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THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DISCOURSE IN *AUTOBIOGRAPHY* BY MARKO CEPENKOV

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Abstract: This paper explores the question of autobiographical discourse in the work "Autobiography" by Marko Cepenkov. Firstly, we will determine the basic theoretical settings according to which a text can be said to be autobiographical or it contains autobiographical elements. Then, we will specifically indicate the presence of the explicit and implicit techniques or elements in certain works that are used by the author in addition to which his work can be called an "autobiographical text". Even though his theoretical model will be used, in the same time the inconsistencies in this model will be indicated as well as its modification in the literary works of autobiographical discourse. In that context, the "Autobiography" by Marko Cepenkov will be reviewed, in which, joining the private and the socially-public, depicted through the whole relevant Balkan situation in that time, he created a specific autobiographical – biographical discourse of memoirs. In that manner, the uncertain theoretical status of autobiography will be confirmed, the previous definition of autobiography as "dogmatic" will be unmasked and a notion that autobiography cannot be seen isolated from the other genres will be created, i.e. the existence of hybrid genres will be confirmed.

Keywords: autobiography, autobiographical discourse, Marko Cepenkov, Macedonian literature.

1. Introduction

Before we start reviewing the corpus of works that can be characterized as a diary, perhaps it is best to first look at "what is an autobiography?"

The word is derived from three Greek words with the meaning "autos" (self), "bios" (life) and "graphe" (to write, to note). The autobiography is a style, a way of writing that exists as long as history has recorded. However, the autobiography was not classified as a genre until the late 18th century. In the digital dictionary of Macedonian language, the word autobiography is described as "a literary work in which the author himself describes his life; a description of one's life."¹ In the Oxford Dictionary², the word "autobiography" is explained as "an account of a person's life written by that person: in its autobiography that person gives a vivid description of his childhood. Here, the autobiography is considered as a literary genre: books that are a curious mixture of autobiography and fantasy."

There are many definitions and attempts to disclose the characteristics of the autobiography. The most famous in this regard is Phillipe Lejeune, in his article "Autobiographical pact" (1975), where he also wonders whether it is possible to define autobiography, and gives the following definition: "Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality".³ Just to clarify, here, the term *autobiographical pact* implies a contract between author and reader in which the autobiographer explicitly commits himself or herself not to some impossible historical exactitude but rather to the sincere effort to come to terms with and to understand his or her own life.⁴ He distinguishes four crucial elements according to which the autobiographical texts function: 1. *Form of language* (narrative, in prose), 2. *Subject treated* (individual life, story of personality), 3. *Situation of the author* (the author and the narrator are identical) and 4. *Position of the narrator* (the narrator and the principal character are identical; a retrospective point of the view of the narrative)⁵. In his article, Lejeune distinguishes *explicit* and *implicit* ways to establish an autobiographical pact, and as an opposite he distinguishes *fictional/Romanesque pact*. Also, Lejeune attempts based on all criteria, to mark the boundary between the autobiography and border genres like biography, autobiographical novel, memoir etc. But, the research of many other theorists, particularly in the last twenty years, suggests that autobiography as a genre, increasingly and consciously "borrows" various methodological procedures from imaginative fiction. This primarily results from the need of the writer of the autobiography to express "the truth" about his past, so he "borrows" specific verbal strategies in order to transcend these limitations.⁶

¹Digitalen rečnik na makedonskiot jazik, <http://www.makedonski.info/search>, accessed on 16.01.2014.

²The Oxford Dictionary, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/autobiography?q=autobiography>, Accessed on 16.01.2014

³ Phillipe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, The Autobiographical Pact, Autobiographical Contract, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

https://edocs.uis.edu/Departments/LIS/Course_Pages/LNT501/RN/Rosina's_on-ground_course_storage/Rosina's_LNT_501_Readings/On%20Autobiography%20pp3-30%20by%20Philippe%20Lejeune.pdf, accessed on 16.01.2014

⁴http://www.martinamisweb.com/scholarship_files/Gappmaier_thesis.pdf, accessed on 16.01.2014

⁵Andrijana Kos-Lajtman, Autobiografski diskurs u prozi Višnje Stahuljak, Zbornik radova s međunarodnoga znanstvenoga skupa, Zlatni danci 12, Filozofski fakultet Osijek, Osijek, 2011, str.32.

⁶Louis A.Renza, The Veto of the imagination, A theory of autobiography, <http://sites.dartmouth.edu/larenza/files/2012/08/Renza-1977-The-Veto-of-the-Imagination-A-Theory-of-Autobiography.pdf> accessed on 16.01.2014

2. “Autobiography” by Marko Cepenkov

It seems inevitable to talk about Macedonian autobiographical prose for children and youth and to not take into account the two autobiographies by Grigor Prlicev and Marko Cepenkov in the XIX century, which today are an inevitable reading assignment in primary and secondary education. Therefore, in this paper we review "Autobiography" by Marko Cepenkov.

It is an autobiographical prose that is not divided into chapters.

The manuscript of the *Autobiography* by M. Cepenkov has no title. It contains 45 finely written pages with ink. It is probably written at the suggestion of Dr. Iv. D. Shishmanov, but also following the example of the *Autobiography* by G. Prlicev which was published at the time (SbNU(BAEST), 1894). The existence of this manuscript was firstly announced immediately after the death of Cepenkov by the renowned ethnographer and folklorist from the village Leshko, Gornodzhumajsko, A. P. Stoilov, in Mark Cepenkov's obituary. Overall and "completely by the original text" the Autobiography was published by Dr. Cyril Penushliski (*Autobiography* by Marko K. Cepenkov, "Makedonski jazik", IX, 1-2, Skopje, 1958, 112-145).⁷

The work begins with a proverb by the author himself, proved to be true by older sayings: "Many philosophers are farmers and many farmers became philosophers. This is what our elders say" (303, the underlined part is added by me- JD), in which dominates the author's opinion about the fickleness of life, followed by an immediate illustration for which he gives the example with his father: "And this is the truth, as I have judged many of my friends and enemies, I have mostly wondered about my father, may God forgive me" (303).⁸

The entire text of "Autobiography" by Cepenkov can be conditionally divided into two thematic parts, the first part would include everything that happened in Cepenkov's life up until the banishment of the Greek bishop and the appointment of the bishop from Veles. Since then, Cepenkov is completely devoted to his collecting work which will last the rest of his life.

The narration by Cepenkov begins with the history of his father and the bigger part of his narration Cepenkov dedicates to him. Besides his father, as an individual to which he has paid particular attention is his grandfather, after which his family got their surname: "One day he was wearing white pants, torn up to his ass, and he went out to play with the children in the middle of the village. One saw him and started yelling 'Marko Cepenko (meaning: one with torn pants), Marko cepenko', and from that day he had the nickname Cepenko" (303), and his aunt Dafa known for her great ability to sing songs.

In the first part as the narrator, besides the author (Cepenkov) on several occasions appears his father Kosta, especially in the parts regarding the biography of his father (Marko's grandfather): "My grandfather was from the village Oreovec, Prilep and he led a saddler's life in Prilep. My grandfather didn't live to see me. My father used to tell me stories about my grandfather, how he got his nickname Cepenko... My grandfather was a fond of singing and was a

⁷ „Avtobiografija“, Marko Cepenkov, Materijalni literaturni tvorbi, redactor Blaze Ristovski, Makedonski kniga, Skopje, 1972, str. 392.

⁸ Marko Cepenkov, Avtobiografija, Materijali literaturni tvorbi, redactor Blaze Ristovski, Makedonska kniga, Skopje, 1972.

very loud person... When he would sit at a table, for three days and three nights he sang songs for the in-laws or guests..." (303), and especially narrating parts from his biography that the author later retells to us. Introducing the reader to the text with such prefaces/introductions or conclusions/epilogues, the author uses a literary strategy, used by many writers of autobiographies, and in fact, it represents the meta-textual reflections on the likelihood of their own memory.⁹ With such narrative formulas "he/she told me", the authors of the autobiographies usually tend to reinforce the sense of authentic identity of the narrator, i.e. to highlight the referential code of narration. Since in this first part as focal points in the narrative arise from people from his family circle (grandfather, father, mother, uncles and aunts, especially aunt Dafa who knew a lot of songs), especially the youthful period of his father who didn't show any interest in working, so he wandered through Wallachia (Romania), Serbia through Germany, and later when he worked as a doctor he was called "Kosta Cepenkov – doctor to the poor, because he didn't take money from the poor, so we can say that this part is closer to the biographical-memoir type of discourse.

Throughout the text, Cepenkov gives us the names and surnames of people from a wider social circle, some who remained anonymous, but also some who have left a mark on history at the time of Renaissance, names of magazines and events (Dimitar Miladinov, the teacher Hadji Pop Kostadin Dingov from the village Varosh, the teacher Naum Hadzhov, the Russian -Turkish war (i.e. the Crimean war), the Hungarian bourgeois and democratic evolution from 1848-1849, the bishop Metodii Kusev, i.e. Todor Jovchev Kusev, a prominent fighter against Graecism in Prilep, Kuzman Shapkarev, Rakovski, the teachers Ico Prcan, N. Ganche, Adamche Zugraf, Kone Cheshlar, the teacher Joan Dejkov, the Constantinople weekly magazine "Zornica" (Cepenkov was one of its representatives and spreaders) the magazine "Chitalishte"...), the brothers Pop Spirkovi (traders who moved from Prilep to Sofia), Josif Kovacev, Ephrem Karanov, Ivan Shishmanov, Dimitar Apostolov Matov, Atanas Iliev, Stefan Stambolov, Kosta Shahov and others.

From the first to the last page of the text echoes an idea towards which Cepenkov aspired all his life – the science/learning, although his desire does not find an approval with his father, and he often interrupts schooling: "I had a great desire to learn, but barren poverty does not allow it when you have not a single penny to buy a book, whether it is your will or not you will learn a trade in order to make a living" (316), "Many times I have told my father, why didn't you give me more time to go to a teacher, to learn it all, instead you left me like this" (316), "Come on, son, enough studying, he said, you are not going to be a bishop, so why are you so eager to learn" (316), "... that is why I tell you not to hold on so tight to a book, but a trade, learn a trade because it provides the bread, not the book, it gives you nothing" (317), "Despite everything I knew about these things, I still considered myself illiterate, like I do not know any grammar. Ah, poor me, I kept asking myself, how to learn, to be learned...? Oh father, father, why did you tore me from the teacher and did not leave me to learn?" (323). The unfinished education will later cause him additional difficulties, especially when in Bulgaria he will be forced to rewrite the collected materials. Regarding this, there is one more thing that troubles Prlicev, and that is the inexperienced teachers, especially the assimilation policy that at the time of the Renaissance the neighboring Balkan countries led in order to assimilate the Macedonian people through scholarships for young people, sending Serbian, Greek and Bulgarian teachers and reverends,

⁹ Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Remembering the Past in Words and Pictures: How Autobiographical Stories Become Picturebooks*, Published in: Colomer, Teresa/Kümmerling-Meibauer, Bettina/Silva-Díaz, Cecilia (Hgg.): *New Directions in Picturebook Research*. New York: Routledge, p.5, http://homepages.uni-tuebingen.de/bettina.kuemmerling-meibauer/essays/Remembering_the_Past.pdf, accessed on 18.01.2014

priests, bishops, performing the teaching in schools and the religious service in churches in Greek or Bulgarian language: "The schoolroom was this one porch, where all of us learned sitting on bare planks, with our legs crossed, one child next to the other, while the teacher, sitting on one tailor's table, also with crossed legs, holding a long branch to reach far and to beat us... (314), "It was a very painful hitting me without any guilt, but that was a habit, you will sit quiet and will get your hands smacked with a branch... (315), and in this context are also mentioned the priests, especially in several narrative sequences the priest Trajko who "knew nothing about a book" (317).

These facts are of great importance not only for getting acquainted with the author's biography, but also with his development as a writer, and especially to introduce the socio-cultural, economic and political situation in Macedonia in the dark XIX century. At the same time, they reveal the inner joyful state of Cepenkov as a result of the expulsion of the Greek bishop: "I have seen enough, since my soul is joyful and peaceful, all my efforts were not in vain. I will truly die happy and I hope God will forgive me many sins, because I have worked for free and I have deserted my work only and just only to help the church within all my power together with all my companions" (330).

In the second part, *Autobiography* very vividly shows us the hardships of Cepenkov after his arrival in Sofia and the efforts to print the collected materials. Given the fact that in its narrative discourse, the author repeatedly inserts/interpolates stories ("story within a story"), beliefs, legends, prayers, the narration by his father Kosta about his adventurous life etc., it can be said that on moments this is a polidiscursive autobiography.¹⁰

3. Closing Remarks

Thus, we can conclude that this is a text that does not leave the slightest room for any doubts in its autobiographical type, i.e., just like Lejeune would say, the *autobiographical pact* is consistently implemented. The author achieves this by using explicit and implicit processes. In fact, even the covers of the book bear the name of Marko Cepenkov, in the first chapter he gives information about his parents, grandfather, family. The narration is usually in the first person, with the exception of those episodes that his father narrates, and which are related to the history of the grandfather and the history of his own life in his youth. This means that there is an identity between the narrator and character, which is identical to the character of the author (author = narrator = character/protagonist) i.e. Cepenkov is not only an author, but also a narrator of the events in which he participates. Explicit acknowledgment of the equivalence of the names is found in several places in the text when the author addresses to someone else: "my son Marko", (328), "Mr. Marko" (324) and others. Thus, it seems, all factors are met for a text to be called autobiographical, according to Lejeune.

The theme in "Autobiography" is the author's life. The author concentrates on individuals and events from his life that were of the utmost importance: the father, the grandfather, the school, the desire for learning, interruption of schooling, the early rewriting work, the meetings with Dimitar Miladinov and Kuzman Shapkarev, the departure to Sofia, publishing a part of the collected materials.

¹⁰Andrijana Kos-Lajtman, Autobiografski diskurs u prozi Višnje Stahuljak, Zbornik radova s međunarodnoga znanstvenoga skupa, Zlatni danci 12, Filozofski fakultet Osijek, Osijek, 2011, str.43.

Given the fact that the narrator/character starts the narration by giving his own genealogy, information about ancestors and parents, and ends with data about the place and the period in which the autobiography was written: "Sofia, 1896" (345), at the time of the writing of the text, its author was sixty-seven years old (born 1829 – dies 1920). From the abovementioned, following the criteria for treatment of the category of time, it can be concluded that the text can be qualified as chronologically bounded autobiography, beginning with the genealogy of the ancestors (unaware part), through the earliest childhood (aware part) and lasts until his old age.

Throughout the "Autobiography" a retrospective narration is present (retrospective point of view) and the plot flows linearly, it covers the period from the earliest childhood of the author until his old age.

Finally, if we orientate according to the classification of genres by Lejeune in his "Autobiographical pact", and given the abovementioned for consistent and full match of the autobiographical contract between the author, narrator and character (completely identical), the narration is in first person ("I" form), it can be concluded that this is a classic autobiography, autobiography in the narrow sense of the word or autodiegetic autobiography, especially in the second part of the "Autobiography" where the model author = narrator = protagonist can be found.¹¹

A certain dilemma about this qualification can be seen in the first part of the text in the episodes in which as the narrator appears Marko's father - Kosta when he retells his life to the narrator/Marko. In that case, we may consider the option under which the "Autobiography" contains a possible dual model, but only in the first part of the text, because Cepenkov retells us what he heard from his father:

- a) author (Marko) = narrator (Marko) ≠ character (the father Kosta)
- b) Author (Marko) = narrator (Marko) ≠ character (Marko's grandfather)

In both cases, the section narrator ≠ character (the narrator is not identical with the character/protagonist), the narration is no longer in "I" form, i.e. in the first person, but in the third person, which is closer to what Lejeune calls a *classic biography (heterodiegetic)*. By merging the private and the socially-public together, painted throughout the entire relevant situation at that time on the Balkan, the author, Marko Cepenkov in his "Autobiography" created a specific autobiographical - biographical memoir discourse.

As it was previously mentioned, the text contains several narrated episodes from the life of the father, which disputes the nature of this text. This is nothing unusual, and even Lejeune himself realized that there is great uncertainty about the status of the autobiography. Therefore, redressing to the *Autobiographical pact* (1982)¹², Lejeune, realizing the unsecure theoretical status of the autobiography, disproves the previously given definition about autobiography as "dogmatic" and admits that the autobiography cannot be viewed in isolation from other genres, and that hybrid genres also exist.

¹¹ <http://english4321.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/philippe-lejeune-the-autobiographical-contract.pdf>, p. 196, accessed on 18.01.2014

¹² Lejeune, Philippe. 'The Autobiographical Pact (bis)' 1982. In: Philippe Lejeune. On Autobiography. Ed. Paul John Eakin. Trans. Katherine Leary. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

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АУТОБИОГРАФСКИ ДИСКУРС У „АУТОБИОГРАФИЈИ“ МАРКА ЦЕПЕНКОВА

Сажетак: Овај рад истражује питање аутобиографског дискурса у делу "Аутобиографија" од Марка Цепенкова. Прво, ћемо одредити основне теоријске поставке према којима се за неки текст може рећи да је аутобиографски или да садржи аутобиографске елементе. Затим, ћемо посебно указати на присуство експлицитних и имплицитних техника или елемената у појединим радовима који се користе од стране аутора, према којима се његов рад може назвати "аутобиографски текст". Иако ће се користити његов теоријски модел, у исто време ће бити назначене недоследности у овом моделу као и његове модификације у књижевним делима аутобиографског дискурса. У том контексту, ће бити разгледана "Аутобиографија" од Марка Цепенкова, у којој, као спој

приватног и друштвено-јавног, приказана је релевантна ситуација на Балкану у то време, и на тај начин он је створио специфичан аутобиографски - биографски дискурс са мемоарским елементима. На тај начин, несигурни теоријски статус аутобиографије ће бити потврђен, претходне дефиниције о аутобиографији биће раскринкани као "догматски" и потврдиће се да аутобиографија не може бити изолована од осталих жанрова, или тачније, биће потврђено постојање хибридних жанрова.

Кључне речи: аутобиографија, аутобиографски дискурс, Марко Цепенков, македонска литература.