel, both French and Francophone. Since 2013, Polish and foreign researchers have been invited to examine different aspects of the literature of the extreme contemporary, a reflection that has been organized around three thematic groups.

The first group questions the relationship between contemporaneity and literary creation: its permeability to the changing reality, both social and political; the different postures of the contemporary individual exposed to declared or potential identity crises, as well as the incessant redefinition of aesthetic or ethico-aesthetic standards. Pierre Senges, Marie-Claire Blais, Emmanuelle Pireyre, Éric Chevillard, Gilles Rozier, Caroline Mulder, Eugène Savitzkaya, Véronique Bergen and a whole section of the erotic literature of the moment, are thus taken to witness a certain state of the literature, as written at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The second thematic set concerns the Francophone novel outside France. What is it today? How to define its peripheral or ex-centric status, if there is one? Do the trends that it displays fit into a global trend or are they specific to one or another cultural area and explore the traditional themes of the Francophonie? So many questions are asked about several texts designed in Belgium or Switzerland, Mauritius or Canada, Algeria or Kongo. There is a heritage novel by Belgian Alain Berenboom, an archeological novel by the Algerian Boualem Sansal, an «odyssey» story by the Brazilian Sergio Kokis and several others (Kamel Daoud, Alain Mabanckou, Xavier Deutsch, Christopher Gérard, Serge Delaive, Amal Sewtohul, Jacques Chessex, Daniel Charneux, Nathalie Gassel) who say the multiple, aesthetic and thematic variations of the French-speaking novel outside France.

The third part of the reflection on the novel of the extreme contemporary, that we present today to the attention of the reader, proposes a study in 13 episodes centered on the aesthetic and formal aspects of the novel after the year 2000. Styles, modes, genres and codes are thus detected and put into perspective; trends, continuities, breaks and reconfigurations – recognized and grasped in their variety and complexity; development vectors – named and illustrated. Among the authors studied in this volume, there are that criticism has already recognized,

even canonized (Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio, Patrick Modiano, Jean Echenoz, Jean-Philippe Toussaint, Nicole Malinconi or Yasmina Khadra) and others who are yet waiting to enter the pantheon of French or Francophone literature (Claude Duneton, Dominique Jamet, Makenzy Orcel or Marvin Victor).

As for the main trends in today's French-language novel, the articles contained in this volume first of all make possible to note the following: the categories of undecidable, transitional and transgeneric still seem unavoidable, if one wants to account for current narrative production. Several articles in this volume revolve around issues that arise from the testing or porosity of the boundaries between fiction, document and essay, particularly in the context of the ongoing reflection on history and its legacy, less or more problematic. In particular, the work of generic hybridization, undertaken a long time ago and very vivid for the last thirty years, does not dry up, but it also allows to notice, by return, the persistence of certain genres or literary forms which, far to lose their contours, get rich and complex: the crime novel, the fantastic story, the interior monologue, the dystopia or the travel story. And it is in the same order of ideas that we should see the important vein of hybrid texts that mobilize the image (painting, drawing or photography) next to or even within writing.

A genre, relatively new, acquires in this volume an emblematic status: the biographical narrative, meeting place of various issues important for today's authors. It is in this genre that are discussed the weight of the past and the relation of the present to the history, the actualization and the rewriting of age-old generic models, the problematization and the eventual reversal of hierarchies more or less established in the social, political, ethical and aesthetic domains.

Finally, let us underline the importance of two other concepts whose interest is not undeniable in the research on the extreme contemporary: dialogism and intertextuality return often in the analyses which the reader will find here, analyses which are related as much to the stylistic choices than to different generic parameters and formal research of any kind. It is because the authors of today's narrative prose do not lose sight of the literary tradition to which they refer in various ways, testifying to this characteristic of which literature does not degrade and which consists in writing always in relation to the preceding – against, backwards or in parallel. This living, dynamic and constantly changing literature does not seem eager to break the thread that connects it to its predecessors, inviting its readers to critically question the changing world in which they are taken, without depriving themselves of putting under their eyes a world of words where to live and meet oneself.

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