

## **Review**

by Assoc. Prof. Nevena Asparuhova Panova, PhD, Department of Classical Studies, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, member of the Academic jury in the competition for the position of Associate Professor in the professional field

2.1. Philology (Literature of the peoples of Europe, America, Asia, Africa, and Australia – Western European literature), announced in State Gazette, issue 61 /02.08.2022

Bogdana Paskaleva Paskaleva, PhD, Chief Assistant Professor of Ancient and Western European Literature at the Department of Theory of Literature at the Faculty of Slavic Studies, the only candidate in the announced for the needs of St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia competition, applies with the monograph “The Garment of Nudity: Transformations of the Image in the Story of Narcissus and Echo” (Sofia UP, 2022, 286 p.), as well as with a total of 15 articles and studies, six of which – in foreign languages. In view of the presented publications, as well as on basis of the other groups of criteria, B. Paskaleva fulfils the requirements of the relevant Bulgarian legislation in the academic sphere, as shown by the complete competition documentation.

“The Garment of Nudity: Transformations of the Image in the Story of Narcissus and Echo” is a remarkable study, with an undeniably fruitful interdisciplinary character. If a narrower disciplinary field in which it falls should be defined, I would name it more broadly philology, because literary analysis would not be possible to be realized in the form in which we find it here, without the attraction of linguistic paradigms. On the other hand, the author works, not only in this study of her, in that field of modern literary studies, which constantly dialogues with philosophy, semiotics, and especially in this case – with art studies as well.

The monograph is divided in two main parts, each of them with two chapters with several sub-chapters: Part one: "The veils of the image" (35 – 124): Chapter one: "Leon Battista Alberti: The Origin Myth and the Technique of Image"; Chapter Two: "Back to Lucretius: The Matter of Image"; Part Two: "Images Under the Words" (125 – 241): Chapter Three: "The Science of Ferdinand de Saussure: Labyrinths of Semiology"; Chapter Four: "Dispersed Echo, Doubled Image". In addition to the paratexts (Introductory words, Introduction, Concluding words, Bibliography, Basic abbreviations, Index of names, Index of concepts, Summary in Bulgarian and in English), the Appendix "Ovid in Saussure's notebooks" (247 – 253) has been added.

The primary source text is the Narcissus and Echo episode from the Third Book of Ovid's "Metamorphoses" (339 – 510), but as can be seen from the abbreviated content, his analysis is carried out through various secondary reference sources from several eras, which set and layer different theoretical perspectives. Paskaleva calls these "separate inclusions" (280) representing the secondary sources "interpretive deviations", but they can be seen as independent small studies that impressively introduce and contextualize the contributions of individual scholars to which one's own interpretation is added, and in view of the leading theme, and more broadly.

We note this indeed as a contribution, or as a bundle of contributions, showing Paskaleva's deep versification in many humanitarian fields, although at times there is a hesitation whether the real focus of interest is the ancient myth, or whether it is rather an illustration of the theory of the image developed in the research. The author herself points to this in the closing pages, pointing out that "Narcissus and Echo appear to be part of a series of possibilities" (243), after, however, once again defending the choice of the corpus of „Metamorphoses" due to its genre suitability to construct "various image concepts" on its basis.

The story of Narcissus and Echo, "one of the most popular myths that has come down to us thanks to Ovid" (39), is nevertheless particularly suited to the path the study is taking, with attention to both visual and verbal imagery thematized and conceptualized through the two main characters, as precisely in Ovid's version they are connected in one myth, defined by Paskaleva and as a kind of "metamyth" (according to B. Manchev), because of its self-reflexive features and internal theoretical potential. Based on this, significant comments are currently being made on features of the image of the poem itself extracted from this narrative. Also important in Ovid's context is the discussion of the excerpt's placement among the myths of

the Theban cycle and the thesis – based on research mainly from the last few decades – that the story of Narcissus can be read as an “enigmatic reinterpretation of the myth of Oedipus” (41).

A number of intermediate analyses, conclusions, and connections of the mythological narrative through the text of Ovid with the selected theoretical paradigms on the topics of the veil of the visual image and from there – on the possible veiling and unveiling, on the surface of the image, on the image as an edge or a front, but and as a membrane, for the deceptiveness, changeability and in/visibility of the image, and a number of others. Extremely important is what has been written about Alberti and his theory, in which Narcissus is presented as the “inventor of painting” (47), as well as the turning back to Lucretius and ancient “idealistic” materialism as a possible source for Ovid himself.

In order to maintain the observation of the plot of Narcissus and Echo not only as a narrative, but in constant adherence to its characteristics as a poetic text, it seriously contributes to consider Saussure's work in the part devoted more to the image (and voice) of the nymph Echo, as a peculiar emphasis is placed on his preoccupations with anagrams in ancient poetry, and thus a new line of connections between image and word is drawn. And around Echo return the themes, or concepts, of the veil and the edge, as well as the mirror.

In general, the proposed research is characterized by both the already known and completely legitimate independence of its individual parts in a theoretical plan, without abandoning the fluid analysis of Ovid's poetic narrative, and the – delicate, but also insistent – retention of the integrity of the work and on a conceptual and conceptual level. Here it should be noted the very careful work with the language of Paskaleva herself, which is evident, on the one hand, in all the commentaries on the sources used, used both in the original and in translation, including comparative (this applies first, but not only, to the Latin original of Ovid and the Bulgarian translation of “Metamorphoses” by Georgi Batakliiev). Particularly valuable here are the insights into polysemy, synonymy, the potential for phonetic games with Latin, and not only, key for the analysis words, concepts, terms (in the more theoretical parts).

On the other hand, this research precision also refers to the concepts “made” within the research itself as a “product of the analysis” (243) and to the dynamics of their use and refinement during the entire analysis. The general coherence of the author's style is also worth

noting, which shows in "Dressing the Nudity" an even higher academic maturity and persuasiveness compared to Paskaleva's earlier texts. And more: the main text of the entire study is accompanied by extensive footnotes, probably of almost similar volume, and which show not only the breadth of the framework in which the subject is placed, but above all the depth with which it has undoubtedly been worked for a long time on its possible elevations through different prisms, and the desire to introduce each point of view against the background of the occupations of the individual authors, the relevant debates surrounding it and its reception, which gives additional value to the monograph.

Here is the place to mention the attraction to the analysis of a number of Bulgarian contributions on the problem of the image through the works of Angel Angelov, Amelia Licheva, Boyan Manchev, Yoana Sirakova, Kamelia Spassova, Cleo Protokhristova and others, which, in turn, is not only a dialogue with their texts, but also a result of Paskaleva's active involvement in our academic environment and in the community development of the theory, to which she also contributes through successful and inspiring work with young colleagues and students.

Bogdana Paskaleva's monograph is very well elaborated and regarding its technical layout. I would only add the following: the complete citation of the passage from Ovid devoted to the metamorphoses of Narcissus and Echo, even as an appendix, would contribute, through the graphic presence of the entire verbal image, to an additional "participation" of it in the analysis, despite its popularity (overall only one excerpt of 20 verses is quoted, p. 215).

And as a possible direction for further development of the visual-verbal image studies with a view to the auto-referentiality of the work, I would suggest expanding the comments on the oral-written character of the original reception of ancient poetry (which is more defining for the Greek, but also for the Roman case), although this line is affected in the study too.

The rest of the studies with which Chief Assistant Prof. B. Paskaleva participated in the competition, are also impressive because they show the development and upgrading of the same approach, based on an excellent knowledge of the primary sources, a thorough study of their context and their reception before a specific narrower analysis is carried out. In almost all presented texts, the view is interdisciplinary, and the interests of the researcher are often tied to the history and development of a given notion, concept, or idea, and again – to their

reception. For me personally, Paskaleva's permanent preoccupation with ancient and Renaissance literary and/or philosophical testimonies, often not considered so specialized in our academic circles or at all, is particularly delightful and valuable. In many cases, B. Paskaleva also has merits as a translator of the analysed texts. I would even say that she boldly builds a kind of modern methodology, and – from another angle – an apology for studies of reception, of ancient texts, first, but not only, becoming an instrument for a successful reading and interpretation of philological-philosophical concepts, phenomena, debates from different eras. This also leads to the already visible international presence of Paskaleva's research. As far as I know her teaching activity as a Chief Assistant, as well as her project commitment, I have the impression that they develop with the same activity, demandingness, and enthusiasm.

In conclusion and based on all that has been said, given the high research and teaching qualities and achievements of Chief Assistant Bogdana Paskaleva, PhD, I strongly vote for her to be awarded the academic position of Associate Professor in Western European Literature, in the professional field 2.1. Philology.

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