

## SHORT REVIEW STATEMENT

on the monographic study

“*The Garment of Nudity: Transformations of the Image I the Story of Narcissus and Echo*”,

the main habilitation work of Dr **Bogdana Pascaleva**,  
candidate for an academic position “Associate Professor”

in the field of higher education 2.1. Philology, scientific specialty “Literature of the nations of Europe, America, Asia, Africa and Australia (Western European literature)”

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1. My personal impressions of Bogdana Pascaleva are not from yesterday. I've listened to her scientific reports at conferences, I've read her articles (if I too go in the dual mode of the theoretical plot). This personal experience forms my impression of an ambitious, mature, self-confident and thoroughly dedicated scholar with a broad and yet deep humanitarian culture, literary and philosophical.

The monographic study offered to us as the main habilitation work (I will talk about it from here on) fully confirms this impression, gives it a finished look. The work is elegantly, at once simply and complexly structured, with a Dantean symmetry that seems to compensate for the own ambiguity of the problem under discussion, but rather is presupposed in an intrinsically necessary way by the essence of the problem (a main thesis around which I will develop my review). The problem itself, in turn, is chosen to connect several theoretical plots, both synchronically and diachronically, but the connection is loose enough to leave room for fresh, surprising discoveries.

2. The book enters *in medias res* with its very first paragraph, stating its subject: a study of the artistic image, visual and verbal.—But not as a simple dichotomy, not as an antithesis between two opposing fields, but in searching and problematizing the border between them, in standing on the dividing-uniting edge, a favorite word with conceptual status.

Another such word is the veil, by which the act of meaning-making of the artistic image is named—not as a stable status quo, but as an oscillating movement across the border.

*Metaphoricity* is conceptually inherent in theoretical narrative. Clearly stated in the title and subtitle of the book, it is generated by an initial, basic metaphor—Ovid's myth/narrative of Narcissus and Echo. It poses and formats the theoretical problem from its metaphorical side, which throughout will unfold in a dual, internally tense manner. It is Ovid's story that guides theoretical speculation. The subject predetermines *its* (meta)language. Stepping onto this story/narrative, the study itself blossoms as a metaphor. In its conception and in its unfolding, the work combines the two plans, which also have a discursive expression in language.

Strictly speaking, the study is a *theory of the artistic image*. His focal goal is the duality of the image between the sensory and the speculative. Or to put it in the metaphorical key of the basic metaphor—his bisexuality. This bisexuality also has a structural-compositional expression.

3. After the title, the structure explicated in the content paradigm is the second key to entry into a study. It is here, in the extremely bare appearance of the armature, that the Dante-

like (as I defined it) symmetry is clearly highlighted: two mutually tense parts, under the sign of Narcissus and Echo respectively.

The particular charm of this symmetry is that it functions at various interfering levels. One of them, perhaps the most visible, is the problem of the boundaries between the languages of painting and poetry, of spatial and temporal mimesis, which is a basic of the self-articulations of classical modernity. The lowest layer, hidden in the folds, or rather the veils of the metaphor, is perhaps the gender determination of this relationship in the figures of Narcissus and Echo (and at the same time its erasure in the narcissistic, autoerotic, latently bisexual nature of Narcissus; it is precisely these reversive moves across the border that are most interesting to the author).

Somewhere between these levels of tension stands another fundamental conjunction, both historical and substantial—the relationship between letter and voice. The key word is again “between”—the border of a basic difference, but with many gaps, which are carefully inventoried, and for this purpose different hermeneutic angles, different historical and theoretical contexts have been tested.

The main hypothesis—about the borderline, “edged” essence of the image as a meaning-making machine—is viewed in a dual mode: circular-concentric and linear. Here again, the critical narrative reproduces its own subject—the metaphorical narrative of metamorphosis invented by Ovid (according to a French scholar, Frasois Frontisi-Ducroux, who is cited, p. 75).

Despite the resistance to the linear approach in favor of a dispersed breakdown into separate points (constellations) of meaning-producing tensions, there is at the same time the establishment of distant (trans-, meta-historical) kinships.

3. Operating in this way and in this territory, the work stands broadly in a field known as visual studies, which, so to speak, problematizes the “nature” of the image beyond the visible. Although it has a deep origin (for example, in the discussion about dogmatic icon worship around the 8th—9th centuries), this approach became possible after the philosophical discoveries of the 1960s, when it was stimulated “from outside”, by the artistic practices of the radical neo-avant-garde, which led to the final collapse of “traditional” aesthetics: the neo-avant-garde abuse of freedom completely displaces the “nature” of the image, problematizes the quotation marks of aesthetic convention and mimesis, the boundary between art and nature.

But unlike other similar studies, Bohdana Pascaleva’s work remains in the philosophical discussion. (I mean that it is not tempted to follow, for example, the practical uses that twentieth-century art offers.) In this way, it fits into the line of mainly French structuralism and poststructuralism of the 1960s and beyond, while integrating in an essential way the most contemporary theories on the nature of the image. The metaphorical lability of the subject, pointed out and sought, knows the theoretical background of authors such as Derrida, Nancy, Vernant. But the presence of Deleuze in reading the image as flatness, surface is special.

4. But one main merit of the study must be highlighted here. Dealing with the European (partly also American) theoretical experience from the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, it does not fail to simultaneously “construct” its native, Bulgarian tradition—from its synchronous manifestations in the 60s-70s-80s (Miroslav Yanakiev, Nikola Georgiev and especially Radosvet Kolarov) to the most current ones. Along with the wide horizontal-vertical working perimeter, in which it places itself, the study of Bogdana Pascaleva also states a circle of researchers, among which stands: Angel Angelov, Cleo Protochristova, Boyan Manchev, Kamelia Spasova, Amelia Licheva—both in the form

of theoretical background and of immediate, “living” collegial-friendly community, of logos and body. Their research is equally integrated in European/world trends, some of them are extensively referenced. I respect this because, in addition to being an expression of self-confidence, this is how, in short, a school is created.

5. And now I will formulate my general impression (with the hope that it would not be taken as a minus of the work; on the contrary!).

B. Paskaeva’s thesis all the time hovers on the edge of the critical metaphor, stands on it. It is deployed in a form of inspiration that successfully crosses the line between academic discourse *stricto sensu* and creativity. In other words, literary theory as *true*, inspired artistic creativity. The careful construction of a hypothesis as a creative act, namely by building it on the shifting sands of metaphor. Its argumentation, including the detective investigation method. The refined pleasure of literary play.—One of the strongest possessions of the post-60s French school, to which this book takes us back without pretending not to does it.

The pair Narcissus—Echo is an abbreviation of a bundle of different but parallel antitheses, fundamental to the theoretical narrative: visual—phonic, sight—voice, dominance—passivity, primary—secondary and others in this semantic order.

This entire complex is addressed to the auto-orientation (autoeroticism) of the artistic image.

And the study itself, to repeat, unfolds in the form of a great metaphor, following the method of metamorphosis in a shared zone of poetic narrative/mythos (Ovid) and natural philosophy (Lucretius). A narrative that, in turn, echoes—on other levels—in its future meta-languages, exploring the dual “nature” of the image in relation to its subject—reality: at the same time showing and veiling, revealing and concealing (*‘раз-скриващ’*, said in Heidegger’s language in the congenial linguistic solution of the Bulgarian translation).

A slippage that allies the made attempted with the uniqueness of the artistic act no less than to the reproducibility of the scientific ones.

6. Of course, such an assessment is itself part of the play *with* and *of* academic discourse.—What should be added out of a *grano salis* is that even in the beauty of the metaphorical narrative, B. Pascaleva’s study does not leave the academic tradition at the whole time. It stays there in a beautiful way.

Formal evidence of this is also the paratexts with which the book is accompanied (especially the scrupulous summary of the newly discovered texts of Saussure, previously integrated into the problem-methodological scope of the study).

7. In view of everything that has been said so far, I will hardly surprise anyone by stating my convinced support for the successful habilitation of Ch. Assist. Bogdana Pascaleva. And more precisely, for occupying the pleaded academic position “docent” in professional direction 2.1.

06.12.2022

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