

REVIEW

by Prof. Todor Hristov

of the competition for the position of associate professor

in field 2.1 Philology (Literature of the people of Europe, America, Asia, Africa and Australia - Western Literature)

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The only candidate in the competition for the position of an associate professor in the field 2.1 Philology (Literary history) is Bogdana Paskaleva. She presented for the competition the monograph

Единственият кандидат, Богдана Паскалева, участва в конкурса с монографията *The Garment of Nudity: Transformations of the Image in the Story of Narcissus and Echo* (Sofia University Press: Sofia, 2022), two articles in academic journals indexed in global databases, 2 studies and 11 articles in peer-reviewed academic journals and edited collections.

Bogdana Paskaleva is one of the leading young researchers in the field of the humanities. Her work is remarkable for its interdisciplinary scope, systematic and detailed analytical protocols, outstanding erudition, expertise in both contemporary and classical philosophy, theory and history of literature and art.

In her book *The Garment of Nudity: Transformations of the Image in the Story of Narcissus and Echo*, Bogdana Paskaleva defines the image as an operator in the production of sense (33-34, 243-244). The concept of operator developed in the study however can seem misleadingly simple. To be able to understand its function, we need to take into account that the concept condenses four types of operations:

Firstly, the study traces a series of transfigurations: the image of Narcissus on the calmly reflective surface of the lake transforms, on one hand, in the images that the Renaissance painters tried to capture by means of their canvases (64), on the other hand it mutates into the images as membranes cast off by the things in the philosophy of Lucretius Carus and then to simulacra capable of a life autonomous from the things (87, 90, 97); but the image of Narcissus on the surface of the lake also converts into Echo's response which in its turn reshapes Tyresias' prophecy into a verbal image (124, 128).

Secondly, the study develops series of disjunctive relations: the representation of the myth of Narcissus in book III of *Metamorphoses* fractures into the stories of Narcissus himself and Echo, as the study itself; the image splits into visual and verbal image, the visual image - into edges and surface, the verbal image - into voice and speech, the speech - into narrative and *fata* (75-77); the heritage of Ferdinand de Saussure breaks into the concept of sign as an equivalence between a signifier and a signified canonized by Charles Baillie and Albert Sechaye, the structuralist axiomatics of Louis Hjelmslev and the pre-structuralist semiotics developed by Bogdana Paskaleva (135, 139, 153); the allegedly familiar Saussurean concept of the sign disperses into a constellation of four, and later five elements (166-168), while his concept of anagram dissipates into a constellation of terms: coupling, anaphony, hypogram, paragram, logogram, antigram, biphon, mannequin, syllabogram, paramorph (201-203).

Thirdly, the analysis constructs series of conjunctive relations that can be broken down into three types: (1) The surface of the image is associated with the cross-section of the visual pyramid in Alberti and later - with the canvasses, veils, nets and mirrors by means of which the Renaissance artist tried to capture it in their paintings (58, 63-64). At the same time, the surface of the image is characterized by activity and, on that basis, linked to the images shed by the things as skins, films or membranes. The surface of the lake on the other hand is conceived of as active and hence associated with the images cast off the things as membranes, according to Lucretius Carus. The conjunctive series organized around the surface of the image, however, are traversed by other series linking the image to the canvas, the dress (237) and the skin (54), while the conjunction between the image and the mirror develops in the direction of the simulacrum. Moreover, the conjunctive series of the surface are folded into the concept of the agency of the image as dressing and undressing (55, 90, 119-121). (2) Another type of conjunctive series is organized around the concept of edge (219) associated with the limits of the image and hence with borders, horizon, front, the liminal, the break, the rift, the tearing apart of clothes or the image itself (44, 54-55, 212). Additionally, that type of conjunctive series incorporates the relationship between the image and the sublime, the unrepresentable, the unimaginable mediated by the problem of the perspective representation of clouds (100, 105) as edgeless surfaces (111) or as edges with an indiscernible surface (107, 109). Moreover, the conjunctive series of the edge incorporates the concept of the simulacrum (87) interpreted as a captured image (69), elusive image (80), an autonomous image (94, 127), a wandering image (97), an image without a source, *hymera*, delusion (98, 107). (3) The concept of verbal image is delineated by three conjunctive series

linked by the Saussurean concept of analogy: the association between sign, value, motivation and system (156); the idea that verbal analogies are related to the capability of linguistic innovation (157); the similarity between linguistic analogies and the echo (157) and hence with anagrams, verbal images and the stories of Narcissus and Echo.

An important advantage of the series developed in the study consists in the fact that they are not abstract, they cannot be dissociated from the texts in which they are identified. For example, if one would try to generalize the relationship between Lucretius Carus and Ovid, then one should inscribe the relationship in a chain of influence or in the line of development of the classical notions of image; but then the relationship would turn into literary history or into history of ideas rather than into visual history. Similarly, one cannot dissociate from the texts the Saussurean concepts of language and anagrams, Alberti's canvases, the imprint of the face of Jesus on St. Veronica's cloth or the substitutive image act. Such relationships cannot and should not be generalized because they are molecular rather than molar, embedded in particular texts or incorporated in material images. Such molecular links would undermine any attempt at a generalization, perhaps even any attempt at a commentary because they include relationships that traverse and transgress them towards other images and texts, as for example the discussion of the exchange between Lucretius Carus and Ovid incorporates an article by Philip Hardy, or the analysis of the relevance of the anagrams to the concept of sign builds in a book by Beata Stawarska, or the problem of the perspective representation of clouds absorbs Leonardo's notebooks. Perhaps this is the reason why Bogdana Paskaleva argues that the relationships that she is describing are possible rather than necessary, or why she claims that she is developing a concept of the image that is only "a part of a series of possibilities" (243), and even Ovid's "Metamorphoses" allow the formulation of other concepts. I believe nevertheless that the potential of the myth about Narcissus and Echo exceeds the alternative possibilities mentioned by Bogdana Paskaleva due to the key role of Narcissus in the history of images and the potential impact of the study in fields in which his figure is of considerable importance such as psychoanalysis, semiotics, or visual culture.

Fourthly, the study outlines planes of immanence comprising the heterogeneous series of relationships described above: the surface is a constitutive component of the visual image and at the same time a space of the production of sense and an area of contact between images and words; the cloud combines the concepts of surface and front with the representation of the unrepresentable and the simulacrum as a general problem (94, 105); the anagram is both a surface effect (219), almost an auditory hallucination (206) which

nevertheless retraces in the materiality of the sound, under the veil of the narrative, the fatum that defines both the myth and the image of Narcissus, and hence functions as a point of contact between sound, sense and image (192, 235).

Perhaps the operations condensed in Bogdana Paskaleva's concept of the image can be described in greater length or detail. For the purposes of this review however, I will illustrate their interdependence by a problem that is weaved into the background of the study: the image of Echo demonstrates, according to Bogdana Paskaleva's reading of Ovid, that saying the same means saying something else, even more, that saying something implies saying is something else that is already repeating the same (212); in that case however Echo is an autoreflexive image, an image of the verbal image founded on the disjunction between the words and the echo which opens up a rift, a fracture between them; yet the words and the echo are characterized also by a conjunctive relationship (as long as the echo comes after the words), and by a transformative relationship (as long as the echo reproduces the words); furthermore, the disjunctive, conjunctive and transformative relationships summarized above develop on the material surface of speech which, in that sense, functions as a plan of immanence of the verbal image autonomous from the reference or the speaking subject.

However, one should not conceive of the operations that I have tried to outline above as an activity that the study or the researcher does on the image. The operations, the development of series, the opening up of a plane of immanence are the image. It is because of this that Bogdana Paskaleva does not formulate an abstract concept of the image. Her concept of the image is an image in itself, it is an image of the image, an autoreflexive image of the concept of the image. I believe that this is its most crucial advantage. Indeed, if one wants to stay true to the images, to say the truth about images, is it not more effective to show rather than to tell what is an image?

Any definition of the image already traces its edges. The edges however belong to the image, they are not interruption but rather a protraction of the image that open up an immanent transcendence, they as if transform the image into a cloud whose front is incessantly developing and reshaping. Because of that, any definition of the image is irredeemably limited, it tears the image apart as a dress making itself blind to the fact that a torn dress is already an image. Bogdana Paskaleva claims that the defining feature of images is their enigmatic nature. Indeed, if one ignores the enigma of the image, then - perhaps in the hope to find some unquestionable knowledge - one makes herself selectively blind for the images themselves. I believe that the most important achievement of the study is the fact that it does not try to guarantee the value of knowledge by blindness.

In conclusion, I would like to ask what is the reason for the emphasis on doubles and duplicity in the study. I imagine that the emphasis comes from the function of doubling and splitting in Ovid's account of the myths about Narcissus and Echo (74, 126, 128) as well as from the Saussurean concept of anagrammatic coupling (187, 190). It seems however that there is a tension between the language of doubling and the concept of dissemination. Thus I am wondering if dissemination can be decomposed into a series of couplings or decouplings, or it rather involves indeterminate, perhaps intensive quantities that resist the representation as units (although the description of doublings and splits undermines the notion of the image as an unity, it nevertheless implies units). The question seems important also because of the function that the study ascribes to dissemination: to prevent the dissipation of the image by establishing local, situated rules for its generation and transformation, and hence makes possible its systematic nature (170, 211, 241).

To sum up, Bogdana Paskaleva outperforms the minimal standards for the academic position "associate professor". The monograph and the additional academic publications are valuable contributions in the fields of image theory, literary theory, history of literature, history of culture, visual culture studies and semiology. Therefore I am going to vote in favor of the appointment of Bogdana Paskaleva to the position of associate professor in the field of 2.1 Philology (Literature of the people of Europe, America, Asia, Africa and Australia - Western Literature).

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