GENRE CHARACTERISTICS AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN 19-TH-CENTURY RUSSIAN WOMEN'S DIARY WRITING: A. P. KERN (1800–1879) AND E. A. STAKENSHNEIDER (1836–1897)

Rebecca Gigli[1], Institute for Literature, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

https://doi.org/10.46687/MEJZ6704

Abstract: *For a long time, the diary was the only literary space accessible to women. For them, it was not just a kind of text that collected their daily records. It was a means of creating their self-image, expressing their literary talent, and reflecting on the cultural codes that marginalized them to the periphery of society. These functions and the close connection between diary writing and the female universe were also relevant in 19th-century Russia. This article aims to analyse the genre and thematic constants and transformations in Russian women's diary prose of the time. The study examines and compares the life journals of Anna Petrovna Kern (1800–1879) and Elena Andreevna Stakenschneider (1836–1897), written respectively in the first and second half of the 19th century. Anna Petrovna and Elena Andreevna are best known for their connection with some of the most significant figures of Russian literature. The name of A. P. Kern is always associated with A. S. Pushkin, while E. A. Stakenshneider was a friend of F. M. Dostoevsky. However, the two women were also the authors of interesting diaries. This article highlights the similarities and differences in the narrative strategies and in the treatment of various themes (family, literature, self-portraiture, role of the women) in these ego-documents. At the same time, the analysis shows the role of the diary in the diarists' lives. They used their journals to conduct their existential self-exploration and to record their protesting voice against the "unjust" (patriarchal) reality surrounding them.*

Key words: *Women literature, diary, A. P. Kern, E. A. Stakenshneider, 19-th century Russian literature*

In the past, literature had been an almost inaccessible world for the so-called fair sex. Being relegated to the role of wife and mother, women could at best pretend to become the inspiring muse of poets and novelists. To see their

1 Rebecca Gigli is a Senior Assistant Professor at the Institute for Literature at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. She was born in Italy in 1994. She studied foreign languages and literatures at Pisa University, where she got her bachelor's degree (2016) and master's degree (2018). In 2019, she specialized in Russian literature at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In July 2024, Rebecca Gigli defended her PhD thesis, entitled "Memory and Cultural Identity in the Memoirs of Prince I. M. Dolgorukov". She is the author of articles and studies in scientific journals and in proceedings of national and international conferences and seminars. Her scientific interests are Russian literature, comparative studies, gender studies, autobiographical genres, and cultural memory. Email: rebeccagigli.19@gmail.com

Article history: Received: 30 April 2025; Reviewed: 25 May 2025; Revised: 2 June 2025; Accepted: 9 June 2025; Published: 5 August 2025

works published, they often had been forced to hide themselves behind male pseudonyms[2]. The only literary space that allowed them a certain freedom of expression was represented by autobiographical prose. According to the patriarchal society, since autobiography, memoirs, and diaries were thought less subject to the risks of the use of imagination, these types of texts were considered to a lesser extent dangerous literary forms for the female "weak minds". As a result, over the centuries a close bond has been established between womankind and autobiographical genres and, nowadays, women's literature[3] is often associated with life writing.

Not only are women the main authors of ego-documents, but they are responsible for their significant "rediscovery" in the academic field as well. In fact, the recent "autobiographical turn" in the humanities is largely due to feminist criticism. The representatives of this interpretative current have not limited themselves to give voice to the many forgotten women writers[4]. They have also radically questioned canons, attributing a new importance to peripheral literary phenomena such as autobiographical prose[5]. Gender and feminist studies recognize a pivotal role to the latter: "If women have been categorised as 'objects' by patriarchal cultures, women's autobiography [and the other autobiographical genres give – R. G.] an opportunity for them to express themselves as 'subjects', with their own selfhood" (Cosslet & al., 2001, pp. 5-6). In other words, according to feminist criticism, life writing has been the main means through which women have attempted to oppose their marginal position in society and to claim their own space in it.

Among the various autobiographical genres, the diary has been the privileged literary form used for these aims[6]. Although the life journal was born as a form of control and educational instrument for young girls, soon it became a written refuge in which women could express their own selves regardless of social conventions[7] (Duby, Perrot, 2015, p. 325).

2 In Russian literature, the first women writers used a similar stratagem. For example, it is famous the case of Ekaterina Aleksandrovna Knyazhnina (1746–1797), who published her verses under the name of her father and poet Alexander Petrovich Sumarokov or her husband and writer Yakov Borisovich Knyazhnin.

3 Another popular label to indicate women's literature is "Écriture féminine". The term was introduced by H. Cixous in her famous article *Le Rire de la Méduse*, in which she provocatively invited women to reclaim their space in literature and talk about themselves as women, see (Cixous, 1975),

4 Feminist criticism asserted itself in the 70s in America. Its aim was and still is to demonstrate that linguistic and narrative solutions are closely linked to the gender identity of a given author. Feminism criticism continues to be very productive. For example, we can mention some recent publications on the subject relating to the Russian literary context: (Stroganova, 2019) and (Gendernye issledovanya, 2019).

5 For an overview of the main theoretical contributions on women's life writing, see (Watson, Smith, 1998, pp. 3-52) and (Savkina, 2007, pp. 38-52).

6 Several researchers have dedicated to the study of the diary as a significant form of female writing, see (Bunkers, 1996).

7 Just a few decades ago, Ph. Lejeune still felt the need to defend the diary from the accusation of being "feminine" (Lejeune, 2009, p. 148).

It should be added that, despite its apparent simplicity, the definition of the diary as a genre is problematic and full of challenges. Frequently, the life journal is defined in opposition to autobiography. In *Le pacte autobiographique* (*The Autobiographical Pact*), Ph. Lejeune states that the diary lacks the narrative retrospective point of view, typical of autobiography (Lejeune, 1975, p. 14). Years later, the French researcher gives the following definition:

> A diary is a series of dated traces [*série de traces datées*]. [...] An isolated dated trace is a memorial rather than a diary: the diary begins when traces in a series attempt to capture the movement of time rather than to freeze it around a source event. (Lejeune, 2009, p. 179)

As the quote points out, most scholars have reflected on the peculiar existing relationship between time and diary writing. Unlike autobiography, the diary does not deal with a whole life. In a strange interplay between continuity and discontinuity[8], this type of text is a titanic endeavour to record the present, which turns out to be already (although very close) past. According to I. Paperno, a further temporal perspective should be added:

> As a serial text written continuously on a chronological grid, the diary mediates between the past, the present, and the future[9]. Concurrence of experience with the act of writing calls for presentness. But every entry is the past in relation to the ones that would follow. [...] The diary is best read not as a book with a beginning and end, but as a process (Paperno, 2004, pp. 572-573).

Hence, the complex temporal matrix of a life journal requires a different approach from the reader. This aspect is also underlined by B. Didier, who states that "in a journal, it is the spectator, more than the painter, who is called upon to do the work [of reconstructing the self-image of the author – R. G.]."[10] (Didier, 1983, p. 182) Day after day, the diarist obsessively and fragmentarily gives sketches of himself in his text, inviting the reader to grasp his identity in its entirety from the written daily notes. This existential nature of the diary is another of the non-secondary aspects that has attracted the interest of scholars.

This brief overview shows that the journal is a complex literary construction aimed at leaving a testimony of one's life experience and at finding a meaning to one's own individuality. Therefore, it brings into play philosophical, social, cultural, and identitarian issues. Moreover, it implies the use of compositional and narrative strategies. These assumptions are at the core of the present research, which focuses on the diary writing of Anna Petrovna Kern (1800–1879) and Elena Andreevna Stakenshneider (1836–1897), who are mostly known for their connection with some of the most important authors of Russian literature.

8 The diary presupposes constant daily writing. Nonetheless, the act of writing is interrupted every day to be resumed the following one.

9 On the contrary, Ph. Lejeune affirms that the future is a temporal category completely absent in the journal: "The diary's value lies in its being the trace of a moment. If I begin fixing things the next day, I do not add value to my diary: I kill it." (Lejeune, 2009, p. 182)

10 Quotations from non-English sources and the analysed texts are translated by the author of the article.

The name of A. P. Kern is inseparably associated with A. S. Pushkin. She was the woman to whom the famous poet dedicated his verses, entitled *Я помню чудное мгновенье* (*I remember a wonderful moment)*[11]. Instead, E. A. Stakenshneider was a close friend of F. M. Dostoevsky, and the probable source of inspiration for the character Liza Khokhlakova in the novel *Brothers Karamazov* (Viktorovich, 2017, pp. 89–90). However, they did not lack literary talent and were the authors of interesting diaries as well. The analysis of these texts, written respectively in the first and second half of the 19th century, allows us to highlight general functions and characteristics of the genre. Moreover, their close reading permits to identify constants and evolutions of the practice of women's diary prose in the Russian culture of the period.

Anna Petrovna Kern (after her second, marriage Markova-Vinogradskaya) came from an aristocratic family. Her father, Pyotr Markovich Poltoratsky, was a court adviser, while her mother, Ekaterina Ivanovna Vul'f, was the daughter of the governor of Orel. Anna Petrovna spent all her youth in the Ukrainian province, where her grandfather had some landed estates. Despite the provincial environment, the girl showed a keen interest in literature from an early age. Her destiny radically changed in 1817, when her father decided to give her in marriage to the much older, but with the prestigious title of general, Ermolaev Fedorovich Kern. The wedding turned out to be very unhappy and a source of constant sorrow for the woman. In 1842, after her husband's death, Anna Petrovna married her cousin Aleksandr Vasil'evich Markov-Vinogradsky. This marriage was based on love and not on economic or social interests. Nonetheless, it provoked discontent among relatives and financial difficulties for the couple[12]. Anna Petrovna's unhappy life was not an obstacle to her intellectual development. She was in relation with A. S. Pushkin, M. I. Glinka, A. A. Del'vig, and several other noteworthy literary figures. She left interesting memoirs about many of them, which were published and attracted the public's interest. Moreover, she was the author of the diaries *Дневник для отдохновения* (*Diary for Relief*, 1820) and *Рассказ о событиях в Петербурге…* (*An account about events in St. Petersburg…*, 1861). For the aims of this study, the focus is on the former. Anna Petrovna began writing it on her own initiative between 23 June and 30 August 1820, while she was in Pskov with her husband, who commanded a brigade there. The text was published for the first time in 1929 and a second time in 1989. Critics have not shown much interest in it. As the same preface to the text of A. M. Gordin shows, the diary has been mainly read as an interesting written testimony of the everyday life of a 19th-century woman. The first important contribution to its literary revaluation belongs to I. Savkina who dedicated a broad analysis to it in her monograph on Russian women's autobiographical prose (Savkina, 2007, pp. 100-116).

11 The title is usually rendered as such in English. However, V. V. Nabokov pointed out the difficulty in translating the beginning of this Pushkin's renowned poem.

12 A. P. Kern had to renounce her title and her widow's pension, while Aleksandr Vasil'evich was disinherited.

The life of Elena Andreevna Stackenshneider and the literary and critical fate of her diary were not very fortunate either. She was the daughter of the talented architect Andrei Ivanovich Stackenshneider, who built some of the most iconic buildings in St. Petersburg. Her mother was Mariya Fedorovna Kholchinskaya, known at the time for her prestigious literary salon, frequented by the most brilliant contemporary writers, such as I. S. Turgenev, I. A. Goncharov, and F. M. Dostoevsky. This stimulating cultural family environment allowed her to become a prominent figure on the late 19-th-century Russian cultural scene, despite the illness that disabled her throughout her life[13]. Following her mother's example, Elena Andreevna created her own literary salon and was among the first activists for the Russian women's emancipation movement. She also devoted herself to literature. She translated literary and journalistic texts and wrote a family chronicle, travelogues, and memoirs. An important place in her prose is occupied by her original diary. Following the advice of the poet N. F. Shcherbina[14], E. A. Stackenshneider began writing her journal in 1855 and continued to keep it until 1888. Although some of the pages of the diary were published as early as 1893 in the *Русский архив* (*Russian Archive*) and at the beginning of the 20th century in the magazines *Русский вестник* (*Russian Gazette*) and *Голос Минувшего* (*Voice of the Past*) (Rozanov, 1934, p.24)[15], the integral text has not been printed so far[16]. The most complete version of the diary can be considered the edition prepared and edited by I. N. Rozanov in 1934 (Stakenschneider, 1934). The difficult accessibility of the diary is the likely explanation for the few scholarly publications devoted to it. In addition to I. N. Rozanov's preface to the aforementioned edition, only A. Vacheva (Vacheva, 2017) and V. A. Viktorovich (Viktorovich, 2017) analyse the work in more detail[17].

Having remained on the fringe of academic attention, the two diaries offer interesting interpretative perspectives.

A first element to comment on is the language in which the two diaries are written. A. P. Kern's diary is in French. Its use is not surprising, as French was very widespread among the Russian nobility of the time, for whom it was the everyday language of conversation. Unlike men, even in their autobiographical texts, women usually expressed themselves in the foreign idiom. In the choice of Anna Petrovna, additional reasons can be identified. Her use of French was a way to state her distance from the backward provincial reality in which she was forced

13 She had a bone malformation of her thigh that prevents her from walking normally.

14 N. F. Shcherbina (1821–1869) was a poet, known at the time for his collection of poems *Греческие стихотворения* (*Greek Poems*, 1851).

15 Excerpts from E. A. Stackenschneider's diary were also used by V. V. Stasov for his book *Надежда Василевна Стасова* (*Nadezhda Vasilievna Stasova*), dedicated to this representative of the nascent Russian women's movement (Rozanov, 1934, 24).

16 V. A. Viktorovich has announced the preparation of a full edition of the text (Viktorovich, 2017, p. 72), but the project has not yet been realized.

17 To these sporadic publications we can add the articles by A. I. Indzinskaya, in which the researcher analyses the diary and letters of E. A. Stakenshneider to reconstruct her relationship with Dostoevsky and his wife, see (Indzinskaya, 2015; Indzinskaya, 2019).

to live. Furthermore, it was a precaution against possible unwanted readings of the text by her husband, who did not know the language (Gordin, 1989, p. 22). It should be highlighted that *Дневник для отдохновения* contains passages in Russian as well. A. P. Kern several times translates quotes from foreign novels into her mother tongue, or she relies on it in the account of events in which her emotional involvement is more evident.

At the end of the century, the use of Russian was increasingly widespread in female ego-documents. Elena Andreevna's diary is a demonstration of this tendency. However, as she constantly emphasizes her patriotic feelings, in her decision to keep a diary in Russian, one can also glimpse her desire to underline her Russian identity despite her foreign origins.

Even from a structural point of view, the two authors use different narrative strategies. A. P. Kern writes her journal in the form of letters addressed to her great aunt Feodosiya Petrovna Poltoratskaya. Epistolary diaries were not an exception in the early-19th-century Russia[18]. In the cultural climate of sentimentalism and early romanticism, the Russian writers of ego-texts frequently mixed the characteristics of autobiographical genres, by imitating the then popular epistolary and pseudo-autobiographical novels[19]. A further confirmation of the novelistic matrix of A. P. Kern's diary is the assignation of a title to her work. Instead, E. A. Stakenshneider's journal is structured in a more traditional way. The descriptions of the day's events are presented after the date, and sometimes the place, when the given diary page was written. The temporal indication is also present in A. P. Kern's diary. In this regard, it should be underlined that, although the diary presupposes daily writing, an author rarely writes every day. There are often pauses and interruptions. From this point of view, Anna Petrovna is a more systematic diarist. Intervals in the keeping of the journal are almost absent. On the contrary, over a single day she frequently returns to write in her diary to add new details. Instead, in E. A. Stakenshneider's text, there are long time gaps between one note and another. Interestingly, both the authors feel the need to explain the infringement of their diary practice:

> *Вы удивитесь, мой ангел, что я пропустила целый день, не писавши вам, я вчера была в отчаянном положении [...], целый день я почти была в беспамятстве* (Kern, 1989, p. 185)[20].
>
> [...] в городе буду прилежнее писать, здесь [в деревне – Р. Дж.] все мешают[21] (Stakenshneider, 1934, p. 70).

18 E. Grechanaya and K. Viollet list many other authors who use the epistolary form to narrate the story of their lives day by day (Viollet, Grechanaya, 2006, pp. 73-76).

19 For example, the autobiography of A. T. Bolotov, one of the most significant autobiographers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, is written in the form of letters to his children.

20 *"You will be surprised, my angel, that I have let a whole day pass without writing to you. Yesterday, I was in a desperate state, [...] I was almost senseless all day."* The passages of the diary written in Russian are indicated in italics.

21 "[...] in the city I will write more diligently, here [in the countryside – R. G.] everyone disturbs me."

As we can see from the quotations, many times external factors are given as an explanation for the ellipses in the narration. In other cases, A. P. Kern and E. A. Shtakenshneider confess other reasons:

> Зачем нет у меня такого дара слова, чтобы я могла передать вам все, что я испытываю? Мой язык слишком беден, перо мое отказывается это выразить (Kern, 1989, pp. 231-232)[22].

> Я скоро тебя заброшу, дневник мой, за то, что ты не можешь вместить в себя всего, что я вижу и слышу (Stakenshneider, 1934, p. 109)[23].

The authors' awareness of the difficulties and challenges that the description of their own life poses to them leads them to question the usefulness of continuing the enterprise of keeping daily notes. The felt inability to find words to describe their rich inner world results in the inclusion of metaliterary passages in their texts. It could be said that these pages of the journals play the role of the autobiographical pact[24]. In them, the two women declare their intents and justify their narrative choices. By doing this, they demonstrate the sincerity of their words despite the possible shortcomings. Their need to assert their reliability as narrators reminds us that also the diary has its reader, whether real or fictitious[25].

In A. P. Kern's diary, the very choice of the epistolary form presupposes the presence of a receiver of her text. As mentioned, the young aristocrat addresses her letters to her great aunt F. P. Poltoratskaya. Nonetheless, leafing through the pages of her diary, it is evident that Anna Petrovna writes with the idea that her audience could be wider. In fact, she asks her aunt to read her diary pages to her platonic lover or to other family members. For instance, "У меня большое желание самой написать папеньке и просить его защитить меня [...]. Впрочем, можете показать ему в моем дневнике те места, какие сочтете подходящими." (Kern, 1989, p. 235)[26] Therefore, the confidential and pathetic tone that characterizes A. P. Kern's diary not only is dictated by her emotional closeness with her great aunt[27], but it is motivated by her effort to gain empathy from other readers as well.

This game between intimacy and publicity of diary writing is also present in the text of E. A. Shtakenshneider. On the one hand, the author openly declares that her journal is private: "Кто будет читать этот дневник! Никто."

---

22 "Why don't I have the gift of words to convey to you everything I feel? My language is too poor, my pen fails me."

23 "I will soon abandon you, my diary, because you cannot contain everything that I see and hear."

24 The autobiographical pact is a peculiar agreement between the author of an ego-text and his reader. Ph. Lejeune identifies it as one of the distinctive characteristics of autobiography (Lejeune, 1975).

25 Although in the past it was believed that the absence of an addressee was one of the distinctive features of the journal, today scholars agree on the key role of the reader in this genre.

26 "I have a great desire to write to my daddy myself and ask him for protection [...]. By the way, you can show him those places in my diary that you consider appropriate."

27 After A. P. Kern's second marriage, these good relations with F. P. Poltoratskaya came to an end.

(Stakenshneider, 1934, p. 127)[28] On the other hand, in her daily notes, she admits the opposite desire: "Мне бы хотелось, чтобы через много, много лет, если уцелеют эти страницы, в них бы живо и верно отражалось нынешнее время." (Stakenshneider, 1934, p. 175)[29] These contradictions show the opposite stimuli at the base of female diary writing. The female diarist seeks a place where she can externalize her most hidden emotions without the judgement of other people. At the same time, the act of writing itself is her means to fight oblivion. In any case, both writers fear a possible reading by an "unauthorized" addressee:

> Его [его мужа – Р. Дж.] низость до того дошла, что в мое отсутствие он прочитал мой дневник, после чего устроил мне величайший скандал, и кончилось это тем, что я заболела (Kern, 1989, p. 158)[30].

> Не помню, как, [в разговоре – Р. Дж.] коснулись дневников. Шелгунова ведет дневник; мама рассказала о моем, и вдруг потребовали его. Вот страх-то был! Но было уже слишком поздно, и меня оставили в покое. (Stakenshneider, 1934, p. 110)[31]

The unwanted reading is presented and perceived by Anna Petrovna and Elena Andreevna as a form of violence and transgression of their intimacy, which causes dismay and disappointment in them. These feelings are exacerbated by the fact that, in their diaries, Anna Petrovna and Elena Andreevna express their individuality and form their own alternative female identity, ignoring canons and stereotypes of the patriarchal society. In this construction of their self, the selection of topics to include in the narration is significant. Feminist critics have emphasized how the thematic repertoire of female ego-texts is mainly centred on the domestic sphere. The narrower range of subjects does not result in a lack of originality in their treatment. In the following paragraph, attention is paid to the specific way in which A. P. Kern and E. A. Stakenshneider interpret and elaborate the themes of parents, their female identity, and literature.

In women's life writing, the problematization of the relationship with the parental figures is crucial. Regarding the mother, C. Gamberi comments: "Women [...] need to reconsider 'their' mothers critically, in order to emerge as independent subjects." (as cited in Crisafulli, Golinelli, 2019, p. 6) It is interesting to note that, in A. P. Kern's text, the mother is not a dominant figure. The daughter presents her as a benevolent parent, whose love is unconditional towards her. Nonetheless, in the journal, Anna Petrovna comments with apprehension on the colder tone of one of the maternal letters:

> *Маменька меня огорчила сегодняшним письмом, она никогда так не начинала* [...]. Попросите мою родную маменьку, чтоб она меня (Анной Петровной) не огорчала,

28 "Who will read this diary? Nobody."

29 "I would like that in many, many years, if these pages survive, they would vividly and accurately reflect the present time."

30 "His [of her husband – R. G.] vileness went so far that in my absence he read my diary, after which he made a big scene, and it ended with me falling ill."

31 "I don't remember how they started talking about diaries [in the conversation – R. G.]. Shelgunova keeps a diary; my mother talked about mine, and suddenly they demanded it. What a fear it was! But it was already too late, and they left me in peace."

> а называла бы всегда *Анетушкой*. Она, верно, это сделала от рассеянности, а для несчастной и так*ая малость много значит*. (Kern, 1989, p. 221)[32]

A simple change in the way of addressing the daughter immediately leads the author to doubt her mother's affection for her. Thus, the overall romanticized representation of the mother in the journal is rather a testimony of the adoption of rhetorical poses by the diarist.

In Russian women's literature the figure of the loving mother is a rarity. Much more often the mother is seen and represented as an antagonist by her daughters. E. A. Stakenshneider's diary falls into this trend. Elena Andreevna presents her relationship with her mother as almost conflictual. For example,

> Сейчас принесла мама и положила мне на стол мои бриллианты, серьги, брошку, браслеты – все атрибуты моей пытки. Сегодня бал у Бруни. Она их принесла с таким видом, точно знает, что обрадует меня; точно слезы, которые навертываются на мои глаза, – слезы радости. Она смотрит на меня и улыбается. Слепая она, что ли, или хочет не видеть? (Stakenshneider, 1934, p. 117)[33]

The mother does not accept and denies her daughter's health condition, insisting on behaving with her as with the other "normal" girls. The impossibility of responding to her mother's expectations causes the diarist's exasperation. The lack of a total relationship of trust with the maternal figure induce A. P. Kern and E. A. Stakenshneider not to follow the female model, represented by their mothers.

Regarding the father, the psychologist and philosopher E. Fromm observes that the love of the latter must be won by the child (Fromm, 2023, pp. 69-70). In both diaries, the search for paternal consensus and approval is glaring. Not only do the two writers idealize their fathers, but they try to behave according to their expectations. Despite this, A. P. Kern, with her unhappy marriage, and E. A. Stakenshneider, with her poor health, are unable to fully embody their father's ideals:

> Я, может быть, приеду прямо к вам, если только буду уверена, что отец меня не выгонит: ведь сказал же он однажды мужу, что, если бы я его оставила, двери родительского дома были бы для меня закрыты. В своем ослеплении он уже заранее готовится сделать свое дитя несчастным. (Kern, 1989, p. 185)[34]

> Удивительно, как я переменилась за эту зиму, сама замечаю [...]. Но будет ли лучше, если я буду молчать и повторится то, что было прежде, когда я ждала,

32 "*Mama upset me with today's letter, she never started like that* [...]. Ask my dear mama not to upset me (Anna Petrovna), but to always call me *Anetushka*. She probably did it out of distraction. However, for the unhappy one, even such a *small thing means a lot*."

33 "Mama just brought and put on the table my diamonds, earrings, brooch, bracelets; that is all the attributes of my torture. Today there is the ball at Bruni's. She brought them with such an air, as if she knew what would make me happy. For her, the tears welling up in my eyes were tears of joy. She looked at me and smiled. Is she blind, or does she want not to see?"

34 "I will perhaps come straight to you, if only I am sure that my father will not disown me. After all, he once told my husband that if I left him, the doors of my parents' house would be closed to me. In his blindness he is already preparing to make his child unhappy."

чтобы ко мне обратились, и никто не обращался, и я сидела со скусанными губами, и папа так грустно смотрел на меня. (Stakenshneider, 1934, pp. 57-58)[35]

The paternal refusal is depicted as a tragedy by Anna Petrovna, while Elena Andreevna internalizes a sense of guilt for her condition. On the other hand, the quotations show that the diarists claim their right to be considered worthy daughters, even if they do not answer to the roles imposed on them.

Another way women build their own self-portrait is by comparing themselves to the Other. For A. P. Kern and E. A. Stakenshneider, the confrontation with the female and male universe is an opportunity to reflect on their gender identity and to question cultural stereotypes.

According to S. Friedman, over the centuries women have developed a sense of sisterhood that has led them to feel part of a universal female community (as cited in Savkina, 2007, p. 42). Nonetheless, in the analysed texts, the diarists rather seem to emphasize their distance from other women. If A. P. Kern repeatedly declares her certainty in the mutual understanding of the women in her family, the diary contains several letters, which testify the contrary: "Только посоветуйте, как мне быть, все, что вы скажете, будет для меня священным, и я немедля последую вашему совету." (Kern, 1989, p. 187)[36] The requests for the consent, opinion, and judgment of her interlocutor serve her to adapt her behaviours to avoid disapproval and exclusion from the female collective. The sense of estrangement from the women's community is even more accentuated in the case of Elena Andreevna:

Как бы я желала иметь приятельниц, как все мои знакомые имеют; у меня нет никого. Все знакомые девицы меня чуждаются, и неудивительно: кому я интересна? Я не могу ни в чем, что их занимает, принимать участие; не могу ни танцевать, ни наряжаться, ни кокетничать. (Stakenshneider, 1934, p. 53)[37]

The impossibility of fully fitting into the feminine matrices of other women worsens the state of loneliness of the diarists. The journals assume the role of a lifeline to their isolation, collecting their pathetic statements of discomfort[38].

The two women are no less marginalized by men. This does not prevent them from recognizing their value as individuals and challenging patriarchal society. Some contemporary researchers write:

35 "It's amazing how I've changed this winter. I can see it myself [...]. But will it be better if I remain silent as when I waited for someone to consider me, and no one paid attention to me, and I sat with my lips bitten, and Dad looked at me so sadly."

36 "Just advise me what to do. Everything you say will be sacred to me, and I will immediately follow your counsel."

37 "How I wish I had friends, as all my acquaintances have; I have none. All the girls I know ignore me, and it is not surprising: who could be interested in me? I cannot take part in anything that interests them; I cannot dance, nor dress up, nor coquet."

38 For example, "Какая тоска! Это ужасно! [...] Представьте себе мое положение - ни одной души, с кем я могла бы поговорить" ("What a pain! It is terrible! [...] Imagine my situation: not a single soul I could talk to", Kern, 1989, p. 150) or "Тоска, тоска! Теперь я вижу, как я мало похожа на других." ("Pain, Pain! Now I see how little I resemble others", Stakenshneider, 1934, p. 89).

> Russian women, authors of memoirs and diaries, present themselves as women, but in no way inferior to men and even superior to them, in any case capable of assimilating their interests and values, fulfilling male roles, and thus going beyond the limits prescribed for the female sex. (Viollet, Grechenaya, 2006, p. 43)

Indeed, the analysed authors denounce the hypocrisies of the male perspective. Anna Petrovna almost with disgust describes her husband and his acquaintances as uncultured and soulless people who look at her only as an object. Similarly, Elena Andreevna scornfully notes that men often make fun of women and their cultural aspirations. Therefore, like Virginia Woolf[39], they claim a space for themselves:

> Я хочу затвориться в своей комнате, никого решительно не видеть, только писать вам. (Kern, 1989, p. 196)[40]

> Сидеть одной в нашей маленькой квартире, имея перед собой ряд свободных часов, которые знаешь наверное, что никто не нарушит, в настоящее время самое живое мое удовольствие и даже единственное. (Stakensneider, 1934, p. 460)[41]

Anna Petrovna and Elena Andreevna understand that only away from public life have they the opportunity to criticize oppressive and often unjust cultural codes. It is striking that the two diarists even contest the meaning that motherhood should have in a woman's life:

> Вы знаете, что это не легкомыслие и не каприз; я вам и прежде говорила, что я не хочу иметь детей. [...] Это исповедь. (Kern, 1989, pp. 211-212)[42]

> [...] если бы могла я сделаться женою или матерью, я бы не стала писать. (as cited in Indzinskaya, 2015, p. 37)[43]

For both, maternity should not be a burden that inevitably ties one to a despotic husband or prevents from fulfilling oneself as a woman outside the family context.

The Lecarme couple state: "The female writer most often finds her real identity in the depiction of her emotional and intellectual life, which outlines the stages of a progressive emancipation." (Lacarme, Lacarme-Tabone, 1997, p. 97) This explains the central role that literature plays in the lives and diary narratives of Anna Petrovna and Elena Andreevna[44]. In their daily records, they

39 In *A Room of One's Own* (Woolf, 1929), Virginia Woolf points to domestic life and the lack of a personal space as the main reasons that have long prevented women to dedicate themselves to literature. With this text, the English author can be considered a forerunner of the critical reflection on the relationship between women and literature.

40 "I want to shut myself in my room, without seeing anyone, and just write to you."

41 "Sitting alone in our little apartment, with several free hours ahead, in which you know for sure nobody will disturb you, is at present my greatest pleasure, if not my only one."

42 "You know that this is not frivolity or a caprice; I have told you before that I do not want to have children. [...] This is a confession."

43 "[...] if I could have become a wife or a mother, I would not have start writing."

44 Like autobiography, diary writing raises the problem of the boundary between reality and fiction. In the article we leave aside the cases of literariness present in the two texts. We limit ourselves

note down their opinions and impressions on a wide variety of literary works. At the same time, the diarists affirm:

> Я по-прежнему много читаю, – что бы я без этого стала делать! Читаю романы, дабы рассеяться. [...] [Я] считаю, что ничто не может лучше успокоить мои страдания. Соболезнуя героине романа, ее любви, я занимаю свой ум и отвлекаю себя от мыслей, которые завладели мной целиком. (Kern, 1989, p. 145)[45]

> Но ведь книга – мой единственный друг, который мне объясняет непонятное, или разгоняет мучающие мысли и заменяет их другими, иногда такими новыми и чудными. (Stakensneider, 1934, p. 57)[46]

In the passages it could be observed that literature alleviates the diarists' sufferings. Moreover, it always starts an investigative process on their own self and on their surroundings. For them, literature is an interpretative key to their reality. It is interesting to note that, for both, it is significant the reading of *Hamlet*, probably for the existential questions at the centre of the theatrical piece. This brings us once again to one of the main functions of the diary, that is the effort to "answers to one of these questions: "who am I?" (introspection) and "what should I be?" (deliberation)." (Lejeune, 2008, 180) The difficulty in finding the solution to this enigma is the reason that prevents the authors from abandoning their diary writing: "Я хочу и дальше писать свой дневник" (Kern, 1989, p. 239)[47], "Лето прошло, я ни разу не заглянула в свой дневник. Думала, что уже совсем его забыла, но вдруг сегодня он вспомнился. Отчего? Сама не знаю." (Stakenshneider, 1934, p. 159)[48]

Thus, the present analysis shows that at the formal level, women's diary writing in Russia undergoes evolutions, while the role of the journal in women's lives remains unchanged. The latter is the only means by which they can express their own alternative female identity and give voice to their protesting cry against a society in which they do not recognize themselves.

---

here to observing that *Дневник для отдохновения*, especially in the representation of A. P. Kern's relationship with her Platonic lover, shows the clear imprint of the epistolary novels of the period. In E. A. Stakenshneider's journal, we can find literary motifs mainly in her descriptions of nature.

45 "I still read a lot – what would I do without reading! I read novels to distract myself. [...] [I] believe that nothing can soothe my suffering better. By sympathizing with the heroine of the novel, her love, I occupy my mind."

46 "Indeed, the book is my only friend, which explains to me the incomprehensible or dispels tormenting thoughts and replaces them with others, sometimes so new and wonderful."

47 "I want to continue writing my diary."

48 "The summer passed; I didn't look at my diary even once. I thought I had forgotten it completely, but suddenly today I remembered it. Why? I don't know myself."

References

Bunkers, S. L. (1996). *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Crisafulli, L. M., Golinelli, G. (2019). *Women's Voices and Genealogies in Literary Studies in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Cixous, H. (1975). Le rire de la Meduse. *L'Arc*, 61, 39-54.

Cosslett, T., Lury, C., & Summerfield, P. (Eds.). (2001), *Feminism and autobiography: texts, theories, methods*. London, New York: Routledge.

Didier, B. (1983). L'autoportrait et journal intime. In *Corps écrit. L'autoportrait*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 167-182.

Duby, J., Perrot, M. (2015). *Istoriya zhenshchin na Zapade. V 5 tomakh. Tom 4. Ot Velikoy frantsuzskoy revolyutsii do Mirovoy voyny*. Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteyya. [Дюби, Ж., Перро, М. *История женщин на Западе. В 5 томах. Том 4. От Великой французской революции до Мировой войны*. Санкт-Петербург: Алетейя, 2015.]

Fromm, E. (2023). Iskusstvo lyubit'. Moskva: AST. [Фромм, Э. *Искусство любить*. Москва: АСТ, 2023.]

Gendernye issledovaniya (2019). *Gendernyye issledovaniya: Feministskaya metodologiya v sotsial'nykh naukakh*. Khar'kov: izdatel'stvo KHTSGI. [*Гендерные исследования: Феминистская методология в социальных науках*. Харьков: издательство ХЦГИ, 2019.]

Gordin, M. A. (1989). Anna Petrovna Kern i yeye literaturnoye naslediye. In Kern (Markova-Vinogradskaya), A. P. *Vospominaniya, dnevniki, perepiska*. Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Pravda", 5-24. [Гордин, М. А. Анна Петровна Керн и ее литературное наследие. В Керн (Маркова-Виноградская), А. П. *Воспоминания, дневники, переписка*. Москва: Издательство "Правда", 1989, 5-24.]

Kern (Markova-Vinogradskaya), A. P. (1989). *Vospominaniya, dnevniki, perepiska*. Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Pravda". [Керн (Маркова-Виноградская), А. П. *Воспоминания, дневники, переписка*. Москва: Издательство "Правда", 1989.]

Indzinskaya, A. V. (2015). "Vsya vasha i s kostylyami E. Shtakenshneyder": perepiska E. A. Shtakenshneyder i A. G. Dostoevsky. *Neizvestnyy Dostoevsky*, № 4, 34-39. [Индзинская, А. В. "Вся ваша и с костылями Е. Штакеншнейдер": переписка Е. А. Штакеншнейдер и А. Г. Достоевской. *Неизвестный Достоевский*, № 4, 2015, 34-39.]

Indzinskaya, A. V. (2019). F. M. Dostoevsky v perepiske E. A. Shtakenshneyder s Ya. P. Polonskim. *Neizvestnyy Dostoevsky*, № 4, 2019, 139-158. [Индзинская, А. В. Ф. М. Достоевский в переписке Е. А. Штакеншнейдер с Я. П. Полонским. *Неизвестный Достоевский*, № 4, 2019, 139-158.]

Lecarme, J., Lecarme-Tabone, E. (1997). *L'autobiographie*. Paris: Armand Colin.

Lejeune, Ph. (1975). *Le Pacte autobiographique*. Paris: Seuil.

Lejeune, Ph. (2009). *On Diary*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Paperno, I. (2004). What Can Be Done with Diaries?. *Russian Review*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Oct.), 561-573.

Rozanov, I. N. (1934). Elena Andreyevna Shtakenshneyder i yeye dnevnik. In Shtakenshneyder, E. A. *Dnevnik i zapiski (1854 – 1856)*. Leningrad: Akademiya, 7-27. [Розанов, И. Н. Елена Андреевна Штакеншнейдер и ее дневник. В Штакеншнейдер, Е. А. *Дневник и записки (1854 – 1856)*. Ленинград: Академия, 1934, 7-27.]

Savkina, I. (2007). *Razgovory s zerkalom i Zazerkal'yem. Avtodokumental'nyye zhenskiye teksty v russkoy literature pervoy poloviny XIX veka*. Moskva: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye. [Савкина, И. *Разговоры с зеркалом и Зазеркальем. Автодокументальные женские тексты в русской литературе первой половины XIX века*. Москва: Новое литературное обозрение, 2007.]

Stakenshneider, E. A. (1934). *Dnevnik i zapiski (1854–1856)*. Leningrad: Akademiya. [Штакеншнейдер, Е. А. *Дневник и записки (1854–1856)*. Ленинград: Академия, 1934.]

Smith, S., Watson, J. (1998). *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Stroganova, E. N. (2019). *Klassiki i sovremennitsy: gendernyye realii v istorii russkoy literatury XIX veka*. Moskva: Litfakt. [Строганова, Е. Н. *Классики и современницы: гендерные реалии в истории русской литературы XIX века*. Москва: Литфакт, 2019.]

Vacheva, A. (2017). Literaturnaya zhizn' 1850-kh godov v zapiskakh Eleny Shtakenshneyder (1836 – 1897). In *Rusistika segodnya: traditsii i perspektivy. Yubileynaya mezhdunarodnaya nauchnaya konferentsiya*. Sofia: Tip–top pres, 472-479. [Вачева, А. Литературная жизнь 1850-х годов в записках Елены Штакеншнейдер (1836 – 1897). В: *Русистика сегодня: традиции и перспективы. Юбилейная международная научная конференция*. София, Тип–топ прес, 2017, 472-479.]

Viktorovich, V. A. (2017). Ispytaniye "prakticheskoy filosofii", ili dva uchitelya Eleny Shtakenshneyder. *Neizvestnyy Dostoevsky*, №2, 2017, 71-95. [Викторович, В. А. Испытание "практической философии", или два учителя Елены Штакеншнейдер. *Неизвестный Достоевский*, №2, 2017, 71-95.]

Viollet, K., Grechenaya, E. (2006). Dnevnik v Rossii v kontse XVIII – pervoy polovine XIX v. kak avtobiograficheskaya praktika. V Biolle, K. Grechenaya, E. (eds.). *Avtobiograficheskaya praktika v Rossii i vo Frantsii*. Moskva: IMLI RAN, 57-111. [Вьолле, К., Греченая, Е. Дневник в России в конце XVIII – первой половине XIX в. как автобиографическая практика. В Бьолле, К. Греченая, Е. (ред.). *Автобиографическая практика в России и во Франции*. Москва: ИМЛИ РАН, 2006, 57-111.]

Woolf, V. (1929). *A Room of One's Own*. London: Hogarth Press.