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**FAMILIAR LETTER AND ITS GENERIC BOUNDARIES**

**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to investigate the nature and generic properties of familiar letter in literature overall, and more specifically in the 19th-century Macedonian literature. In the absence of more detailed accounts, I strive to analyse the character of Miladinov brothers’ epistolary, in order to re-examine the questions of factuality, fiction and the development of fictional discourse in the realm of diverse historical accounts, originating from this period. According to the immanent sociological approach of Hans Robert Jauss, which I previously explained in several of my texts on similar topic, I will try to underline the sociological dimension of familiar letter as a genre, and put it into an appropriate historical perspective. The results of this investigation should also enable a more diverse approach to this period of Macedonian literature, as well as an overview of its specific position in the world literary complex. It is expected that this analysis will also bring about questions of creativity and its specific status in the light of tradition and modernity.

**Keywords:** familiar letter, Miladinov brothers, fictional discourse, genre, creativity.

1. **Epistolary tradition and its generic properties**

The beginning of epistolary tradition and its popularity can be traced as early as Cicero’s letters, i.e. in the so-called “neglegentia epistolarum”. These letters actually pinpoint the difference between epistolary discourse and rhetorical prose (Mills Todd III, 1999, p. 19), throughout the main specifics of letter writing – its common, everyday language (“the language of conversation”). Ever since its beginnings, the epistolary discourse is underlined by the intimate and familiar communication, element that highlights various different generic properties of epistolary novel. This aspect can also be seen as a kind of overstepping into the boundaries of essay; although essay’s unique nature can be understood exclusively in terms of its problematic/scientific language. The problem of intimate conversation can also be seen in Seneca’s and Pliny’s works, as representatives of Roman epistolary tradition.

There are many sorts of letter. But there is one unmistakable sort, which actually caused letter writing to be invented in the first place, namely the sort intended to give people in other places any information which for our or their sakes they ought to know... There are two other sorts of letter which I like very much, one intimate and humorous, the other serious and profound (Cicero, apud Mills Todd, 1999, p.19).

In the Imperial Rome, the cultivation of this genre was executed by different means. Firstly, the intention of writing and reading the letter was primarily intrinsic, as a kind of practice performed in circles of intimate friends. Soon afterwards, these letters were made popular by professional copyists, and they enabled their circulation among people that did not belong to that social class or social/political circle. For Mills Todd, Demetrius was the key figure of this period. He made several points about epistolary style that served as guidelines for everyone wishing to engage in this kind of communication. Demetrius clearly differentiates the philosophical and the epistolary discourse, underlining that the latter should not be a philosophical treatise, resembling the form of epistolary discourse (Demetrius, 1902, p. 177). A letter should be constructed in such a way, that we feel liberated to discern its proper subject and its expulsion of unnecessary or inappropriate content. These aspects enable letter writing to be seen as a mixture of two incompatible and different styles – the elevated (graceful) and the ordinary (plain) style. Mills Todd states that the highest point in epistolary development can be seen after its didactic use in the Latin Middle Ages, namely in the period of the Renaissance. Erasmus is one of the first authors who enabled the development of a certain form of fictionality in letters, especially since “the Humanist, like the Ancient, made letter writing a self-conscious act” (Mills Todd, 1999, p. 22).

Relatively different approach to the problem of epistolarity can be seen in Thomas O. Beebee treatise about epistolary fiction and its tradition from 16th to 19th century. He underlines the fact that in Greek and Roman antiquity, epistolary genre was viewed as a conversation, which clearly indicates the impossibility to differentiate these works from everyday dialogue and to perceive them as separate genre. This statement can be revised, since Demetrius already indicated the difference between dialogue and letter writing. However, O. Beebee illustrates this fact by using Alexander Pope’s term “talking on paper” (O. Beebee, 1999, p. 1). The 18th-century understanding of the significance of letter writing also purports this statement – Oratory is seen as a mother of two daughters: the noble literary discourse and the letter writing, which is observed as a pragmatic and informative discourse. This analogy irrevocably illustrates the necessity of literary background for proper understanding and creating the letters, which are not separate from literary tradition.

Consequently, we can trace the birth of epistolary novel in literary salons of the seventeen-century France, designed to shape literary taste and envisage the readership through the practice of public reading of the letters. Throughout this process, we also witness the (trans) formation of epistolary genre, since it did not confine itself to private matters anymore, circulating among salon peers. Epistolary tradition in France is the most developed, because its relationship with several political movements from this period transformed it into an active tool for enhancing the social communication (Tarle, 1982, pp. 264-272). Life in famous salons, that stimulated social exchange and development, can be seen through the classicistic concept of conversation, understood as an exchange of ideas and a sort of enjoyment. On the other hand, this period in Germany can be seen in the light of political ambiguity, and that is the reason why diary and similar works prevail in this region. Letter writing is something that can and should be seen as geographic and cultural specifics.

Significant effort has been made to properly distinguish the types of letter writing and their unique properties. Mills Todd proposes the English term “familiar” as a word that derives from the Latin *familiaris*, which means “friendly”, a notion that has been used since the 18th century (1999, p. 8). This kind of letters does not only reveal writer’s character, but also the quality of friendly exchange of ideas and valorizations. Todd highlights the author’s persona as a main element of letter exchange. Additionally, he adds several other aspects of the genre “familiar letter”: discernible interest in literature and friendship, specific play with words, and descriptions made in literary style, as well as mild verbal lasciviousness.

Similar elaboration of the term “familiar” can also be noted in Mikhail Bakhtin’s typology of speech genres, which are actually verbal patterns, available to every human being. They are the means for learning everyone’s mother tongue (Bakhin, 2000, pp.84-85). Bakhtin proposes the classification of primary and secondary genres, viewed as a distinction between the simple (protean) and the complex. Primary genres can be basically seen in almost every form of everyday communication, as well as in simple literary dialogues, sermons, etc. Complex genres are primarily literary – novel, drama, and every type of cultural communication, which also include simple, colloquial forms. Furthermore, this classification is enriched with the differentiation between familiar and intimate genres. The latter are underlined by the expressiveness of their discourse and the close relationship between the participants (namely, the ones that are used when we are communicating with family members). On the other hand, familiar genres are the types that successfully undermined the official culture of the church in the Middle Ages, subversive and specified by their constant effort to impose their social power over the dominant cultural voices. In this context, we can add that generic exclusivity of familiar genres can be seen in the light of their specific structure that enhances the dialogical contact between the writer and the reader, implied or not.

1. **Theoretical framework of epistolary discourse**

Some of the most profound ideas about the nature and the elements of what the term “discourse” designates were made by the French linguist Emile Benveniste. His well-elaborated theory can be summarized by depicting the two basic elements of each discourse – speaker or writer (“I”) and its addressee, or the reader (“You”) (Benveniste, 1974, pp. 82-83). Benveniste thoroughly investigates their interchangeable position, which is also a sign of their mutual connectedness, stating that the writer in one instance can easily become a reader in the next, and vice versa. This kind of relationship is also underlined by the very nature of discourse itself, since it is clearly differentiated, on linguistic level, from speech as a grammatical phenomenon (Benvenist, 1975, p. 33). Taking into account the active position of each element of the discursive act, Benveniste actually proposes a different kind of linguistics, more pragmatically and sociologically oriented.

Emile Benveniste’s statements are a kind of methodological basis, on which Janet Gurkin Altman theoretically analyses the problem of epistolarity. She envisages three characteristics of epistolary discourse: specific relationship of the “I” and its partner; present tense, as a formal ground on which past and future events come into being; and the so-called “temporal polyvalence”, where the difference between the moment of writing/reading of the letter and the actual time of the events can be discerned. Through the simple observation of the nature of letter, we can become aware of the stability and the fixity of the proposed writer of such text, and its necessary connectedness with the reality of addressee’s existence. One major characteristics of their relationship is the fact that this addressee (the “You”) in the text can be clearly observed, it is not something that require an additional analysis, since it is actually a product of the existence of that “I” in the text. This idea can be demonstrated by Gurkin Altman statement that “to write a letter is to map one’s coordinates – temporal, spatial, emotional, intellectual – in order to tell someone else where one is located at a particular time” (1982, p. 119). Throughout the classical example of epistolary fiction, namely “The Portugal Letters”, Gurkin Altman underlines the kind of loving relationship between “I” and “You” in the process of writing letters, indicating the suspense and the necessity for proper answer.

On the other hand, the vividness of this unusual relation can be depicted by the constant presence of “the writer’s reference point”. In this respect, Gurkin Altman clearly points out to several generic differences between the letter and the memoire, especially since memoire’s main characteristics is the active use of preterit, or past tenses in general. This kind of alteration between “Erzählzeit” (time of narration) and “erzählte Zeit” (narrated time), made clear by Käte Hamburger (Hamburger, 1976) and other literary critics, actually depict the way present tense is irrevocably connected to past or future. This effective interdependence can also be seen through Gurkin Altman’s explanation of “temporal polyvalence”, thus shedding light to various ways by which the time of writing and reading the letter can activate diverse aspects of memory. It is the constant process of making past present or the illusion of present moment that makes epistolary genre unique and innovative. The importance of temporal framing, as well as writer-reader relationship, can be seen through the specific case of fictional letters, especially in cases when this relation is relative. If the context is empty, the actual and the proposed reader can only rely on editorial notes, or some enigmatic allusions or statements.

1. **Genre classification of 19th-century Macedonian literature**

Macedonian 19th century is one of the most specific and problematic periods in the development of Macedonian literature and culture overall. Geographically and politically, Macedonia in the 19th century is still under the same cultural influences that prevailed in the former periods (they also pinpoint its specific position in the Ottoman Empire). These circumstances determine literary development, and point to the reasons for its modest literary production. The prominent critic and literary historian, Naume Radichevski, analyses this situation from a literary-historical point of view, and claims that at the beginning of the 19th century, “we discern more vivid twitches from the former byzantine centers, and now more aggressively toned Greek cultural centers, as well as a more active turn towards the closer and more distant Slavic regions” (Радически 2012: 9). The progress of Macedonian literature is clearly hindered by its unique position in the Ottoman Empire, which can also be seen through the two parallel processes, or two literary generations (Поленаковиќ 1989a: 7). Namely, Macedonian literature until the 1850s is actually quite different from the one that develops in the next decades, since the elements of church sermons begin to diminish and we witness a true process of creating a specific form of authorship.

In one of my previous texts on this topic, I have made an attempt to clearly classify prose genres in 19th century Macedonian literature. This kind of undertaking is actually a problematic one, since it presupposes a proper understanding of what Hans Robert Jauss calls “the historical notion of continuity”. This phrase implies that in every cultural system, there is a mutual development, as well as successiveness of genres, fact that does not always involve the notion of evolutionism. In the analysis, called “commutational probe”, Jauss illustrates the differences between the medieval epic, the novel and the novella. According to this analogy, in 19th-century Macedonian literature we can clearly differentiate the relationship between three specific genres, originating from this period – the sermon (profane), biography (autobiography) and the novella (short story) (Тасевска 2019, p. 313). Taking into account all the discrete elements of certain literary act – the relationship between the author and the reader, style and form of discourse, the level of fictionality etc., in Macedonian cultural context we can discern the profound connection between the folklore model of the world and the recently created authorship of specific kind. A proper example of this process can be illustrated by the background, on which the birth of Macedonian short story happened. It generally consists of legends, fairy tales and stories with religious and folklore thematic. On the other hand, one truly important aspect of this process is the reception, which creates certain differences in the way literary works are created (and read). Consequently, we can note the specific didactic function of sermons that through decades formed the historical point of view in (auto)biographies. It is the aspect of fictionality that develops most slowly and specifically in Macedonian literature, and its early impulses can be seen in Macedonian short novels.

1. **Letter writings by Miladinov brothers**

The role of Miladinov brothers in Macedonian cultural and literary history cannot be explained by simply putting their main works in a historical perspective. It is actually the dominant cultural context that enhances their activity. Dimtrija Miladinov’s education under Greek cultural influences in Struga and Ioannina makes him prone to diverse cultural contacts (Greek, Italian, French etc.). Since his important meeting with the Russian scholar Victor Ivanovich Grigorovich in 1845, Dimitrija changes his attitude towards Slavic culture and language. However, a significant turn in his lecturing style and political views can be seen as early as 1856 (Поленаковиќ, 1989b, p. 31), after his work abode in Herzegovina, Slavonia and Serbia. On the other hand, these circumstances also influence his brother’s education, which can be seen in the light of Konstantin’s stay in Moscow, where he started his philological studies. If we put into perspective the activities of these two authors, we can note that Dimitrija is mainly a teacher that makes a huge impact on his brother’s development, while Konstantin is the most refined lyrical poet and the inaugurator of true lyrical poetry in Macedonian literature. Both are significant cultural workers in the field of national enlightenment, arousing people’s consciousness about Macedonian Slavic and nationally different historical background.

One of the main reasons why the analyses of epistolary genre are quite rare in Macedonian literary criticism, I argue, is the unresolved and specific position of factual and fictional in certain types of texts, since there are not enough profound sociological and cultural analyses of 19th-century Macedonian literature. Macedonian writers from this period actually use letters to involve in different kinds of relationship, mainly political or ideological, with certain prominent figures, and this fact can be illustrated by different examples, originating from the beginning of the 19th century. However, Miladinov brothers’ letter writings are a specific and vivid example of the existing ideological circle of co-workers, restlessly engaged into the process of national enlightenment, which is being executed by different means in the 1850s. We should note that Miladinov brothers’ letters were published by the Bulgarian academy of sciences in 1964, on the centenary of the first publication of Miladinov brothers’ Anthology of folklore songs.

One of the main aspects of their letter writings is the importance of the time of narration, since all of the letters are envisioning different historical background and point to a unique historical perception. In addition to this, it can be noted that in every instance we can see the writer’s endeavor to represent events as being simultaneous to the process of letter-writing, which is logically unobtainable. However, this kind of specific position of the writer can be noted in Dimitrija Miladinov’s letter to Alexander Egzarh, written in 1852:

One Russian traveler, Viktor Ivanovich Grigorovich, professor in Kazan, was truly surprised when he saw Slavic books in Ohrid, in my birthplace Struga, in Prespa etc., since Europeans were not acquainted with us, the “Voulgaron”, and they perceived us as a nation of a different kind. When I was teaching students about Thucydides in Ohrid, Grigorovich cried out emotionally: “Oh, you are our brothers?” He could not believe that Slavic language is our mother tongue and our tradition (Трайков, 1964, p. 20).

In this context, we can see the writer’s intention to inform the factual reader (Egzarh) about the circumstances regarding the education in Macedonia, as well as about the specific process of national enlightenment. The Greek expression “Voulgaron” in Bulgarian criticism is seen as a denomination for Bulgarians, but if we take into account the context in which Dimitirija uses this term, as well as its specific alterations – “Slavovulgaron”, “Slavovulgari”, we can understand the specific meaning of this word, which actually refers to the Slavic nature of people in Macedonia. Blaze Koneski depicts these labels as an effort to differentiate Macedonian language and culture from the Greek one, since in this historical epoch, to say that something is Macedonian means that it belongs to the Greek culture (Конески, 1987, pp. 17-18). We can use several of subsequent Dimitrija’s statements as an argument of this process. In several of his letters, Dimitrija writes about Eftim Dimzov, a son of the famous Dimzov family, stating that his origin is “Bulgarian”, as an attempt to indicate the specific position of Slavic people in the Ottoman Empire. Bulgarian critics underline the fact that Dimitrija talks about “Makedono-Bulgaria”, thus noting the connectideness of these two regions. However, if we take into account the nature of slavophilism as a dominant cultural movement in this period, the expression “Makedono-Bulgarian” or “Bulgaro-Macedonian” obtains a different kind of meaning. It clearly refers to these friendly and collaborative peoples, which are not regarded as politically or culturally identical. Blaze Koneski explains this fact even more thoroughly, indicating the concurrent national movements in Macedonia and Bulgaria in this period.

Throughout these letters, we can see the main figures of Miladinov brothers’ ideological circle – friars from the Zograf monastery, Petar Ivanovich Sevastianov, Robev brothers, Georgi Sava Rakovski etc. All of these historical figures are demonstrators of the main spiritual and ideological horizon of Miladinov brothers’ works and their activity, underlining the unique quality of Macedonian Slavic tradition. Haralampie Polenakovik (1989b: 310) depicts this process through one specific and most indicative historical fact – Vasil D. Cholakov’s letter to Franjo Rachki, two of the most important foreign figures in Macedonia. In this letter, Bulgarian Cholakov affirms the fact that previous to publishing the Anthology of folklore songs, he gave Konstantin hundred songs from East Bulgaria, so that he could use the term “Bulgarian songs” in the title of his work. Additionally, most of Dimirtija’s letters are written in Greek and they clearly demonstrate his intention to differentiate his country Macedonia from the alleged Greek region, since European historical perspective of that time treated it as such.

A specific aspect of epistolarity is the writer’s effort to represent events as being lived or experienced in the present moment, that moment which should be revived in reader’s consciousness. It is also a kind of imaginary act of evoking the future throughout the past circumstances, or their temporal correlation with the present moment. This phenomenon can be seen in one of Dimitrija’s letters, which is actually retrieved from Rajko Zhinzifov’s biography of Miladinov brothers. The writer of this letter, Dimitrija, expresses his gratitude to the citizens of Kukus (Kilkis), since they have summoned him to continue his teaching activity. However, this letter is written one year before his engagement in Kilkis, and transmits his fascination with people’s aspiration to actively use vernacular language in their schools and studies. The co-relation between past and future in present circumstances can be noted in the segments where Dimitirija points out to the effects of memory (or the act of remembering), considering all the aspects of Slavic heritage in Macedonia (in Kostur/Kastoria, East Macedonia, Debarca, Ohrid etc.). The structure of this letter is conveying Dimitrija’s love towards Russian language, as well as his consistent effort to re-affirm the necessity to differentiate Macedonian cultural heritage as specific and unique, something which is constantly undermined by Greek political and educational predominance. This fact is highlighted significantly in writer’s consciousness and self-awareness, since he actually learned Slavic language just recently.

I am jumping out of joy when I see your aspirations and love towards our mother tongue, especially since most of our youths and clerks have decided to learn Slavic language with devotion, so in couple of months we will be able to hear the holy liturgy in our old language. Greeks hold you in contempt! You have your pride and you should make Slavs proud! Greeks reject our Slavic-Pelasgian language, one of the most old and rich languages, calling it barbarian language! (Трайков, 1964, p. 39)

In several segments of this letter, we can see the important “instrumental generative role” of the reader (Gurkin Altman, 1982, p. 88), structured and constructed by the writer. The effective, internal readers are actually the ones referred as “my loved ones”, close friends that are ideological points of resistance, regarding the dominant cultural perspective. The liveliness of this letters conveys the absurd attempt to re-connect the time of experiencing the events (which is past) with the present moment or the reality of letter writing. Also, it demonstrates Dimitrija’s future hopes and aspirations as present. Although there are not clear and unmistakable references or anticipations of Dimitrija’s future engagement in Kilkis, we are more than aware of this possibility, especially if his specific function as people’s tribune is taken into account.

In Macedonian and foreign literary criticism that follows Macedonian criticism’s main conceptions (for example Goran Kalogera), Konstantin Miladinov is seen as one of the most nationally conscious authors of this epoch. This conclusion can be derived from his biography, especially from the two events he experienced in Ukraine, and more vividly from his letter, written in 1859 and addressed to Georgi Sava Rakovski. They started to exchange letters since Rakovski wrote several times to Konstantin, although these letters are not saved in the archives. Konstantin clearly affirms his ideas about the unstoppable process of national enlightenment, which is one of the main aspects of their friendly, familiar correspondence.

On the other hand, his letters reveal several main figures of Macedonian enlightenment, namely Bulgarian cultural workers, underlined as close collaborators (e.g. Vasil D. Cholakov). The fact that these colleagues are represented as culturally different, close but not same can be illustrated by two examples. The first one is the expression “Macedonians”, which is the label that Konstantin uses to refer to the students which recently arrived in Moscow. He also refers to “Macedonian songs”, collected and arranged by him, the ones that will be published in the Anthology several years later (Трайков, 1964, pp. 132). This affirmation of Macedonian ethnic and cultural otherness is in fact an attempt to underline the specific, common effort of Macedonian and Bulgarian writers and critics of this period to regain political and social autonomy.

The second example, which can also be found in the letters addressed to Rakovski, is indicating Konstantin’s effort to underline the “graphic signs of Macedonian dialects”, as well as the fact that Greeks call Macedonia “West Bulgaria”, in order to disintegrate it. Later in this letter, Konstantin also uses this term and considers it as a valid name of his country (Трайков, 1964, p. 138). All of these segments are intrinsically reinforced by writer’s lyric soul, which constantly strives for better future and expanded cultural horizons.

We, the Macedonians, who recently arrived here, have received your letter, filled with honest and zealous love towards our country, with great content. Your acquaintance is a source of great joy and happiness for me. I have heard so much of your fearless attempts towards our common cause, of your efforts, which you gladly offer on the sacrificial altar of fatherland. Mr. Cholakov also told me about you; it is not long ago since I was willing to offer you a token of my friendship, and I think that it would not be useless, if all the patriotic “Bolgars”, connected under the flag of fraternal love, would have made a hurdle against elinisation (Трайков, 1964, p. 132).

1. **Macedonian literature and epistolarity**

Macedonian literature is very complex and specific whole, underlined by its heteronomy and interrupted historical development. This kind of disrupted run can also be seen in the light of its literary genres and generic properties. Generic uniformity is the least expected phenomenon, and we discern different genres that lack preliminary context or setting in which they develop consequently. Epistolary tradition had its pragmatic function, especially in 19th-century literature, and this is a well-known fact. However, we strive to demonstrate different ranges of epistolarity and its function as a sign of existing circles of co-workers, whose letters were not only of an informative kind. The phenomenon of letter writing is a specific kind of artistic experience, and it can clearly be differentiated from memoires, autobiographies and the other forms of subjective writing by its unique property – the co-existence of “I” and “You”, without a shared space and time. First traces of epistolary fiction in Macedonian literature can be noted as early as the end of the 20th century (this statement is being presented after consulting professor Vesna Mojsova-Chepishevska regarding this question, to whom I am most thankful). The delayed development of Macedonian literature is one of the reasons why there is a necessity of thorough and detailed analysis of epistolary genre.

The first Macedonian epistolary novel “East-West”, published in 2002 by Jadranka Vladova and Nebojsha Knjezevic, represents the labored development of new generic forms in Macedonian literary system (Tasevska Hadji Boshkova, 2017). In this text, I have argued that epistolary novel impels the questions of fictionality, as something that can hardly be grasped in the letter form, since it questions our sense of referentiality (especially in this case, because here, once again, we are witnessing several familiar letters). On the other hand, this novel is presented in a playful mode, and the reader is constantly under the attack of his own doubtful reasoning. There are several problems, concerning the structure and form of the presented reality in familiar letter. The first one clearly deals with the unresolved reader’s position, which is being manipulated and intentionally misled. He cannot judge about the verisimilitude of presented facts, although most of them refer to well-known facts and persons. On the other hand, the critic can only accept the fictional illusion and regard letter writing through the main narratological terms. The extent to which fictionality and factuality are interconnected is an open question, and reader’s common sense strives to unpuzzle it. The only way out of this maze is through the determination of the nature of letter writing fascination, which can only be approached by clearly stating the importance of this genre in one culturally and nationally specific literature.

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