

Noemi Stoichkova,

Associate Professor, PhD,
Faculty of Slavic Studies,
Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"
Sofia, Bulgaria

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-5180-870X
stoichkova@slav.uni-sofia.bg

Nadezhda Stoyanova,

Assistant Professor, PhD,
Faculty of Slavic Studies,
Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"
Sofia, Bulgaria

ORCID iD: 0000-0001-5599-8398
nadezhdaas@uni-sofia.bg

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**"INTERVIEW" AND (AUTO)BIOGRAPHY.
CULTURAL-HISTORICAL AND MEDIA CONTEXTS OF A NEWSPAPER COLUMN**

The article aims to present and analyse the cultural-historical and media contexts of the column "An Hour at..." from the Bulgarian newspaper of the 1930s — Literary Voice. The methods of cultural and literary-historical study are used. It is concluded that, by integrating the genres of interview and (auto)biography, this column has rehabilitated the role of the European intellectual after the crisis of the 1920s. The article is a part of a larger study.

Key words: *interview, (auto)biography, cultural-historical contexts, media environment, literary history, newspaper column, 1930s.*

Prior to 1944 Bulgarian literary history did not walk a long path. The first conceptual model for literary-historical study was set by Prof. Boyan Penev in his article "Directions and Objectives in the Study of Our Recent Literature" („Посоки и цели при проучването на най-новата ни литература“) published in 1910. In the period between the two wars the interest to this subject grew, with various approaches to it. However, the predominant method, which, in one way or another, integrated the different directions, was the personalistic one. Perhaps the most representative personalistic literary history during this period was the collective work *Bulgarian Writers* („Български писатели“, 1929–1930), edited by Prof. Mihail Arnaudov. After the changes in 1944, this model again dominated, but the critics aimed their efforts at the process of rewriting the biographical and artistic narratives in accordance with the compulsory ideological postulates of the Socialist realism. There were

some deviations from this paradigm in the 1970s and 1980s. On the one hand, they were provoked by the Bulgarian mediators of the Prague school — Prof. Nikola Georgiev, Prof. Iskra Panova, and Prof. Radosvet Kolarov. On the other hand, they were influenced by Veselovski's historical poetics and interpreted in the works of Assoc. Prof. Stefan Elevherov. It was not until the 1990s that literary history began to integrate methods of close humanitarian fields, including modern literary sociology. An emphasis was put on the literary process itself, on its synchronicity, multiplicity and dynamics. It was being reconstructed through numerous marginal phenomena and the means, through the study of literary circles, their platforms and the literary periodicals. However, it is strange that one of the most esteemed literary periodicals that existed for almost 16 years — from 1928 to 1944, has not been in the scope of the literary scholars until today. During the period of its publication it was widely supported by people, central to certain

literary societies and periodicals, who were constantly in dialogue and even in conflict with each other. This periodical is the *Literary Voice* newspaper, a weekly paper for literature, art and public issues, edited by Dimitar B. Mitov. It will be the subject of this article.

We will focus on one of the regular newspaper column — “An Hour at...”, which was particularly frequent in the first years of the periodical. It presented visits of journalists to the homes (and not only) of esteemed and popular figures from different field of culture. In the opening words of each material important moments from the biography, from the creative and personal presence of the host were are highlighted, and then the questions were asked. These questions highlighted their place in the current cultural life of the 1930s, added new information or elaborated on it. However, the biographical narrative did not serve to turn the artistic person into a “herbarium”, but rather represented their contemporary activity in the process of its unfolding and incompleteness. This column, even if unnoticed for decades, was important, because it captured and presented the dominant personalistic approach of the literary/cultural history of that times. What is more, by adding new touches, by creating an up-to-date interest, by enriching the professional biography through the author’s personal “story”, these conversations turned literary history from a “monument” into a living and multifunctional organism. The development of this organism could be followed by the readers themselves, who were not just witnesses, but associates who empathized with writer’s feelings. This was an indirect manifestation of the changed status of the recipient in European modernist culture from the times of the First World War and after that. On the one hand, this was a modernist hierarchical narrative, on the other — it created a non-institutional, alternative public image of the European intellectual and his/her values in contrast to the official policies. The “portraits” of the interviewees depicted the seemingly multinational (Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Russian, French, American, etc.) profile of the periodical and that was its substantial and non-explicit ideological pledge in the context of rising nationalisms just before and during World War II.

The aim of the column “An Hour at...” has been to focus readers’ attention to important figures of Bulgarian and European culture. Among the names that should be mentioned are the following: the founder of futurism Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (presented beyond his political interests), the future Bulgarian Prime Minister and prominent archeologist Bogdan Filov (presented before his fateful decisions for

Bulgaria¹), the important cultural and diplomatic figure Simeon Radev (obliterated from the public narratives after 1944), the famous public figure in Bulgaria — Ukrainian Lidiya Shishmanova², the world-famous Russian opera singer Feodor Chaliapin, Belgian Byzantinist Henri Gregoire, French violinist Jacques Thibaud, Ukrainian poet Maria Omelchenkova, the young Bulgarian poetess Yana Yazova, the famous Bulgarian zoologist Peter Petkov, the popular Bulgarian artist Konstantin Shtarkelov, one of the first Bulgarian nature examiners Mara Leshtova-Tranka, the president of the Union of Sofian Journalists Stefan Tanev, etc.

The diversity of the figures belonging to different national cultures and representing different public spheres is impressive — some of them had difficult career and life path due to the historical vicissitudes. Gathering them into one column creates an impression of a compact (internationally and nationally), polyphonic and complete cultural process. At the same time, these interviews have unfolded the national cultural dialogue in different aspects — between the capital and the provinces, between the “elite” and the mass audience, between institutional units, professional organizations and the general public. And as a result, it becomes clear that these texts served both to educate and popularize. Moreover, they can be viewed as a barometer for the process of cultural medialization which had already started in the 1920s. This means that cultural media had turned into primary means of imposing aesthetic criteria, forming the reader’s taste and positioning the cultural figures in the public space.

One of the signs of this process was the need for hybridity of the genre, as neither the literary portrait, nor the interview itself could fulfill the synthetic functionality of the texts in “An Hour at...”. The authors, the journalists or the literary historians, and even the artists who often accompanied them have been free to express their point of view. The publications in the column begin as a literary portrait which is focused on the most famous and even stereotypical ideas of a particular figure. However, this beginning seems to have prepared the reader for the actual conversation on less known qualities of the person. The next part includes questions and answers that get naturally

¹ Bogdan Filov was the Prime Minister who signed Bulgaria’s accession to the Tripartite Pact in 1941.

² Lidiya Shishmanova was the daughter of Ukrainian professor Mikhail Dragomanov. She was the wife of one of the first Bulgarian literary historians and the first Bulgarian Minister Plenipotentiary in Ukraine — Professor Ivan Shishmanov. Lidiya Shishmanova was the mother of the Bulgarian writer and diplomat Dimitar Shishmanov who was sentenced to death by the People’s Court in 1945.

incorporated into the narrative structure of the text. Thus, a kind of story about a particular person has been created. This story is on the borderline between the belles lettres (understood not as fictional, but as beautiful and sublime) and the documentary and biography. In this way, a modern type of heroism has been constructed in this newspaper, with its roots in the intellectual and creative potential of a particular cultural figure. This was a way to assert the integrated characteristics of the interwar talent that corresponds to the Enlightenment model, both denied and eccentrically exposed in the years of modernism.

The journalist Hristo Brazitsov who was most likely the author of the column and an interviewer in the first years testified that it was important for him to find interlocutors who were emblematic figures in their fields [1, 3]. He categorically emphasized that he did not look for any hierarchies. This is a sign of the democratic approach and of the general cultural policy of both the newspaper and its contributors. In the same issue [1, 3], Brazitsov mentioned his major idea to publish a volume of texts that he defined as “inquiries”. His idea as a whole and the genre definition of the texts have to be commented. The first means that he had intention to take care for the cultural and historical memory of the nation and that he had an attitude towards the Bulgarian canon-building, as placed in a European context. He realized his intention, though to a certain degree ideologically conformist, by publishing the book *Visiting Great People in Dressing-Gowns and Slippers* („При големи хора по халат и чехли“) in 1976. Consistent with the nationalist tendencies, integrated in the Socialist realism of the 1970s, the context of the world literature and culture is absent. Second, the nomination “inquiries” refers, at least associatively, to the contemporary genre of literary inquiry that was widely spread in Bulgaria in the 1970s and 1980s and is still a matter of present interest. This genre has been a cornerstone of the Bulgarian literary-historical study, since the first fundamental historical and biographical works in this genre were published in the 1930s. It was focused on the work of the emblematic Bulgarian poet Peyo Yavorov who committed suicide in 1914. The author of the book *On the Life of P. K. Yavorov: New Contributions to the Biography and Characteristics of the Poet* (1934) was Prof. Mihail Arnaudov. Its second edition, in 1961, named the genre of the literary inquiry: *Yavorov: Personality, Work, Destiny: Biographical and Psychological Inquiry*. Thus, a specific change from the socialist ideological matrix was made because several years earlier, in the period 1944–1956, mainly through the genre of biography, the public

image of the author had become an object of serious manipulations made through various procedures — cutting, editing, rewriting³.

The poet’s authentically subjective voice in the “inquiries” has been rehabilitated and this has been a way to refute the normativistic status quo that reduced the author’s work only to its social aspects and forgot his large and complex modernist heritage. By putting emphasis on the author’s voice the column of *Literary Voice* laid the foundations of an important literary-historical scholar trend that emerged later again in the 1960s. At the same time, it presented the (auto)biographical narrative in its double-voice as a basis of the “authentic” sound of the cultural-historical narrative, which thus has become accessible to the educational system and the general public. In parallel, the biographical and autobiographical basis, as both authentic and secondary modeled, is being used today in the most up-to-date psychoanalytic interpretations in Bulgarian literary history. These are some of the reasons for us to return to the mechanisms in the creation of this column.

“An Hour at...” usually begins with an emphasis on the spontaneous atmosphere of the conversation and on the informal communication between the journalist and his interlocutor. The host’s outfit, sometimes even casual-intimate, also makes an impression to the contemporary reader. The “interview” took place in homes and offices, where paintings and bookshelves were often been an integral part of the interior, or in the pub as a topos to exchange ideas. The marks of the everyday life showed the “human” side of these men of the spirit and took them off their elite pedestal. In this way the *deinstitutionalizing* functions of these “interviews” have been revealed. We also find them in the attempt to contextualize the professional achievements of these figures in their family environment. For example, the entire conversation with Chaliapin, concerning his creative success and worldwide fame, was “illustrated” with photographs from his personal archive — one with his young daughter and the other with his son (we see the great opera singer posing for a portrait before his son [2, 3]). Sometimes present at the “inquiries” were the closest people to the intellectuals — their wife, mother, daughter, brother. However,

³ See the articles: Стоичкова, Ноеми. Документалистика и идеология (Из епистолярно-критически сюжети от 50-те години на XX век. Първа част). В: „Научни трудове на Пловдивския университет „Паисий Хилендарски“, т. 56, кн. 1, бг. Б, 2018 — Филология, 2018, с. 89–100; Стоичкова Ноеми, Документалистика и идеология (Из епистолярно-критически сюжети от 50-те години на XX век. В: „Литературен вестник“, 2019, бр. 26, с. 10–11 [11, 89–100; 12, 10–11].

it is interesting that in these instances the optics towards the subject of the conversation was changed and the efforts of the interviewee focused on the institutionalization of their famous relatives. For example, the keynote in Lidiya Shishmanova's interview was her husband's will to have his literary heritage settled.

In the interview in 1929 she shared that she had been paralyzed for three months after the death of Ivan Shishmanov, but it was precisely the thought of her duty and the promise to do it at any cost that made her overcome her illness [3, 3]. Ten issues later [4, 2], her letter to the Rector of Sofia University was published. She stated that she would donate her husband's library as it had been promised although she had not received a state pension and despite her low income. Her actions and gestures are strong indications of the sustainability in defending the Enlightenment values and the prevalence of the idea of public education over the financial well-being. This idealism was the leading idea in the presentation of many other authors, including the famous Bulgarian writer Dobri Nemirov, for whom the well-being of the people was a guarantee for a change in the writer's miserable status [1, 3], and for the popular humorist Damian Kalfov, forced to work as a clerk hindering his creative work [5, 3]. This subject was also touched on by the Bulgarian scholar in Germany Prof. Dimitar Gavriiski in 1933. He expressed his satisfaction that poverty did not endanger and destroy Bulgarian teacher's faith, abilities and perseverance [6, 3]. These examples are evidence of the *mythologization* of the intellectual while demonstrating the newspaper social criticism of the state and society. This criticism was by no means an accidental and sporadic gesture of the editorial policy of *Literary Voice*, despite the censorship in the 1930s.

Another important line of the "interviews" is related to the attempt to widen the author's creative biographical story. Thus his/her image became multi-faceted and unfamiliar to the general audience. For example, in the aforementioned interview with Ukrainian Lidiya Shishmanova, Ivan Shishmanov's academic image was broadened with that of the writer and the diplomat. She revealed that her husband had been the author and translator of epigrams and 300 of them had already been ready to print. She also emphasized that there were memoirs in his archive related to his work as a Minister Plenipotentiary in Ukraine, as well as important data on Ukrainian history and its relationship with Bulgarian politics. The epigrams became public two years later (Ivan Shishmanov, *Epigrams and Portraits*, 1931), and the diary containing part of his memoirs came to light only five years ago (Ivan Shishmanov, *Diary and Dossiers*:

1879–1927, 2015). The broadening of the biography is also visible in the interview with the future (1940–1943) Prime Minister — the archeologist Professor Bogdan Filov. He wrote and published in German *History of Bulgarian Art from the Ancient Times to the Newest* in 1931 — a work that encompassed issues from the field of architecture, fine arts, crafts and more — all of which not directly connected to his specific scholar interests [7, 3]. The "interview" with the Education Minister from the early 1920s Stoyan Omarchevski revealed that he had been invited to the United States to lecture at prestigious universities (in Washington, for example). The provincial teacher and government official had become an international public figure, a valued academic lecturer in the USA who had made Bulgarian educational reforms a model for the "civilized" countries [8, 8]. The Belgian Byzanthologist Henri Gregoire made a presentation at a scientific congress in Sofia — it was on the Shakespeare's last play *The Storm* and he revealed the striking similarities between the play and contemporary mediocre works — a German drama and a Spanish short story. Thus, he argued that "Byzantology leads to everything", as it was a starting point of knowledge, similar to journalism [9, 3]. The selected examples signify that the creative talent in the 1930s was thought as universal, and the presence of the intellectual had already regained its role and reputation. The public place of the intelligentsia had been questioned earlier, at the end of the First World War, and had been made a subject of public debate in many European countries. In the third decade, however, it seemed that intelligentsia enjoyed public confidence again. And this happened not because of any specific socio-political gestures, but thanks to the overall presence of the intellectuals that was presented in their biographical narratives that emphasized on both the artistic and the scholar aspects of their lives. The figure of the intellectual was no longer perceived as a fragmented one, but it became complete and integral, simultaneously combining both cultural and social functions.

The completeness was realized also through the visual image, presented in the inquiries — through autographs and portraits. The autograph was a documentary evidence for the authenticity of the already mythologized image of the intellectual, literalisation of the strengthened connection between the reader and the writer. Last but not least, it was a gesture to the audience of the newspaper and made the edition more prestigious (see, for example, the French violinist Jacques Thibaud's special autograph for the newspaper [10, 3]). Most of the "interviews" in the column were accompanied by graphic sketches made by famous Bulgarian

artists such as Vasil Stoilov, Mihail Krastev, etc. The materials make it clear that sometimes the artists were a part of the newspaper staff and have made these portraits during the “interview”. Let us clarify though that this happened in a time when photographs had already been the main visual image in the periodicals (there were some of them as well in “An Hour at...”). The attention to the creative image not only emphasized the authenticity of the interview and the interviewee, but also has presented a subjective artistic view of an author to an author. Unlike photography, the sketch reinforced the notion of the intellectual’s uniqueness and irreproducibility. And this, in its turn, contributed to the mythologization and fictionalization of his/her figure.

The column “An Hour at...” shows the combination of a biographical and autobiographical story in the generally personalistic Bulgarian literary history of 20th century. It simultaneously constructed and destroyed mythologies, created institutional images and deinstitutionalised them, integrated them in their specific cultural field and opened them to the multiplicity of human knowledge. In this way, a romantic image of the intellectual was built. Thus a “media” image was created, that set/limited the linguistic and methodological parameters through which “elite” Bulgarian scholars seemed to have communicated

to the mass audience and presented to it their most significant cultural “heroes” for more than a century. *Literary Voice* ostensibly offered a polyphonic and adequate European cultural context, but thus it formed conservative images of the national identity. These images are similar to the ideas of what Bulgarian was, typical for the 19th century, in which the commensurate process prevailed, but they were not so analytic and integral. The fears about the “disassembled” figure of the interwar intellectual can be seen behind them, and the image created appears to be just a media camouflage through which the intellectual presented himself/herself as a cultural hero. Despite his/her attempts to put a mask using excessive documentary evidence, authenticity and visual means. Although the column “An Hour at...” cannot be one-sidedly favored, it cannot be deleted from the metacultural narrative because it represents one of the discourses through which the literary development process took place. For the contemporary reader this column in some way brings to light figures and aspects that have been forgotten either for ideological reasons, or because of the diverse horizons of the cultural history over the years. Set in intercultural context, this column can be studied now as an outline, contributing to the typology of the formation of the European intellectual in the challenging times of the 1930s.

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«ИНТЕРВ'Ю» ТА (АВТО)БІОГРАФІЯ.

КУЛЬТУРНО-ІСТОРИЧНІ ТА МЕДІЙНІ КОНТЕКСТИ ОДНІЇ РУБРИКИ

Мета статті — представити та проаналізувати культурно-історичні та медійні контексти рубрики «Одна година у...» з болгарської газети «Літературний голос» 30-х років ХХ століття. Використовуються методи культурного та літературно-історичного дослідження. Зроблено висновок про те, що ця рубрика, інтегруючи жанри інтерв'ю та (авто)біографії, реабілітує роль європейського інтелектуала після кризи 20-х років. Стаття є частиною більшого дослідження.

Ключові слова: інтерв'ю, (авто)біографія, культурно-історичні контексти, медійне середовище, історія літератури, газетна рубрика, 30-ті роки ХХ століття.

„ИНТЕРВ'Ю“И (АВТО)БИОГРАФИЯ.

КУЛЬТУРНОИСТОРИЧЕСКИ И МЕДИЙНИ КОНТЕКСТИ НА ЕДНА РУБРИКА

Целта на статията е да представи и анализира културноисторическите и медийни контексти на рубриката „Един час при...“ от българския вестник „Литературен глас“ от 30-те години на ХХ век. Използвани са методите на културно и литературноисторическото изследване. Стига се до заключението, че тази рубрика, интегрирайки жанровете на интервюто и (авто)биографията, реабилитира ролята на европейския интелектуалец след кризата от 20-те години. Статията е част от по-голямо изследване.

Ключови думи: интервю, (авто)биография, културноисторически контексти, медийна среда, литературна история, рубрика на вестник, 30-те години на ХХ век.