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Dissertation work: **Myth of Narcissus in French literature at the turn of the 20th century**

ABSTRACT:

This dissertation thesis based on knowledge of French myth criticism deals with the issue of myths in literature, which is a specific manifestation of human symbolic imagination. In its most general level the work studies the definition of a myth and its social function as well as the matter of opposite notions regarding to the *mythos* and *logos*, which have gradually more and more differentiated along with the development of European thinking.

The myth of Narcissus has probably been one of the oldest myths in European culture. In its most renowned and most comprehensive form, the myth first appeared in the third book of *Metamorphoses* by Ovid, which has served as an inspiration for remakes by many later authors. The story of a young man who fell in love with his own reflection on the surface of the water contains a great variety of semantically strong structures (mainly the motifs of a mirror, narcissistic love, passively superior character of a hero, or the final metamorphoses into a flower), which are analysed in this study.

The author of this study outlines the interpretational evolution of the myth of Narcissus in French literary history until the turn of the 20th century. She also points out the fact that the understanding of the myth has transformed into a shape, which has been completely different from its original (past) interpretations. Narcissus, who had been long perceived through a moralistic prism as a reprehensible example of self-love, has gradually turned into its modern positively tuned image. It has become a symbol of intellectual introspection, which represents the purifying process inevitable for the development of human thinking and self-knowledge. In this way, art has anticipated and also inspired psychology, which has been preoccupied with the narcissistic phenomenon since Sigmund Freud's times.

The structure of the myth of Narcissus was noticeable especially during French symbolism, most frequently through the motif of mirroring. Its rediscovery was influenced by a wide range of culturally-historical factors, which are mentioned in this study. In particular it was depreciation of traditional Christian values, prevailing scientific and empiric approaches to cognition, or the growing tendency of artistic individualism. The myth of Narcissus gained two functions during that period. It enabled the delineation of the artist's attitude towards tradition (in spiritual, psychological and artistic areas) and it simultaneously opened the debate about a new definition of literature and the role of an artist in the framework of an actual artistic discourse.

Apart from the comparative analysis of many literary texts which are explicitly regarded to the myth of Narcissus, the work also studies the phenomenon of myths blending during the symbolist period (it mentions the occurrence of mythological characters such as androgyne, sphinx, Salome and Orpheus) and in the context of this process it appoints the overlapping character of the myth of Narcissus.

In the last chapter the author deals with the notion of personal myth through which she analyses Paul Valéry's work. Narcissus is represented there as an essential mental structure, which enables the dialogue of conscious and unconscious layers of the artist's soul, and thus it returns the literary creation into an intimate framework, which exceeds the artificial world of artistic construction and visionary tendencies at the turn of the 20th century.