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**PROF.DR.BOŠTJAN MARKO TURK**

**(EASA DEAN of CLASS I)**

**THE INITIATORY JOURNEY OF PAUL VALÉRY IN A GRAVEYARD BY  
THE SEA**

**Abstract**

This presentation explores the initiatory journey as a fundamental structure of Western literature and thought, tracing its development from ancient epic to modern poetic reflection. Foundational works such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, Iliad, Odyssey, Aeneid, and Divine Comedy are presented as key models of the voyage initiatique, in which the hero undergoes a transformative passage through trials that culminate in an encounter with death as the ultimate ontological limit.

I argue that these narratives are structured by a deep dualism—between life and death, body and spirit, human and divine—which later finds its philosophical articulation in the work of René Descartes. This dualism is not merely literary, but constitutive of Western epistemology and the formation of its civilizational myths. The initiatory journey thus operates both as an individual path of transformation and as a cultural matrix shaping collective values such as fate, responsibility, and the pursuit of symbolic immortality.

In contrast, modern and non-Western influenced works like Siddhartha and The Alchemist tend toward monistic frameworks, dissolving the structural tensions that define the classical model.

The central focus of this talk is *Le Cimetière marin* by Paul Valéry, which I propose as the only fully realized modern initiatory journey. Unlike other modern texts, Valéry's poem structurally fulfills all key parameters of the classical voyage initiatique: confrontation with death, dialectics of stillness and movement, tension between body and spirit, and a decisive transformation culminating in the affirmation of life.

Positioned between sea and cemetery, the poem stages a liminal space where thought itself becomes the site of initiation. Here, the journey is no longer external but internal—an exacting movement of consciousness that mirrors, and ultimately redefines, the classical descent and return. In this sense, *Le Cimetière marin*



represents not a break with tradition, but its culmination within a modern, self-reflective framework, making it a compelling case study at the intersection of art, philosophy, and the structures of human cognition.

## CV

**Boštjan Marko Turk** (born 1 February 1967) is a Slovenian scholar and Professor of French Literature at the University of Ljubljana. He completed his studies in literature at the same university and obtained his PhD in French Literature in 2001 from the Université Paris-Sorbonne under the supervision of Dominique Millet-Gérard.

Throughout his academic career, he has also worked internationally as a visiting lecturer and researcher at several European institutions, including the Université Paris II Panthéon-Assas, the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Masaryk University, Comenius University, Jagiellonian University, Palacký University Olomouc, the University of Braşov, Zaporizhzhia National University, and the Université Toulon et du Var.

His research focuses on French classical literature of the 17th century, comparative literature in a broader European context, and the relationship between philosophy and literature, particularly in the work of Henri Bergson. He has also contributed extensively to the study of Symbolism and Surrealism, engaging with authors such as Guillaume Apollinaire and Maurice Maeterlinck, as well as to interdisciplinary research connecting literature with the visual arts, including figures such as Auguste Rodin and Dante Alighieri. His work also encompasses Slovenian literary history, with studies on France Prešeren and Ivan Cankar, and analyses of post-Yugoslav societies through the conceptual frameworks of George Orwell.

Professor Turk is a member of the European Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters and the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, where he has served as Dean of the Humanities Class since 2025. He is also editor of the journal PEASA.

He is the author of more than 1,100 scholarly and journalistic articles and nine scientific and professional monographs published in five languages. His major works include *Paul Claudel et l'Actualité de l'être*, *Bergsonism and its Place in Slovenian Spiritual History* (2000), *Language as a Guide in the Labyrinth* (2008), *Far from the World* (2011), *The Twelve Walls* (2013), *Cote 101* (2017), *The War in the Name of Peace* (2023), and *The Prisoners of Liberty* (2024), *The Silenced page* (2025). His doctoral research examined the work of Paul Claudel in relation



to medieval philosophy, and he has also published studies on Molière and Pierre Corneille.

In addition to his academic work, he contributes to Slovenian, Croatian, Polish, and French media, has collaborated with Stéphane Courtois, and has conducted television interviews with prominent French intellectuals. His broader research interests include European intellectual history and topics such as the Versailles Peace Conference.

Professor Turk is fluent in French, English, Italian, and Croatian, and has reading knowledge of German, Polish and Latin. He received the Prešeren University Prize in 1993 and the Grand Golden Plaque of the Association of Croatian Homeland War Veterans in 2025.