

## 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 whether it contains only autobiographical elements. Then, we will specifically indicate the presence of the explicit and implicit techniques or elements used by Cepenkov that allow his work to be called an “autobiographical text”. Even though his theoretical model will be used, at 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 of 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 the notion that autobiography cannot be seen isolated from the other genres will be created, i.e. the existence of hybrid genres will be confirmed.*

**Key words:** *autobiography, autobiographical discourse, Marko Cepenkov, Macedonian literature.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

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

The word is derived from three Greek words with the meanings: “autos” (self), “bios” (life) and “grape” (to write, to note). The autobiography is a style, a way of writing that has existed as long as history has been recorded. However, the autobiography was not classified as a genre until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the Online dictionary of the Macedonian language, the word autobiography is described as “a literary work in which

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the author himself describes his life; a description of one's life".<sup>1</sup> In the Oxford Dictionary<sup>2</sup>, the word "autobiography" is explained as "an account of a person's life written by that person". In his 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 have been many definitions and attempts to disclose the characteristics of the autobiography. The most famous in this regard is Phillippe Lejeune, in his article "Autobiographical pact" (1975), in which he also wonders whether it is possible to define the 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".<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> He distinguishes four crucial elements according to which 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)<sup>5</sup>. In his article, Lejeune distinguishes *explicit* and *implicit* ways to establish an autobiographical pact, and as a contrast he distinguishes a *fictional/Romanesque pact*. Also, Lejeune attempts, based on all of the 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 is primarily a result of 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.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY MARKO CEPENKOV

It seems impossible 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 from the 19<sup>th</sup> century which today are an inevitable reading assignment in primary and secondary education. Therefore, in this paper we review *Autobiography* by Marko Cepenkov.

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Phillippe 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](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.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.martinamisweb.com/scholarship\\_files/Gappmaier\\_thesis.pdf](http://www.martinamisweb.com/scholarship_files/Gappmaier_thesis.pdf). Accessed on 16.01.2014.

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

<sup>6</sup> Louis 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.

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 pages, finely written with ink. It was 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 first announced immediately after the death of Cepenkov by the renowned ethnographer and folklorist, A. P. Stoilov, from the village Leshko, Gornodzhumajsko, 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).<sup>7</sup>

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" (p. 303, the underlined part is added by JD), in which the author's opinion about the fickleness of life dominates, followed by an immediate illustration for which he gives the example of 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" (p. 303).<sup>8</sup>

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

Cepenkov begins with the history of his father, to whom he dedicates the bigger part of his narration. Besides his father, an individual who is given particular attention is his grandfather, after whom 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" (p. 303).

In the first part, his father, Kosta, also appears as the narrator, on several occasions, especially where it relates to 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 fond of singing and was a 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... (p. 303)

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 meta-textual reflections on the likelihood of their own memory.<sup>9</sup> With such narrative formulas as "he/she told me", the authors of autobiographies usually

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

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

<sup>9</sup> 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](http://homepages.uni-tuebingen.de/bettina.kuemmerling-meibauer/essays/Remembering_the_Past.pdf). Accessed on 18.01.2014.

tend to reinforce the sense of authentic identity of the narrator, i.e. to highlight the referential code of narration. In the first part, as focal points in the narrative, people from his family circle arise (grandfather, father, mother, uncles and aunts, especially aunt Dafa who knew a lot of songs). Their story is especially concentrated on the youthful period of his father, who didn't show any interest in working, so he wandered through Wallachia (Romania), Serbia and 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. 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 left a mark on history at the time of the 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 distributors of the magazine "Chitalishte"...), the brothers Pop Spirkovi (traders who moved from Prilep to Sofia), Josif Kovacev, Ephrem Karanov, Ivan Shishmanov, Dimitar Apostolov Matov, Atanas Iliiev, 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 – that of science/learning, although his desire does not find approval with his father, who often interrupts his 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... 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... Come on, son, enough studying, he said, you are not going to be a bishop, so why are you so eager to learn ... 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. (pp. 316-317)

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 tear me from the teacher and did not leave me to learn? (p. 323)

The unfinished education will later cause him additional difficulties, especially when in Bulgaria he will be forced to rewrite the collected materials. In this respect, there is one more thing that troubles Prlicev, and that is inexperienced teachers, especially in the assimilation policy that the neighbouring Balkan countries led at the time of the Renaissance in order to assimilate the Macedonian people through scholarships for young people. Serbian, Greek and Bulgarian teachers and reverends, priests and bishops were sent to carry out the teaching in schools and the religious services in churches in Greek or Bulgarian:

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 ... It was 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. (pp. 314-315)

In this context, the priests are also mentioned, especially the priest Trajko, who “knew nothing about a book” (p. 317) and is mentioned in several narrative sequences.

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 19<sup>th</sup> 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. (p. 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 there are moments when this is a polydiscursive autobiography.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. CLOSING REMARKS

Thus, we can conclude that this is a text that does not leave the slightest room for any doubts as to 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, and in the first chapter he gives information about his parents, grandfather and 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 his 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 the author, but also the 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 someone else: “my son Marko” (p. 328), “Mr. Marko” (p. 324) and others. Thus, it seems, all the necessary 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: his father, grandfather, school, desire for learning, the interruption of his schooling, his early rewriting work, the meetings with Dimitar Miladinov and Kuzman Shapkarev, the departure to Sofia and publishing a part of the collected materials.

Given the fact that the narrator/character starts the narration by giving his own genealogy and information about his ancestors and parents, and ends with data about the place and the period in which the autobiography was written: “Sofia, 1896” (p. 345), at the time of writing the text, its author was sixty-seven years old (born 1829 – died 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 a chronologically bounded autobiography,

<sup>10</sup> Andrijana Kos-Lajtmán, *Autobiografski diskurs u prozi Višnje Stahuljak*, Zbornik radova s međunarodnoga znanstvenoga skupa, Zlatni danci 12, Filozofski fakultet Osijek, Osijek, 2011, str.43.

beginning with the genealogy of the ancestors (unaware part), through the earliest childhood (aware part) and lasting until his old age.

Throughout *Autobiography* a retrospective narration is present (retrospective point of view) and the plot flows linearly, covering 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 a 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, with autobiography in the narrow sense of the word or autodiegetic autobiography, especially in the second part, where the model author = narrator = protagonist can be found.<sup>11</sup>

A certain dilemma about this qualification can be seen in the first part of the text in the episodes in which Marko's father – Kosta – appears as the narrator 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 the "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 in the Balkans, the author, Marko Cepenkov in his *Autobiography* created a specific autobiographical/biographical memoir discourse.

As previously mentioned, the text contains several narrated episodes from the life of the father, which dispute 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, Lejeune, realizing the unsecure theoretical status of the autobiography, redresses his previously given definition of autobiography in the *Autobiographical pact* (1982)<sup>12</sup>, thus admitting that it cannot be viewed in isolation from other genres, and that hybrid genres also exist.

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

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## **AUTOBIOGRAFSKI DISKURS U „AUTOBIOGRAFIJI“ MARKA CEPENKOVA**

*Ovaj rad istražuje pitanje autobiografskog diskursa u delu "Autobiografija" Marka Cepenkova. Prvo, odredićemo osnovne teorijske postavke prema kojima se za neki tekst može reći da je autobiografski ili da sadrži autobiografske elemente. Zatim, posebno ćemo ukazati na prisustvo eksplicitnih i implicitnih tehnika ili elemenata u pojedinim radovima koji se koriste od strane autora, prema kojima se njegov rad može nazvati "autobiografski tekst". Iako će se koristiti njegov teorijski model, u isto vreme će biti naznačene nedoslednosti u ovom modelu kao i njegove modifikacije u književnim delima autobiografskog diskursa. U tom kontekstu će biti sagledana "Autobiografija" Marka Cepenkova, u kojoj je, kao spoj privatnog i društveno-javnog, prikazana relevantna situacija na Balkanu u to vreme, i način na koji je on stvorio specifičan autobiografski - biografski diskurs sa memoarskim elementima. Na taj način, nesigurni teorijski status autobiografije će biti potvrđen, prethodne definicije o autobiografiji biće raskrinkane kao "dogmatske" i potvrdiće se da autobiografija ne može biti izolovana od ostalih žanrova, ili tačnije, biće potvrđeno postojanje hibridnih žanrova.*

Ključne reči: *autobiografija, autobiografski diskurs, Marko Cepenkov, makedonska literatura.*