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Maria Stepanova

Writer

Russland

Born in 1972 in Moscow

Studied Philology and History of Literature at the Moscow Institute of Literature

ARBEITSVORHABEN

“Anne, Unboxed.” A Documentary Novel

A traveler, a respected landowner, an avid and sharp reader, a social climber, a semi-open lesbian in search of a life-term partner, but most of all an ever-curious mind endlessly probing its surroundings for something new and worth exploring, the British diarist Anne Lister (1791–1840) was meticulously putting to paper the minute details of her everyday life, noticing everything, and never omitting the tiniest detail, including times of the day, minor handiworks, hat prices, and bodily functions. The unreservedness of her writing seems to be fueled by an unnamed wish to conserve all the scope of her existence for some purpose, maybe unclear even to herself.

Throughout her life, Lister was pursuing a certain goal that she never specified: her various studies, travels, and “unladylike” enterprises (solitary mountain hiking in the Pyrenees or dissecting with Cuvier) were never meant to become an occupational activity. She collects her experiences, as numerous collectors of her epoch did with objects more material – preserving them for her own future use, always extending her search for new impressions. The latter had brought her to the risky (and for her times unusual) voyage to Russia and further, to the Caucasus, where she suddenly died in 1840.

Even in the wide context of Romantic diary writing, Lister’s diaries seem unique in the way she approaches everyday life, giving the same amount of precise and measured attention to all the minute detail, imitating the flow of life itself, and never trying to be more than a recorder, a mere scribe that enumerates things for no obvious reason. My book explores the sensibility behind the writing, the ways it was shaped by the Enlightenment era with its utopian modes of self-creation – and tries to place it in the context of contemporary times, marked with our new attentiveness to all things small and seemingly unimportant.

Recommended Reading

Stepanova, Maria. *Pamyati Pamyati*. Moscow: Novoye Izdatelstvo, 2017. German: *Nach dem Gedächtnis*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018.

–. *Der Körper kehrt wieder*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2021.

–. *Mädchen ohne Kleider*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022.