

Review
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of the dissertation entitled “Corporeality and Liminality in the Poetry of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki” presented by Venesa Nacheva as part of the requirements for awarding the academic research degree “Doctor” in the professional field 2.1. Philology, Doctoral Program “Literature of the Peoples of Europe, America, Asia, Africa and Australia – History of Polish Literature”

Venesa Nacheva graduated in 2018 at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” with a Master’s degree in Slavic Philology and a specialization in Polish Language and Literature. From 2021 to 2024 she was a PhD student at the Department of Slavic Literatures at the same university. Since 2023 she has worked as a part-time assistant professor in the History of Polish Literature at Sofia University.

Included in the documentation submitted by the doctoral candidate for the defence of her dissertation are four academic publications in the field of the dissertation and a number of other publications related to Polish literature.

Venesa Nacheva’s dissertation is dedicated to the work of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki – one of the established and well-known contemporary Polish poets, author of multilayered works which can invite different types of interpretation. Studies devoted to the works of one single author may seem somewhat easier, if only because by common assumption their subject matter is clear and well defined. In reality, however, this is rarely true, particularly when dealing with a foreign author whom, as is largely the case with Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, the critic has yet to introduce into the native environment. Indeed, it is difficult to find the intersection between the presentation of the author’s work in general terms and a productive perspective on its interpretation. Such a topic could easily slide in the direction of simply a survey of the author’s work. However, Venesa Nacheva has managed to avoid this danger and has found the right balance between a generalized presentation of Dycki’s poetry and a reading which problematizes it. Her work examines the author’s entire body of works to date, choosing, nevertheless, a specific and productive interpretive perspective. The themes of corporeality and liminality in Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki allow the reading to unfold in the direction of issues representative of this poet, such as identity, autobiographic elements, the specificity of his poetics, among others.

The dissertation presented by Venesa Nacheva consists of an Introduction, four chapters, a Conclusion and a Bibliography. The study is 216 pages long, 12 of which include the bibliography containing over 160 items.

In the Introduction, the author sketches the basic factual bio-literary background of the poet she discusses, identifies the thematic parameters of his poetry, summarizes the main aspects of its literary-critical reception, and comments on the reception of his works in Bulgaria. Here Venesa Nacheva also introduces the categories of ‘corporeality’ and ‘liminality’ which the

study will essentially deal with and which are motivated as an appropriate key to the analysis of the work of a poet who “speaks for people placed in liminal situations [...] and who, in the context of social constructionist theory, presents in his poetry the possibility of one person having different (synchronous or temporally shifting) identities...” (p. 7).

In Chapter One of the dissertation, “Theories of Corporeality and the Borderline,” the doctoral candidate presents and summarizes theories of and perspectives on the body and corporeality, as well as about borders and the liminal, all of which form the basis for the interpretation of Dycki’s work carried out later in the thesis. The ideas discussed in relation to corporeality are mainly derived “from the fields of phenomenology, psychoanalysis, gender studies and queer studies, since their conceptions of the body and corporeality are considered the most relevant to the poetry of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki” (p. 17). Singled out here as being of central importance to the study is the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty with his understanding of the body as a “mediator in the understanding of the world.” The ideas of Sigmund Freud, Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler and others are also drawn upon as applicable to the analysis being carried out. With regard to the problematic of liminality, the study draws primarily on the ideas of Karl Jaspers, as well as those of Michel Foucault and Marc Augé. The first chapter of the work also contains an overview of the conceptions of corporeality and liminality in Bulgarian and Polish humanities studies after 1989.

With the second chapter, “The Body in (the) Liminal Situations,” the dissertation enters into the specific issues related to Dycki’s work. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the “conceptions of the body’s liminality” in Polish literature, starting from the Middle Ages and reaching to the present day, which helps to locate further in the study the poet under consideration into Polish literary traditions. In the following parts of this chapter, the author mainly follows the ideas of Karl Jaspers, which form the prism for her reading of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki’s poetry. Corporeality is here linked to the understanding of identity in the author’s work, with Venesa Nacheva speaking of the “conscious existence in a liminal situation” as a path to self-knowledge: “The consciousness of the existence of the body as a field of ‘knowledge and self-knowledge,’ ‘not my body’ and ‘body-memory’ in the poetry of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki leads him to the understanding of its being constantly in liminal situations, with the consequence that it manages to enact the transition to maximum authenticity. The liminal situation and corporeality succeed in evoking this possible self-transcendence” (p. 50). In the following parts of the chapter, the author analyzes Dycki’s poetry through the prism of the different ‘liminal situations’ according to Jaspers - death, struggle, guilt.

The third chapter of the dissertation, entitled “All Possible Bodies,” offers a detailed analysis of the parameters of the identity of the self in the poetry of the author under consideration. The PhD candidate follows the established critical view on Dycki’s work as one asserting the multiplicity of the lyrical self. However, she extends it further by considering a number of images central to his poetry which she regards as related to that self’s identity (‘constitutive parts of its multilayered identity’): those of the mother, the father, God, the poet of Polish Romanticism Norwid, the kin, the friends/lovers. According to the author, Dycki’s lyrical self is “amorphous” and “exists in a multiplicity of different mutually breeding, yet sometimes mutually exclusive images” (p. 87).

The fourth chapter of the thesis (“‘Liminal’ Spaces”) deals with the places in Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki’s poetry and, above all, with the impact of the topoi inhabited by the self on its identity. In this respect, the author takes as fundamental Merleau-Ponty’s thesis that “to be a body, one must be connected to a certain world [...] our body is not primarily in space: it comes from it.”

In addition to Merleau-Ponty, Gaston Bachelard’s views of space, Michel Foucault’s conceptions of heterotopias and Marc Augé’s idea of non-places are also introduced in this part of the work due to their relevance to the interpretation. The chapter offers a detailed reading of the topoi typical of Dycki’s poetry, their parameters, meanings and functions: the home, the room, the toilet/WC/latrine, the brothels, the library, the train station, the hospital/psychiatry, the church, the city, the forest, the cemetery. The analysis leads the PhD candidate to the conclusion that “their contradictory characteristics, as well as the absence of clear physical boundaries, create difficulties in defining them. This results in the creation of a sense of the illusory nature of their real existence, which further reinforces the suggestion of their being positioned inside the human being” (p. 200).

In the last part of the dissertation, the Conclusion, the doctoral student summarizes the observations made in the previous chapters, confirming once again the initial thesis of her reading – that “the body is an essential component of the entire essence of the lyrical self, expressing its various identities” (p. 202). Also in the Conclusion, the observations carried out in the preceding chapters are synthesized into a generalized characterization of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki’s work.

Among the strengths of Venesa Nacheva’s study one should stress the fact that she carries out a detailed analysis of a large number of the poet’s works, which makes the interpretation solid and convincing. Dycki’s poetry is presented here in its Bulgarian translation, very often done by the author herself. As already mentioned, Dycki’s poetry is not well represented in Bulgaria (only one collection of his poems has been published, in the translation of Panayot Karagyozov), so this consolidation of the poet’s presence in the Bulgarian cultural context deserves attention as an additional contribution of the study.

Yet another merit of the present study is its consistent effort to trace back in Polish literary history the presence of themes and images characteristic of Dycki’s poetry. This makes it possible to delineate its place in the literary tradition, but most of all it also clarifies the rewritings, reversals, and references through which the poet both recalls and alters the dimensions of certain enduring themes in Polish literature.

But perhaps the main achievement of the study is that it actually performs a morphological analysis of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki’s poetry (especially in Chapters Three and Four), highlighting the main images and motifs functioning within it. At the same time, the study also manages to elucidate the poetics characteristic of Dycki’s works, bringing out its typical features, such as intertextuality, polyphonic quality, autofictionality, the mixing of fictionality and non-fictionality, its cyclical nature, repetitiveness, etc.

I believe the work might have benefited if Dycki’s work had been examined more closely in the context of contemporary Polish literature since the early 1990s (this issue is only briefly sketched in the study). I also think that a more comprehensive reading of Dycki’s poetry

would have been achieved if it were interpreted through the concepts of irony and especially self-irony, which are indeed present in the study but only rather sporadically.

These points, however, do not detract from the overall impression of Venesa Nacheva's work as being a rigorous scholarly study with its own contributions to the research on the work of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki and on contemporary Polish poetry.

The 42-page summary adequately reflects the content of the dissertation.

In view of all of the above, I will unreservedly vote for the degree of Doctor to be awarded to Venesa Nacheva.

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