

REVIEW

by Prof Milena Bratoeva (PhD),
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of a doctoral thesis for awarding the educational and scientific degree “doctor” in the Professional field 2.1. Philology, PhD-Programme: Literatures of the Peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia (Ancient Greek Literature)

Author of the dissertation: Boryana Borislavova Chomakovska, doctoral student at the Department of Classical Philology, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

Dissertation topic: "Modes of Madness in Ancient Greek Literature (8th-5th centuries BC): Genre and Artistic Functions"

Information about the author of the PhD thesis and the the doctoral program

Boryana Chomakovska holds a Master's degree in “Ancient Culture and Literature” from Sofia University. Since 2016 she has been a senior lecturer in Latin at the Medical University of Pleven, where she teaches medical Latin and participates in the training of Bulgarian and English-speaking students from all departments. Since 2022 Chomakovska has been PhD-student on independent training programme at the Department of Classical Philology of the Sofia University under the supervision of Assoc. Prof Nevena Panova (PhD). Boryana Chomakovska's PhD thesis was approved for public defense at a meeting of the Department of Classical Philology of Sofia University. The submitted documentation for the doctoral study shows that all the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Implementation and the Regulations for the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and the Holding of Academic Positions at Sofia University have been met. The competition documents comply with all legal requirements.

On the PhD thesis and the abstract of the thesis

Boryana Chomakovska's doctoral dissertation, "Modes of Madness in Ancient Greek Literature (8th-5th century BC): Genre and Artistic Functions," consists of 226 pages, of which 199 pages are the main part of the research. The dissertation is structured into an introduction, seven chapters, a conclusion, two appendices, a bibliography, and an index of commented excerpts. The bibliography comprises 159 titles in Bulgarian, English, and German.

The structure of the dissertation is logical and well-founded, aligning with the stated goals and objectives.

The theme of madness, broadly conceived as a disease of the soul, has been exceptionally productive in the realm of art. Countless works of world literature offer their own interpretations of madness from various perspectives. Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Dostoyevsky, whose "mad" characters continue to resonate with contemporary readers through the timeless existential questions they pose, are just a few examples. The theme of madness itself naturally intersects with philosophy, science (particularly medicine), literature, and, in a broader sense, art. In the realm of art, madness often serves as a provocation to society and its norms, an attempt to make sense of difference. Despite the existence of a universal conception of madness as a counterpoint to normality and "sound mind," each culture interprets its manifestations in its own unique way, and the attempt to systematize these interpretations is a challenge in itself. In this sense, Boriana Chomakovska has set herself a formidable task: "to seek, find, and systematize the primary evidence of various manifestations of madness according to ancient Greek literature from the 8th to the 5th centuries BC" (p. 2).

In accordance with the stated goal, she defines the research questions in the Introduction (p. 3). In the Introduction, Chomakovska also describes the corpus of original texts on which her research is based, the criteria for their selection, and the methodology applied. The interdisciplinary methodology she follows is adequate for the research tasks set and allows for the formulation of objective conclusions regarding the modes of madness, as evidenced in various genres and works of ancient Greek literature from the 8th to the 5th century BCE. The review of the specialized literature in the Introduction (pp. 17-20) demonstrates that Borayna Chomakovska has a deep understanding of key studies focused on the theme of madness and its manifestations in literature, specifically in ancient Greek literature during the period under consideration.

In the following six chapters (2-7), the author analyzes the ancient Greeks' notions of madness and its manifestations, subjecting to a "close reading" selected excerpts from classic examples of the three literary genres - epic (2. *Madness in epics*), lyric poetry (3. *Madness in lyric poetry*), and drama (4. *Madness in Attic tragedy*; 5. *Madness in Old Attic Comedy*), as well as history (6. *Madness in historiography*) and philosophy (7. *Madness in philosophy: Plato*). By highlighting key specificities of the ancient Greek perspective on madness, the author comments

on the modes of madness within the context of each genre, emphasizing their artistic and genre-specific function. This, the author argues, is one of the main contributions of her research.

In this way, Chomakovska's work offers a panorama of various delusional states, from the epics of Homer to the lyrics of Sappho, Solon, and Archilochus, the most emblematic examples of Attic tragedy and Old Attic comedy, and finally, Herodotus' "Histories" and Plato's dialogues. As she notes, this is one of the contributions of her study of madness, in which, for the first time, examples from all genres are included.

In this comprehensive overview, I would highlight the analysis in chapters four and five, dedicated to madness in Attic tragedy and Old Attic comedy. Perhaps not only because it is thorough, systematic, and well-illustrated with sufficient quotations from the analyzed works, but also due to my personal involvement with ancient Indian drama and theatrical culture, which naturally led to some comparisons. While reading, for example, in the fourth chapter about the extreme manifestations of madness in the tragedies of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles, whose characters commit murder in moments of temporary insanity, I thought about how impossible characters like Orestes, who kills his mother, or Heracles, who in his delusion kills his own children, or Medea, driven mad by love for Jason, would be in Sanskrit theater. They contradict the very religious-philosophical worldview and theatrical aesthetics of ancient India. It is precisely for this reason that tragedy is absent from the genre paradigm of Sanskrit theater.

In the fifth chapter, Chomakovska, based on the interpretation of three comedies by Aristophanes ("The Clouds," "The Wasps," "Lysistrata"), derives the essential differences in the representation of madness in Old Attic comedy in comparison with tragedy, predetermined by the fact that comic madness is not understood as a curse sent by the gods. In this context, Chomakovska's conclusion is important that "comic madness represents a mode of mental deviation, but not through the fate of the individual, but as a social problem, sometimes carrying with it social consequences. (p. 124).

The other chapter that I would highlight is the seventh, because in it madness is examined from a different perspective. In the focus of attention in the philosophical discourse, more specifically in Plato's dialogues, madness is interpreted from the perspective of the relationship between physical and mental health ("Charmides") and is considered a divine gift ("Phaedrus"). The approach is different in "Laws," where madness is presented as a pathological condition that

can lead to harm and crime. A key role in this philosophical interpretation of madness is played by Plato's idea of the four types of divine madness and their connection to poetry and philosophy. The author presents the judgments on the topic in the dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus in a concise but comprehensive manner.

In conclusion, based on a sequential analysis of the source material in chronological order, Chomakovska develops a classification of the modes of madness recorded in the texts examined, and summarizes them in a table at the end of the dissertation (pp. 193-194). The proposed classification, as well as the table, has a pronounced practical scientific value. It is interesting that the author decided to compare, albeit as a secondary goal of the study, the represented delusional states from the examples of ancient literature with the modern medical understanding of madness and mental illness, of course taking into account all the conditionality of such a comparison.

Another valuable contribution is the commentary on the vocabulary used in the different texts to denote various delusional states, organized in a concise dictionary of 34 lexical units (Appendix 1, pp. 214-217). Discussing the semantic nuances and connotations of the ancient Greek vocabulary with the general meaning of "madness," "insanity" in the analyzed works is crucial, as it is precisely in them that the specificities of their use in the different genres of ancient Greek literature are encoded.

These are among the five scientific contributions identified by the author of the dissertation, which I believe are well-founded.

The abstract provides a comprehensive and accurate overview of the dissertation, outlining its structure, content, conclusions, and original contributions to the field.

Finally, I would like to clarify something, ask the author a question, and express my opinion on the last chapter of the dissertation.

My comments only on chapters 4, 5, and 7 should not be taken to imply that I do not value the other chapters, which are essential components of the overall research. However, due to space limitations, I was unable to provide a more in-depth analysis.

My question refers to the first chapter, specifically to your reflections on the madness of King Lycurgus (p. 23), whose story is recounted in the sixth song of the "Iliad." In the cited verse in the original, as you yourself has noted, there is no word that refers to madness or insanity. The

characterization of the king's actions as "insane" only appears in the Bulgarian translation. Is it then entirely justified to qualify the hero's deed as an example of delusional behavior? Is it not rather a matter of the translator's interpretation and decision in this case?

The final part of the study on the contemporary idea of the madness of the author, consisting of only 4 pages, could hardly be formed as a separate chapter, as this creates, at least in my opinion, a sense of imbalance. As you yourself note at the beginning of it, that your judgments "are based mainly on Plato's contribution on the subject and mainly concern poetic inspiration" (p. 182), it seems to me that they could be linked to the analysis of Plato's idea of divine inspiration in the seventh chapter and specifically with the analysis of the "Phaedrus."

On the publications related to the Doctoral Dissertation

The submitted publications meet the minimum national requirements for obtaining the doctoral degree. Boryana Chomakovska has published three articles on the topic of her dissertation. One of these articles is in a periodical academic journal, and two are in conference proceedings. Chomakovska has presented papers related to her dissertation at a total of seven conferences, including three national and four international forums.

Conclusion

This research meets the academic requirements for a doctoral dissertation. It presents Boryana Chomakovska as a young scholar possessing the necessary academic competencies and skills. Taking into account the topicality of the theme and the above-mentioned scientific and applied contributions of the work, I recommend to the members of the committee to award to Boryana Borislavova Chomakovska the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the professional field 2.1. Philology, doctoral program "Literature of the Peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia, and Australia" (Ancient Greek Literature).

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