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### **Review of the PhD Thesis**

Author: **Venesa Krasimir Nacheva**

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Title: **Corporeality and Liminality in the Poetry of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki**

Supervisor: **Panayot Karagyozov, Prof. DSc**

#### **General information about the thesis**

The work proposed for review contains 216 pages and consists of an introduction, four chapters with well-defined subsections, a conclusion and a bibliography. The evaluator's positive attitude is facilitated by the excellently structured contents (a total of 25 sub-chapters), including a list of abbreviations placed after the table of contents, denoting the 19 Polish and one Bulgarian-language edition of the poet's oeuvres.

In addition to the 20 source texts, the bibliography (pp. 207–216) contains nearly 170 quoted sources in Polish, Bulgarian and English.

In terms of formal features and composition, the monograph is at a very good level.

#### **Dissertation objectives, scope and content**

The title strictly reflects the main tasks and thematic scope of the study. The goals are clearly formulated, with extensive clarifications on pp. 10, 12 and 14. The entire poetic production of E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki (1990–2023) is subjected to analysis, with the upper limit naturally fixed by the beginning of the writing of the monograph.

The **Introduction** (pp. 6–16) places the central concepts of body and border in close relation. This relationship predetermines the formulation of the initial research problem: what are *body* and *border*, how they relate to *physicality* and *borderline*, and how they interact in Dycki's poems (p. 10). From the beginning, the sociocultural emphasis is placed on the totalitarian period

and its consequences on national cultures, defined in the research as Slavic. In the context of the Polish People's Republic, the broad influence of the Catholic Church is also taken into account.

After a comprehensive review of Dycki's poetic path, taking into account the Bulgarian reception of his works, Nacheva defends the thesis that due to the multitude of repeating and modifying images, themes and motifs, it is productive to analyze the entire poetic production of the author (p. 12).

In the **First Chapter** (*Theories of the corporeal and borderlines*: pp. 17–33), the concepts of body and corporeality are formulated tightly, but extremely logically and with clear declarations in which contexts the theoretical concepts cited by Nacheva will be used. I highlight the author's synthesis of the leading ideas on the issue (pp. 19–23) as an exemplary solution to preparing the proverbial *theoretical part* of research for young PhD students.

The following sub-sections (*Imaginations of the border and liminality* and *Bulgarian and Polish theoretical and artistic representations of corporeality and liminality*) add to the development and sharpening of the research focus and provide convincing logical transitions to the sub-themes.

The **Second chapter** (*The body in border(s) situations*: pp. 34–83) concretizes borderline cases in Dycki's poetry in grouping and commenting them correctly according to the theories of Karl Jaspers. The observations are logical and consistent, although in some places they leave a feeling that the author's task is to present Dycki's works as evidentiary material for Jaspers's theory of borderline situations and transgression, as well as partially – for Z. Freud's concepts.

In this chapter, the most original in my reading (perhaps precisely because they don't refer to Jaspers and Freud) are the author's analyses of the identification of the verse with the body. The conclusion that Dycki anthropomorphised the poem to a certain extent, and in one poem even defined its gender (pp. 66–67), is convincingly argued.

**Chapter Three** (*'All Possible Bodies'*: pp. 84–148) provides a new prism for observations on the body and corporeality. Nacheva's main goal is a commentary on the relationship between body and identity in view of the multiplicity (and directly multi-corporeality) of Dycki's lyrical subject (p. 86). Interpretations tend to defend the idea of foreign bodies and voices as potential constituents of the Self (p. 87).

Although it begins with references to Freud and a sequential review of feminist and queer studies, here the analytical observations are much more self-contained and draw direct comparisons

between specific verses. A number of characteristics of the lyrical subject and the mother in Dycki's poems provoke the reading of these figures through archetypal images according to K. G. Jung, which is also fully justified. Nacheva's conclusion is that Dycki's artistic characters constantly communicate with each other and with the world through their corporeality, but in such a way – again through corporeality – they constantly change their boundaries, forming new forms and associations (p. 148).

Emphasizing on the impossibility of setting clear boundaries between the images of friends and lovers in Dycki's poetry, Nacheva logically states the need to analyze these characters in their interconnectedness (p. 140). Here, to the correct observations of the author, I would make a call to supplement the research or even bring out in a separate study the question of the relationship between friendship and sexual relations in Dycki: for example, is it possible to have friendship without physical intimacy, or as with the inferior figures of the mother, the father and the ancestors, friendship also turns out to be fraught with a priori mistrust because of the lyrical subject's previous experiences as a traumatized son and descendant? It seems to me that this problem is key to Dycki's works, but also in a historical aspect as a development trend in Polish poetry.

**Chapter Four** (*'Border' spaces*: pp. 149–201) concentrates on depicted spaces in order to trace how they turn out to be topoi of border situations: from the home and various room, through the railway station, the city, the cemetery and the church, to brothels and toilets. Correctly, Nacheva adopts her research perspective, drawing from the theoretical statements of G. Bachelard, M. Foucault and Marc Augé.

The broad reflections on dirt and the toilet space, in my opinion, open a field for further research on the category of dirt in Dycki's works: are physiological impurities there unambiguously repulsive in axiological terms, or is the category of impurity burdened with polysemy?

The **Conclusion** (pp. 202–206) focuses on the thesis (albeit convincingly proven in the course of the research) of an inextricable connection between the body and the border, although the strict definition of the two concepts remains an open question to this day (p. 202). To a large extent, the final section retrospectively recalls the declared aims and themes of the exposition, functioning as a summary of the analyzes carried out, rather than highlighting and further developing the results achieved in summary conclusions.

Among the most significant statements in the concluding part, I would single out the following:

- the statement about amorphousness and fluidity as an immanent characteristic of the represented body and individual in Dycki, which makes them difficult to categorise (p. 202);
- for the presupposition of borderline situations in Dycki from the general dislike for non-traditional identities in Polish society until 1990 (p. 203);
- about the body in Dycki's poetry as an example of a postmodern body, traumatically torn as a result of the inherited wounds and traumas of the past (p. 203).

All of Nacheva's concluding statements result from consistent analyses and from convincingly presented trends in the course of the exposition.

### **Contributions and critical notes to the Thesis**

The strengths of the PhD thesis in my reading are in the attempt for a comprehensive, detailed approach to the multi-faceted poetry of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, which is still far from a finished opus. The research focus on the body and liminality is an essential key to the interpretation of this work, but it also allows for a broader assessments of Dycki's place in contemporary Polish literature. Venesa Nacheva shows that – viewed from different essential angles: from the body, diseases and deviations, the idea of border spaces, from the presented topoi, and from archetypal figures such as the mother, the father, friends, lovers, relatives, God – Dycki's world is fluid (sometimes even amorphous), woven of pain, suffering and unattainable longings. Hence, Nacheva reveals, any idea of identity, if such could be obtained at all, is initially problematic and unstable. Pan-liminality, I draw this conclusion for myself, also brings out the pan-problematicity of any identity.

Examining Dycki's work in the context of corporeality and liminality, and hence – of the broad modern searches in European humanities, Nacheva takes into account, but also resolutely avoids specifically Polish approaches to the examined poet. For example, the author specifically emphasizes what she will not explore in her text – that is, the dimensions of regionalism (p. 13). This, on the one hand, reinforces the figure of the conscious researcher, clearly aware of the limits of his competences (insofar as Nacheva is not a bearer of Polish national tradition, nor does she declare any impetus to comment on the delicate Polish-Ukrainian aspects of the so-called Borderlands (Pol. *Kresy*) with their historical and linguistic-cultural complexity). On the other hand, such an approach undoubtedly provides originality to the study, as far as it restrains from nationally-shaped research paradigms.

As a bearer of a non-Polish national or academic background, Nacheva mainly adheres to the analysis of direct messages in the studied poetry. In essence, she consciously avoids the risks of over-interpretation due to the high degree of Dycki's metaphoricality and allegoricality, but at the same time, the research distances itself from the possible manifestations of irony, self-irony and parody. This quality of the dissertation should be especially taken into account, considering the increased complexity in interpreting this poetry even by native Polish speakers. The author correctly considers the weight of the question, stressing that every interpreter of Dycki is provoked to assume where and how far ironic or affirmative intertextual connections, and in some places even parody, are present in given verses (p. 80). In this sense, the marking and classification of Dycki's ironic layers continues to be a challenge for researchers.

From a general Slavist's perspective, Nacheva's ability to draw continuity between her work and the achievements of Bulgarian Slavists, especially current and former members of the Department of Slavic Literatures of Sofia University, makes an excellent impression. The demonstrated citation culture can serve as an example to future PhD students, how a specific research in the humanities achieves scholarly continuity in the field of Bulgarian literary studies.

### **Evaluation of the scholarly achievements of the author**

In the auto-abstract, the author reveals five contributing points of her work. To them, I would point out the very fact that this thesis offers the first extensive study on Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki in Bulgaria. By this, the poet himself and the main themes in his works undoubtedly raise their status among the Bulgarian academic and reading public. Also there, Nacheva indicates 4 publications on the topic of the dissertation in two collection volumes and two journals.

As a young scholar who graduated from Sofia University only 6 years ago, Venesa Nacheva demonstrates active research, translation and promotion activities. Currently, she is a part-time Assistant Professor at the SU Department of Slavic Literatures. She also has worked as a teacher of Bulgarian language and literature at the SoftUni Buditel High School in Sofia, as well as as an expert in the Education without Backpacks NGO. In 2021–2024, she was a member of three research projects and participated in 7 academic conferences. Since 2018, she has published a total of 11 scholarly articles and reviews. She is a translator of 8 articles from Polish and is a regular contributor to *Literaturen vestnik*. In 2023, together with Dr Christian Yanev, she acted as leading editor of issue 17 of the Philological Forum journal of the SU.

## **Conclusion**

The PhD thesis *Corporeality and Liminality in the Poetry of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki* represents a serious, thorough study on significant, current problems in Slavic literary studies. Keeping strictly within the field of literary studies, the work draws on the achievements of phenomenology, psychoanalysis, gender and queer studies. In view of the undoubted merits of the monograph, as well as the overall academic activity of Venesa Nacheva, it will be my pleasure to vote in favour of awarding her the educational and scientific degree of doctor.

*Kamen Riker*