

Chapter One

Sentimentalist Gender Concepts: Their Western Socio-Political Origins and Their Reception in Russia

This chapter provides some context to prevailing Sentimentalist socio-political assumptions, in particular the division of society into a public and a private sphere. It addresses the concept of civil society, and investigates its relationship to notions on gender, exploring to what extent they shaped representations of fate as a female element of disorder. Initially, the focus will be on Western Europe, in particular on France, with frequent reference to the writings of the philosopher and writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), which were of crucial importance in this context. This will be followed by a look at Russian culture and how the Sentimentalist concepts affected it. Finally, differences between the Russian version of Sentimentalist gender concepts and their Western European and French counterparts will be highlighted.

Women's exclusion from the republican order

A fundamental feature of Sentimentalist socio-political thinking was the notion that the state should be structured along democratic principles. In 18th-century Western Europe, Rousseau was among the chief proponents of the Republican concept and, in his 1762 treatise *Du contrat social* (The Social Contract), outlined the basis for a legitimate political order within a framework of classical republicanism, describing the creation of a civil society through a social contract which protects individuals both from each other and from external danger. Collectively, individuals are the authors of the law. Therefore, by coming together in a civil society, submitting to the authority of the will of the people as a whole, and by abandoning their claims of natural right, individuals can both preserve themselves and remain free.¹

The republican models which inspired Rousseau's political ideas were a product of Western European culture, including Switzerland and its neighbouring, independent city state of Geneva, where Rousseau was raised. He also drew on

1 Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Du contrat social, ou, principes du droit politique*. Burgelin, Pierre (ed.): Garnier-Flammarion: Paris 1966.

the ancient Greek concept of a republican state resurrected by Niccoló Machiavelli (1469–1527), the Italian Renaissance political philosopher.

From a feminist point of view, these models describe a civil state based on principles of discrimination and exclusion, and lacking in genuinely democratic foundations. In ancient Greece, for example, neither slaves and nor women were regarded as citizens of the *polis*. Democracy, therefore, is not based on an ideal which ascribes unconditional value to each and every individual; the creators of democracy never intended to establish universal human rights. Patriarchal rule as such was not abolished when it was overturned but was transformed, through fragmentation and redistribution among ‘brothers’, into a ‘fraternal patriarchy’. The public space of society, and the laws underpinning it, came about without women’s participation. This conceptual distinction in political thinking on the grounds of biological difference is what Carole Pateman calls ‘the sexual contract’. In her ground-breaking study, Pateman posits the existence of a *sexual* contract prior to the emergence of a *social* contract, the sexual contract implying women’s subordination to men, and ensuring men’s access to women’s bodies.²

Rousseau’s political ideas were a decisive element in the dawning of the French Revolution of 1789. That same year, the *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen* (Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen) was proclaimed a major achievement of the new republican order. Women, however, had no political sovereignty, nor did they enjoy the civil protection guaranteed by the document, a fact which illustrates the disjunction of civil rights from women’s rights. In response to this omission, the French playwright and political activist, Olympe de Gouges (1748–1793), issued her *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* (Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen, 1791). Her ideas were unwelcome, however. Accused of counter-revolutionary conspiracy, de Gouges was guillotined two years later, her death obliterating the potential re-orientation of civil society as a political system based on social equality of the sexes.³

The idea that women should not be a part of the public sphere was reinforced by Rousseau’s concept of the republican order of the state, which strengthened the notion of a society divided into a public domain accessible to men, and a private sphere reserved for women and regarded as an emotional retreat from the ruthless outside world. The republican order of the state, whose cohesion relied on a mutual, voluntary bond among brothers, to the complete exclusion of women,

2 Carole Pateman: *The Sexual Contract*. Polity Press: Cambridge 1988.

3 Mary Seidman Trouille: *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment. Women Writers Read Rousseau*. State University Press of New York: New York 1997, p. 243.

was divorced from the notion of femininity. Jean Bethke Elshtain notes that politics 'is in part an elaborate defence against the tug of the private, against the lure of the familial, against evocations of female power.'⁴

In Rousseau's political writings, woman is perceived as an element of disorder. Uncontrollable, she poses a threat to the order of the republican state. Pateman shows that 'in his essay, *Politics and the Arts*, Rousseau proclaims that "never has a people perished from an excess of wine; all perish from the disorder of women." According to Rousseau, Pateman suggests, women 'have a disorder at their very centres—in their morality'

Writings by men such as Rousseau betray a subliminal fear of woman's sexual appetite and reproductive capacity. Well before Sigmund Freud, Rousseau states that, being but inadequately capable of developing the control mechanism which Freud was to call the 'superego', women cannot sufficiently subdue their passions.

Such fears and notions about women were transferred into the world of politics, a process which Pateman defines as follows:

'The disorder of women' means that they pose a threat to political order and so must be excluded from the public world. Men possess the capacities required for citizenship, in particular they are able to use their reason to sublimate their passions, develop a sense of justice and so uphold the universal, civil law. Women, we learn from the classic texts of contract theory, cannot transcend their bodily natures and sexual passions; women cannot develop such a political morality.⁵

The dichotomy endorsed by numerous republican political theorists resulted in assumptions about manliness which forced politically active men to repress any internal feminine aspects, leading to 'man's inability to tolerate the feminine side of his nature—an intolerance projected onto, and helping to constitute, external social forms.'

Fate brings disorder to the republic

One manifestation in the public world of the element of disorder was fate, a concept reflected in many Sentimentalist writings, as I will show in Chapters Two

4 Jean Bethke Elshtain: *Public Man, Private Woman. Women in Social and Political Thought*. Princeton University Press: Princeton NJ 1993, pp. 15–16.

On this topic, see also

Linda Zerilli: *Signifying Woman. Culture and Chaos in Rousseau, Burke, and Mill*. Cornell University Press: London 1994, pp. 16–59.

5 Carole Pateman: *The Disorder of Wome. Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory*. Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA 1989, pp. 17–18.

and Six. The following paragraphs summarise the development of the notion of 'fate' in European culture and address its association with the gendered conceptions of republican ideals. Personified as a female character, fate was occasionally called 'Fortune' or 'Destiny'. In antiquity, Fortune was considered to be the deliverer of worldly goods, as Hanna Fenichel Pitkin has shown in her study on the character of Fortune in the writings of Machiavelli. A highly respected goddess, 'directed toward human self-control rather than toward control of the goddess', Fortune's attributes include the cornucopia, a symbol of abundance, as well as a ball or wheel to symbolise her ability to play havoc with human lives.⁶ By the early Middle Ages, Christianity had created a hierarchy of the different manifestations of this female character, reducing Destiny and Fortune to mere facilitators of the will of God, omnipotent organiser and ruler of the universe. In the Middle Ages, Fortune was attributed with maternal features; her cult bore resemblances to that of the Virgin. While the Virgin was the perfect mother, however, Fortune was depicted as an evil stepmother. The Virgin is benign and benevolent while Fortune is angry and terrifying, heedless to any prayers which may be offered to her. Men, although terrified of her, make no attempt to fight her or resist the power of her machinations, attempting to learn life's lessons from her instead. It is in this guise that Fortune will appear in Chapter Six dedicated to Naumova.

By the Renaissance, Fortune is an irrational demi-goddess no longer in control of human lives; if she interferes with human endeavour, she must be subjugated. This is why Renaissance depictions of Fortune are far less frightening than Medieval ones. In contrast to the ancient Roman world, where Fortune stood at the helm of ships, symbolising the decisive force which governs the course of human existence, Renaissance iconography shows her 'as the ship's mast, holding the sail, while it is man who steers.'⁷ The Renaissance doctrine rests upon a gender-specific concept that, rather than attempting to obliterate mere vestiges of a mythical female deity, betrays a deep-seated male fear of the female element equated to disorder. Although it is natural to be upset by and infuriated with the cruel turns and vagaries in our lives, and with their impact on our autonomy, there is no objective reason why life's unpredictability should be represented by female allegories and metaphors.

6 Hanna Fenichel Pitkin: *Fortune is a Woman. Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccoló Machiavelli*. University of California Press: Berkeley 1984, p. 139.

7 Pitkin, p. 142.

It was Machiavelli who first introduced sexual connotations when he equated political concepts of the state with manliness, contrasting it with the feminised threat—and symbolic power—exerted by utterly unpredictable Fortune, who can wreak havoc on kingdoms and nation states. She is Circe luring men to their destruction. The gender-specific aspects of Machiavelli's political doctrine translated themselves into his republican ideals, which strongly influenced Rousseau's ideas on the republican order of the state. Machiavelli advocated a clear distinction between the public realm of male civic virtues, including the creation of a civic brotherhood, and the private sphere of female virtues and 'feminine' qualities such as forgiveness, gentleness and compassion. This dichotomy held no room for a symbolic character as unstable and disruptive as Fortune. Since she could not be mastered, it became necessary to summon extraordinarily powerful manifestations of male virtue, understood as civic virtue, in defence.⁸

As Chapter Two will demonstrate, by the end of the 18th century such sexual connotations also appear in depictions of Fortune in Russia. Perhaps as an antidote to masculinist tendencies in politics, Sentimentalist men celebrated femininity in cultural domains, literature included. Many aspects of the socio-political ideas which prevailed in Sentimentalism therefore stood in direct opposition to its literary concepts.⁹

In Sentimentalist thought, control of the passions—a requirement for social life—was associated to an essentialist dichotomy projected onto women, who were consequently pressed into the ideal of domestic angel and virtuous being to the exclusion of other options, be that participation in civic brotherhood, or disruptive 'madwoman in the attic', to use Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's image.¹⁰

8 Elshaint, p. 99.

9 On the contrast between the masculinity displayed in the public sphere (e.g., university life) and expressions of affection in the private sphere of the family that persisted in Russia until the mid-19th century, see Rebecca Friedman: *Masculinity, Autocracy, and the Russian University. 1804–1863*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke 2005, pp. 53–74, 99–124; Rebecca Friedman: 'From Boys to Men: Manhood in the Nicholaevan University'. In: Clements, Barbara Evans / Friedman, Rebecca / Healey, Dan (eds): *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke 2002, pp. 33–50.

10 Sandra Gilbert / Susan Gubar: *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press: New Haven 1979.

Sentimentalist elevation of the private sphere

As opposed to the public—exclusively masculine—sphere of politics, the private sphere of the home was thought to be women's natural realm. While the home was indeed understood to be a kind of community, it was, as Pateman observes, above all considered to be a *natural* community which had existed before society had begun to emerge.¹¹ As women were considered to have a greater affinity to nature than culture, the notion expressed in Rousseau's *Social Contract* confined women even more to the domestic sphere, where civil rights did not apply. As Elshtain states, 'the private realm of feeling and sentiment is not subject to laws and not judged by public standards.' Rousseau's treatise *Émile ou de l'éducation* (Emile, or, on Education, 1762) reflects this attitude. While an essential element in a boy's upbringing was to instil civil virtues so that he might become a responsible citizen, a girl's education aimed at making her the guardian of morals and virtues in the private sphere of her home.¹²

The public space not only created universal laws intended to guarantee security and equality among brothers, but also to stimulate feelings of justice, a civil virtue which women, who remained in the intimate sphere of the home, were denied. Pateman states that

... it is love, not justice, that is the first virtue of the family. The family is a naturally social, not a conventionally social, institution, but justice is a public or conventional virtue.¹³

As Mary Seidman Trouille observes, this was also a result of Rousseau's dictum, according to which women lacked 'the instinct to resist injustice.' Apart from virtue, paternal authority—also believed to be a 'natural' authority—is the only regulator in the intimate space of the home. Any women with access to the public world were expected to transfer naturalness and honesty—key virtues in Sentimentalist discourse—from the home into the public sphere.¹⁴

Dena Goodman suggests that the dichotomy between a public sphere accessible to men and a private sphere considered to be women's natural realm of activity may be refined if we apply the paradigm outlined in Jürgen Habermas' *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, where a distinction is made

11 Pateman 1989, p. 19.

12 Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Émile, ou, de l'éducation*. T. L'Aminot et al (eds). Bordas: Paris 1992.

13 Pateman 1989, p. 20.

14 Trouille, p. 17;
Elshtain, pp. 157–158;
Pateman 1989, p. 132.

between a public sphere and an *authentic* public sphere.¹⁵ The public sphere is subject to state authority; it is the realm of the court and the aristocracy and controlled by the police and, despite its claims of responding to the needs of, and being responsible for, the welfare of its subjects, it is far beyond their everyday lives. By contrast, an *authentic* public sphere arises when individuals come together to make public use of their reason—in towns, institutions of sociability and the bourgeois family. Despite some public elements, its existence remains outside the public sphere of the state. It is in the *authentic* public sphere that cells of opposition may emerge against the public sphere of the state, which has excluded many subjects from participating in the exercise of political power. In France the weight of the authentic public sphere increased to the point where it eventually overturned the power of the state.

Joan Landes investigates the place of women in the gender paradigm brought about by the French Revolution,¹⁶ arguing that, in its wake, a gender division emerged in the new social order. Rousseau's celebration of domestic life, and of women's place in this domain, was a crucial element in the theoretical framework which paved the way for the new order.¹⁷ After the Revolution, *salonnières* and ladies at court, who under the Ancien Régime had occupied what may be considered

15 Dena Goodman: 'Public Sphere and Private Life. Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime'. *History and Theory* 31, 1992, pp. 1–20; Jürgen Habermas: *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Polity: Cambridge 2008.

16 Joan Landes: *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca 1988.

17 Applying Habermas' theory to the 'woman question', Goodman suggests a revision of Landes' division in France into a male public space and female private sphere. Following Habermas' distinction, Goodman argues for the existence of a public sphere of the state alongside an authentic public sphere of private gatherings where individuals make public use of reason.

Women were influential in both domains, i.e. in the public sphere when involved in life at court, and in the authentic public sphere when hosting salons from which a culture of intellectual exchange began to emerge and threaten the power of the state. As the post-revolutionary state began to appropriate and dilute the authentic public sphere, however, an important arena of female influence disappeared.

Where Goodman disagrees with Landes is in her labelling both *salonnières* and women of the court as women of the public sphere without considering that the former belong to the private realm, of which the authentic public sphere is a part, while the latter belong to the public sphere of the state. Goodman's study does not contest the fact, however, that women were eventually expelled from both areas and relegated to domesticity. See Goodman, pp. 1–20.

public-sphere positions, found themselves expelled from such spheres of public influence, and relegated to the private sphere of the home.

Another way in which the dichotomy between a public sphere of politics and a private sphere of domesticity can be revised is if—as Elshtain suggests—we regard the family as a constituent of culture, rather than an entity opposed to it. From this perspective, home as a place where both men and women are socialised in equal measure ceases to be a sphere that is of secondary relevance to the public sphere of politics. This view contrasts with the notion of the ‘naturally good human being’ posited by Rousseau in order to criticise the path to civilisation his society was travelling on at the time. It is a notion which suggests that enlightenment and progress improve people’s morals. In his *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts, 1750), Rousseau claims that the arts and sciences corrupt a human being’s primordial goodness and are therefore harmful to society. From his *Emile* to his *Confessions* (1783), the philosopher adopts as a guiding principle the notion of a human being’s innate goodness combined with an elevated esteem for nature and scepticism towards social institutions.¹⁸

Even though the influence of Rousseau’s work prevented women from assuming influential positions in the public sphere, instead encouraging them to regard motherhood and domestic life as their main social functions, many women at the time welcomed this shift of focus. The reason for this paradox is that Sentimentalism’s elevated regard for the private sphere gave women a chance to address and give voice to many of the problems they had to cope with, especially when it came to courtship and marriage, which played a very important role in women’s lives. In the absence of other options, marriage was often the only way a woman could acquire material stability or wealth, and could have a significant impact on her mental and physical well-being. In Western Europe, a married man was entitled to be in charge of his wife’s possessions. And so, due to a lack

18 To illustrate her objection to Rousseau’s ideas on this topic, and to exemplify her view that the family is a fundamental element in the creation of culture, Elshtain refers to the Wild Boy of Aveyron captured in south-western France in 1800 who, having grown up outside human society, had failed to develop any capacity of communicating with other people nor did he display any higher moral standards in his interactions with them. See Elshtain, pp. 298–353;

Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*. Roger, Jacques (ed.). Garnier-Flammarion: Paris 1971;

Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Les Confessions*. Raymond Trousson (ed.). Imprimerie nationale: Paris 1995.

of legal measures which would have called them to account, any husbands who dissipated or lost their wives' property usually went unpunished.

Women also had little control over their reproductive capacities, since a husband was allowed to have unrestricted access to his wife's body, rendering any form of birth control difficult. Women were seriously affected by male adultery, not only in terms of their emotional lives, but also in terms of health risks, for example if a husband infected his wife with a sexually transmitted disease. Many women therefore appreciated Rousseau's ideal of matrimony, which emphasised faithfulness and mutual respect. They also supported the Sentimentalist ideal that men and women should be free to choose their marital partners, since relationships which emerged from natural inclinations were more likely to prevent adultery than marriage based on material interests. At a time when arranged marriages were common and the restrictive private sphere made it difficult for women to escape domestic misery, this promised a considerable improvement of women's lives.

Sentimentalism thus elevated the status of women, providing them with a position which brought them closer to the social esteem afforded to men. Rousseau's ideas promised women positions of considerable social significance—at least apparently so—offering them 'a new dignity as women and a valorisation of *la vie intérieure* (in the double sense of domestic life and affective experience).'¹⁹

I will argue in Chapters Four, Five and Six that a further feature of Sentimentalism which appealed to women was the Christian element inherent in this discourse. The Christian value system contains many aspects which elevate women's sphere of existence. Although Christianity is often presented as a faith which has contributed considerably to the oppression of women, it does have strong egalitarian aspects. As Elshtain argues, the emergence of Christianity some two thousand years ago 'ushered in a moral revolution,' forcing the ruling elite to justify their claims to power not with regard to tradition alone, but with reference to standards which applied to every individual. At its roots—and in sharp contrast to the heroic ideals supported in the preceding eras of ancient Greece and Rome—Christianity prepared the way for a democratisation of society because it afforded equal value to each and every single human being, from the oppressed, including slaves and women, to the highest dignitaries. Elshtain further claims that Christianity not only democratised society, but also, and particularly, cherished values which were essential to women and their realm of existence:

19 Trouille, p. 4.

Welcomed into that new community, the *res publica Christiana*, woman shared in the norms, activities, and ideals that were its living tissue. She found [...] that qualities most often associated with her activities as a mother—giving birth to and sustaining human life; an ethic of responsibility toward the helpless, the vulnerable, the weak; gentleness, mercy, and compassion—were celebrated.²⁰

Sentimentalism's elevated regard for femininity attributed considerable relevance to these values, which were important to women's lives. Pietist ideals emphasizing moral purity and charitable activity gained in popularity. However, although empowering to the individual, pietism shares the flaws of similar movements, from Martin Luther's religious reforms to Freemasonry and their belief in the transformative power and influence of virtuous individuals on society, which results in a failure even to attempt to change existing social structures.

A comparison of public and private spheres in the West and in Russia

As we have seen, a typical feature of Sentimentalism is its emphasis on public and private spheres and their clear attribution to gender roles. As in Western Europe, the creation of a public sphere in Russia began with the emergence of an absolutist state, for which Peter the Great (1672–1725) laid the foundation. In 1718 he reformed Moscovite Russia's political landscape by issuing an *ukaz* (edict) announcing the introduction of so-called *assemblei* (assemblies). The sense of equality in these assemblies was a novelty. Rank was of secondary importance; this enabled merchants and craftsmen to participate in these informal gatherings held in private homes, where the entertainment consisted of dancing, drinking, eating and playing games. Moreover, women were involved in rather than excluded from this (authentic) public sphere. This amounted to a considerable change from the Moscovy patriarchy, where noblewomen had spent their lives mostly segregated from the wider social world: Now Russian women became active participants in these forerunners of civil society.²¹

The 18th century therefore saw the rise of a vibrant authentic public sphere in Russia, ranging from salons and literary circles to theatres and public university

20 Elshtain, pp. 56–61.

21 On this topic, see also Barbara Alpern Engel: *Women in Russia. 1700–2000*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2004, pp. 5–26.

lectures.²² In contrast to Western Europe, however, many of these events were held at palaces or in the gardens of influential individuals. The coffee-house, a characteristic venue for activities in the authentic public sphere in Western Europe, was not typical of Russia. This led visitors to mistakenly deplore the absence of such a public sphere, which in turn was taken as evidence for Russia's social backwardness.

In fact, the authentic public sphere in Russia manifested itself in diverse activities.²³ Public intellectual debates were held at the Academy of Sciences. Clubs such as the St Petersburg English club proved highly popular, as did learned societies such as the Free Economic Society. After the administrative reforms of the provinces, initiated in 1775 by Catherine the Great (1729–1796), similar activities also occurred beyond Russia's main cities. 18th-century Russia's expanding print culture is further evidence of the existence of an authentic public sphere.

Women benefited from the growth of the authentic public sphere insofar as it enabled them to participate in social activities such as visits to ballrooms, theatres, gardens, literary circles and learned societies. Literary circles, in particular, provided important arenas for women's social interaction, providing both intellectual stimulus and exchange as well as opportunities to inspect potential marriage partners. Nevertheless, some domains remained off-limits to women, among them most clubs where women were regarded as a distraction; Masonic lodges, an important element of the authentic public sphere; as well as the secret societies and other platforms for political discourse which emerged at the beginning of the 19th century.²⁴

22 The nature of public and private spheres in Russia is well investigated in Douglas Smith: *Working the Rough Stone. Freemasonry and Society in Eighteenth-Century Russia*. Northern Illinois University Press: DeKalb 1999.

23 They included balls, which were separated into 'aristocratic' balls for an exclusive elite, and 'English' balls to which merchants were admitted. Theatrical, concert and opera performances were no longer reserved to the court and wealthy aristocrats, as had been the case in Moscovy, and visits to these venues attracted Russians in increasing numbers. As Smith further suggests, events on stage often mattered less than chatting with other members of the audience. The character of these venues therefore became rather similar to Western European coffee-houses. See Smith, pp. 67–70.

24 As Smith demonstrates, there were Masonic 'adoption lodges' for women in France. By the time of the French Revolution, any sizeable French city had an adoption lodge. Both there and in England, although 'women Masons were never allowed to meet without the supervision of their male counterparts', these institutions developed into forums where women's social inequality was discussed. Three adoption lodges seem to have operated in Russia, about which, however, little is known; see Smith, pp. 28–30.

In contrast to Western Europe, official 18th-century Russian policy made deliberate efforts to lower any barriers between the public sphere and the authentic public sphere. In the early days of her reign, Catherine the Great tried to foster civil awareness in her citizens, e.g. in her 'Nakaz' (Instruction) and by summoning representatives to a legislative commission. Her nomination of Ekaterina Dashkova as President of the Academy of Sciences, a key position in the public sphere, further challenged the traditional social order. In the long run, however, these measures failed to diminish the political gap between the authentic public sphere and the public sphere of state and court, not least because favouritism continued to flourish under Catherine the Great, lending additional weight to the public sphere of the court. There were many who felt incapable of exercising any influence in the system, retiring instead to the authentic public sphere and gathering in Masonic lodges and other secret societies, which fostered the egalitarian approach to the practice and celebration of interpersonal and spiritual values denied by official state institutions.

Similar to France, there were cells of opposition in the authentic public sphere seeking to abolish absolutist monarchy. And similar to the French Jacobin regime in late-18th-century France, the crown's response to the failed Decembrist uprising of 1825 was to impose severe restrictions on the authentic public sphere, albeit less violently so. The policies of Nicholas I (1796–1855) were designed to restrict and mould the private realm to conform to the public sphere, where he proclaimed the fundamental elements of his rule: 'pravoslavie' (orthodoxy), 'samoderzhavie' (autocracy), and 'narodnost'' (nationality).

The strong emphasis of Russian Sentimentalist ethics on friendship, and the idea that marriage, i.e. the husband-wife relationship, should be based on reciprocity of feelings, ran counter to traditional 18th-century conceptions of marriage which placed family interests above those of the individual.²⁵ Traditionally, a woman's primordial duty was to marry and produce children; a mother's important task was to find a husband for her daughter; in turn, the daughter was expected to accept her mother's choice. As it was generally believed that marriage would eventually lead to love, emotional fulfilment at the outset was of secondary importance. Although Peter the Great had outlawed the practice of forcing women into marriage in 1722,

25 See Jessica Tovrov: *The Russian Noble Family. Structure and Change*. Garland Publishing: New York 1987.

On the egalitarian potential of Sentimentalist conceptions of friendship within marriage, see also

Olga E. Glagoleva: *Dream and Reality of Russian Provincial Young Ladies. 1700–1850*. Carl Beck Papers: Pittsburgh 2000, pp. 46–47.

the aristocracy's persistent sense of authority and hierarchy meant that countless women found themselves having to accept arranged marriages.²⁶

Just as in the West, marriage had a considerable impact on a Russian noblewoman's life. Although promising her access to a wider range of social activities and a higher status than a spinster's, marriage did not offer her the independence she might have dreamt of while suffering her father's authoritarian rule. A married woman was legally obliged to obey her husband. In the new family, she usually also came under her mother-in-law's supervision and she was expected to prove her virtue by suffering the husband's infidelities—if and when they occurred—in silence. Rousseau's call that spouses should be respectful of and faithful to each other, and the Sentimentalist idea that marriage should be based on reciprocated feelings promised to bring considerable change to women's lives in Russia. Bolotnikova's and Naumova's writings contain intriguing reflections on the topic, on which I will expand in Chapters Five and Six.

While the Western European home and its private sphere were regarded as a woman's natural domain, an idea made increasingly popular through Rousseau's writings, the position of the home in Russian culture requires a more differentiated approach.²⁷ As Jessica Tovrov argues, despite gender divisions in Russian society, the home was a place where private and public spheres overlapped. And, just as Elshtain suggests, the family was regarded as an integral part of Russian culture. This is in contrast to Rousseau's perception of the family as a natural entity outside society. Aristocratic Russian women had significant opportunities to interact with people and institutions beyond the confines of the home. To a great extent, this was due to the fact that, as Michelle Lamarche Marrese's study demonstrates, they were entitled to own property.²⁸ From 1753 onwards, Russian noblewomen were permitted to sell their estate without their husband's consent.

26 Arranged marriages remained the norm until well into the late 19th century, especially among townspeople and peasants. By then, members of the aristocracy, however, enjoyed greater freedom in the choice of their spouses; see Barbara Alpern Engel: *Breaking the Ties That Bound. The Politics of Marital Strife in Late Imperial Russia*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca 2011, pp. 49–51.

27 For differences in the concept of the home between Western and Eastern Europe, see also Barbara Evans Clements: *A History of Women in Russia. From Earliest Times to the Present*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington 2012, pp. 89.

28 Michelle Lamarche Marrese: *A Woman's Kingdom. Noblewomen and the Control of Property in Russia. 1700–1861*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca 2002. See also Judith Vowles: 'Marriage à la russe'. In: Costlow, Jane T. / Sandler, Stephanie / Vowles, Judith (eds): *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*. Stanford University Press: Stanford 1993, pp. 53–72;

As a result, many of them managed their own estates, supervising industrial production and playing an active role in the economy by buying and selling property. It was normal for spouses to be in control of their own properties, and very common for them to spend considerable periods of time apart to manage their respective estates. It was also not uncommon for men employed in state service in the major cities to have their wives manage their country estates. Women's right to control property led to fewer restrictions than in the West in terms of which spheres of existence were considered appropriate for men and women.

As Marrese argues, women in Western Europe tended to pay considerable attention to household goods, clothing, and valuable items; theirs was a female identity which, in the absence of other options of owning property, relied heavily on these kinds of material possessions. In contrast, the ideals of female domesticity which began to spread across Russia by means of advice literature and many works of fiction, including Western writings such as Rousseau's, were at odds with Russian women's legal right to own property and with the expectation that women should look after their estates in order to provide an income for their children.

This is not to say that women's right to own property never conflicted with society's patriarchal structure. Many women only actively engaged in property transactions as widows. Nor were husbands prevented from encroaching upon their wives' properties by running their estates into the ground or gambling them away, as demonstrated in the examples of Anna Labzina (1758–1828) at the beginning of the 19th century, or that of Karolina Pavlova (1807–1893) in 1852.²⁹ It did, however, give women a legal entitlement to claim control of their own property, which some women pursued in court.

Robin Bisha et al. (eds): *Russian Women, 1698–1917. Experience and Expression*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington 2002, pp. 58–107; Clements, pp. 38–9, 79–80.

For an example of a Russian gentlewoman living in the second half of the 19th century who seems to have been in charge of estate management as a matter of course, see Katherine Pickering Antonova's extensive study on this topic, in particular the chapters: 'Estate Management' and 'Domesticity and Motherhood,' in: *An Ordinary Marriage. The World of a Gentry Family in Provincial Russia*. Oxford University Press: Oxford 2013, pp. 74–94, 136–156.

Antonova emphasises the contrast between the reality of Russian provincial gentlewomen and Western rhetoric about female domesticity, widely known in the Russian provinces at the time.

- 29 Anna Labzina: 'Vospominaniia. Opisanie zhizni odnoi blagorodnoi zhenshchiny'. In: Bokova, B. (ed.): *Istoriia zhizni blagorodnoi zhenshchiny*. Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie: Moscow 1996, pp. 15–88 (p. 55);

Russian culture had therefore developed in a way which empowered women, including them in society rather than excluding them. Towards the end of the 18th century this empowerment was jeopardised by Rousseau's ideal of female education which restricted women to representing domesticity and being dependent on male authority. Labzina's example, which I will expand upon below, illustrates how Rousseau's influence threatened to reverse a progressive feature of Russian society, i.e. female authority in both the public and the private spheres.³⁰

It should be noted that Russian women's responsibilities as estate managers may well have put them in charge of financial matters, giving them opportunities to interact with a great number of people. However, as I will discuss in Chapter Two, women—especially if they lived in the provinces—also needed and wanted reading material to open a window on the world beyond their estates. By reading texts written far from their estates (even abroad), publishing their own works and making them accessible to a wide readership, these women managed to escape domesticity, either in the narrower sense of the family circle, or the wider one of their estates. However, just because aristocratic Russian women bore economic responsibilities, they were not necessarily free to access the more intellectual domains of life.³¹

Alexander Lehrman: 'A Chronology of Karolina Pavlova's Life'. In: Fusso, Susanne / Lehrman, Alexander (eds): *Essays on Karolina Pavlova*. Northwestern University Press: Evanston IL 2001, pp. 251–263 (p. 257).

30 On Labzina in the context of Sentimentalist ideals, see also

Elisabeth Vogel: 'Zur diskursiven Verhandlung empfindsamer Konzepte. Am Beispiel von Nikolai Karamzins *Briefe eines russischen Reisenden* und Anna Labzinas *Erinnerungen*'. In: Cheauré, Elisabeth / Heyder, Carolin (eds): *Russische Kultur und Gender Studies*. Berlin Verlag: Berlin 2002, pp. 149–172; and

Irina Savkina: *Razgovory s zerkalom i zazerkal'em. Avtodokumental'nye zhenskie teksty v russkoi literature pervoi poloviny XIX veka*. Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie: Moscow 2007, p. 75.

Savkina argues that Labzina eventually managed to subvert the role of a submissive woman imposed on her when she made public her experiences, disclosing the clash between Sentimentalist ideals of femininity and the reality of women's daily lives.

On the persistence of the ideal of women's domestic role in Russia in the mid-19th century as manifested in advice literature, see

Diana Greene: 'Mid-Nineteenth-Century Domestic Ideology in Russia'. In: Marsh, Rosalind (ed.): *Women and Russian Culture. Projections and Self-Perceptions*. Berghahn: New York 1998, pp. 78–97.

31 This becomes particularly clear in the example provided by Antonova. Here, the father of a genteel provincial family regards education as an intellectual domain which reaches

Egalitarian principles in Sentimentalist discourse

As I have outlined, a crucial element to Sentimentalist socio-political ideas was the creation of a public sphere of civil laws for men, and a private sphere of feelings which was thought to be women's natural domain. Another fundamental feature of Sentimentalist discourse was the emphasis on egalitarianism and belief in the unconditional value of all human beings. Bolotnikova, whose writings I will discuss in Chapter Five, refers to these notions.

In Russia, the concept questioned the legitimacy of a social system based on serfdom, and led to discussions about women's social equality. However, these discussions did not fundamentally challenge the paradigm of gender-separate spheres of existence. The importance of egalitarian concepts in Russian Sentimentalism manifested itself in the tendency of the ruling class to show a strong sensitivity to democratic ideas and class distinctions—to a great extent a legacy of the ethical principles of the Enlightenment. In particular, the belief that progress and educational institutions were beneficial became very popular. It was contrary to Rousseau's cultural scepticism, and related to the fact that 18th-century Russia was still struggling to overcome cultural 'backwardness' in comparison with Western Europe. Russians espoused some of Rousseau's concepts (such as the worship of nature) while rejecting or ignoring others. The relevance of progress and education clearly emerges from Catherine the Great's political agenda. Belief in their usefulness was so profound that they soon began to trickle down to the lower classes of Russian society. By the end of the 18th century, many members of the aristocracy had established institutions to provide education for serfs and peasants alike. The poet Vasilii Zhukovskii (1783–1852), for example, was reported to have educated and liberated his servant, while Nikolai Novikov (1744–1818) supported a school open to children from all classes of society; journals published numerous similar accounts held up as exemplary.³²

beyond the private realm to provide a connection with the outside world, and takes charge of his children's education. See Antonova, pp. 157–181; see also Glagoleva 2000, p. 68.

32 Natal'ia Kochetkova: *Literatura russkogo sentimentalizma. Esteticheskie i khudozhestvennye iskaniia*. Nauka: St Petersburg 1994, p. 16;

Thomas Barran: *Russia Reads Rousseau*. Northwestern University Press: Evanston IL 2002;

Natalia Kochetkova: 'Zur Idee des Fortschritts in der Literatur des russischen Sentimentalismus'. *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 39, 1994, pp. 405–412;

Catharine Ciepiela: 'Reading Russian Pastoral. Zhukovsky's Translation of Gray's Elegy'. In: Sandler, Stephanie (ed.): *Rereading Russian Poetry*. Yale University Press: New Haven 1999, pp. 31–57 (p. 43).

In addition to the popularity of the notions of progress and education, many of these altruistic acts were due to the (egalitarian) Sentimentalist notion of compassion. In the late 18th century, a Sentimentalist was considered to be compassionate, humane and philanthropic. True to form, the Freemasons considered moral perfection to be within reach of every human being, regardless of their level of education or social class. Masonic journals published reports, for instance, about peasants saving their neighbours from house fires, demonstrating that even the ostensibly ignorant could be magnanimous. Many Freemasons were philanthropists. When famine threatened, Rousseau-inspired Novikov, for example, stocked granaries for the peasant population.³³

Nevertheless, the Sentimentalist conception of compassion was often patronising and did not genuinely aim at changing the status quo. Prevailing notions of virtue required people to accept a given situation. In fact, to do so was considered particularly virtuous, causing people to abandon any thoughts of improvement. This neutralized any threats of political uprising or criticism of the gender order which could have arisen from increasing demands for social equality. The patronising nature of Sentimentalist compassion is most clearly visible in Sentimentalist attitudes to serfdom. Believing that society would improve through enhanced attention to each individual's spiritual life, the Freemasons engaged in charitable activities to reduce the misery of the serfs without condemning the

For an interpretation of Urusova's 'Polion' as a polemic against Rousseau's criticism of culture, see

Marcus C. Levitt: 'The Polemic with Rousseau over Gender and Sociability in E.S. Urusova's *Polion* (1774)'. *The Russian Review* 66, 2007, pp. 586–601.

On the progressive and the conservative interpretations of the Sentimentalist notion of equality, see also

Iurii D. Levin: *The Perception of English Literature in Russia. Investigations and Materials*. Catherine Philips (transl.). Astra: Nottingham 1994, pp. 159–160.

33 Kochetkova 1994, pp. 18–19, 62–63;

V. Stepanov: 'Povest' Karamzina *Frol Silin*'. In: Berkov, V. (ed.): *Derzhavin i Karamzin v literaturnom dvizhenii XVIII—nachala XIX veka*. Nauka: Leningrad 1969, pp. 229–244 (p. 233);

Inna Gorbatov: *Formation du concept de Sentimentalisme dans la littérature russe. L'Influence de J.J. Rousseau sur l'œuvre de N.M. Karamzin*. Peter Lang Verlag: Paris 1991, p. 42.

Anna Kuxhausen observes similar efforts to promote the idea of empathy in educational texts of that time. Anna Kuxhausen: *From the Womb to the Body Politic. Raising the Nation in Enlightenment Russia*. University of Wisconsin Press: Madison 2013, pp. 114–117.

institution of serfdom. For all his idealisation of a peasant's emotional capacities in works such as *Bednaia Liza* (Poor Liza) or *Frol Silin*, Karamzin still supported the institution of serfdom, and considered his Plato-inspired republican ideals mainly a fascinating utopia.

The writer Vladimir Izmailov felt pity for the members of disadvantaged social groups, but did not approve of the idea that serfs should acquire wealth, let alone transcend their social position. Instead, his sympathies were directed towards impoverished representatives of the gentry. Andrei Bolotov (1738–1833) expressed pity for oppressed members of society in his writings, but did so mostly to thank God for not having made him one of them. Zhukovskii's ambivalent views regarding serfdom led him to advocate (and put into practice) education for the serfs, while, at the same time, warning his contemporaries of the dangers which might result from subsequent demands for social freedom. The idealisation of compassion turns out to a great extent to be a self-congratulatory gesture, which in many cases may have served as a means of assuaging the guilty conscience of the privileged classes. As a result, it was as likely to reinforce as much as question the existing social order.³⁴

In Russia as well as in Western Europe, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars led to a desire to improve the conditions of the poor in order to forestall social unrest. This explains why even those Russian aristocrats who argued that serfdom should be abolished often had no intention of changing power relations in society, as Thomas Newlin's investigation of this question shows. Why were they so concerned about the living conditions of the serfs? Rather than the desire to generate social equality, it was the fear that the oppressed might some day rise and take revenge. An excerpt from Alexander Bakunin's 'Agreement Between Landlord and Peasant' of 1803 reveals this attitude:

Отречение от всех насильственных прав не уменьшит но утвердит законную власть помещика, и каждый куст не будет угрожать ему истреблением.

*Being severed from all rights will not diminish but will confirm the lawful right of the landowner, and it will not be that every bush threatens him with destruction.*³⁵

34 Kochetkova 1994, pp. 58–74;

Stepanov, p. 233;

Iurii Lotman: *Izbrannye stat' i*. 3 vols. Aleksandra: Tallin 1992, Vol. II, pp. 162–163;

Ciepiela, p. 43.

35 Alexander Bakunin: 'Usloviia pomeschchika s krest' ianinom' quoted in Thomas Newlin, *The Voice in the Garden: Andrei Bolotov and the Anxieties of Russian Pastoral (1738–1833)*, Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001, p. 99 (in English), p. 227 (in Russian).

Once serfdom was abolished, people would still be working for their landowners, yet they would do so out of their own free will, not because the system forced them.

One of the reasons why, in 19th-century Russia, so many members of the aristocracy began to feel compassion for the serfs was a sense of guilt for the advantages which came with their social position. After 1762, the landowners' privileged situation became even more evident among the aristocrats who retired to their estates once Peter III (1728–1762) had released the nobility from state service. Although the rate of retirement did not increase dramatically, emerging Sentimentalist ethics contributed to the popularity of an ideal which appealed to those who wished to retire to 'cultivate their gardens', in the words of French philosopher Voltaire. There is, Newlin suggests, both a literal and a symbolic meaning to this expression. It implies that one should 'withdraw inward and homeward, into the self, into the family, into the benign, quiet, familiar landscape of the estate'.³⁶ The aristocracy's retreat from the public life of state service to the privacy of their own land forced them to face the different ways in which different classes of society lived on their estates. They had to come to terms with the reality of serfdom, which presented itself to them in a much cruder form than when they had lived in the city. Little wonder, then, that attitudes towards serfdom were ambivalent.

Despite these controversial views, republican ideals circulated widely in Russia during the first two decades of the 19th century. Napoleon's *Code Civil*, introduced in 1804, had given a taste to Frenchmen interested in egalitarian political principles. During the ensuing two decades, the Decembrists, eager to introduce similar concepts in Russia, were preparing their *coup d'état*. Concepts of universal civil rights began to be a topic for discussion in various groups of society, particularly amongst the members of the army who had spent time in France after Napoleon's campaign against Russia. Terms such as 'zakon', 'prestuplen'e', 'vol'nost', 'tiran', 'tsepi', 'raby', 'svoboda', and 'okovy' (crime, freedom, tyrant, chains, slaves, liberty, fetters) became a part of the vocabulary in these debates, and served as signal words in Decembrist poetry.³⁷

As a consequence of this political climate, the 'woman question' became a hotly debated issue during the first two decades of the 19th century, as Grigorii Tishkin's study demonstrates, even though the Napoleonic Code was reactionary

36 Newlin, p. 5.

37 Lidiia Ginzburg: 'Russkaia lirika 1820—1830-kh godov'. In: Ginzburg, Lidiia (ed.): *Poety 1820—1830-kh godov*. Sovetskii pisatel': Leningrad 1961, pp. 13–14, 20; Brodskii, N.: *Literaturnye salony i kruzhki. Pervaia polovina XIX veka*. Academia: Leningrad 1930; repr. Olms: Zürich 1984, pp. 68–69, 142.

in this matter.³⁸ According to debates held in journals, criticism of the patriarchal structure of society had already arisen in 18th-century Russia. It was believed that men's greater physical strength was the cause of the social inequality of women, whose need for male protection was undisputed. The fact that sexual difference should have resulted in social oppression, however, was condemned as unbecoming to an enlightened society. By propagating culture, morals and knowledge, women were to be enabled to achieve social equality with men. This view was reflected in contributions in journals which tried to answer questions about whether men or women were more useful; the privilege usually went to women because of their ability to give birth.

The Decembrists, too, considered the role of the female sex in the new order of society, even though the political nature of their circles meant that women were not admitted. Decembrists such as Nikolai Kriukov, however, declared that the minds of men and women were completely equal, and that any social differences between the sexes were a consequence of education. Nevertheless, the Decembrists had no intention of granting civil rights to women nor of regarding them as equal members in the new social system. The tendency was to reduce women to the traditional tasks of motherhood, charitable actions, and embodiment of virtues and good morals. Sentimentalism made too strong a link between calls for equality between the sexes and the celebration of female virtue to allow the Decembrists to envisage fundamental changes in the social roles of the sexes.³⁹

The Sentimentalist notion of innate goodness, a fundamental feature of Rousseau's thought system, which became very popular in late-18th- and early-19th-century Russia, was particularly detrimental to the achievement of social equality

38 Grigorii Tishkin: 'Zhenskii vopros i pisatel'skii trud na rubezhe XVIII—XIX vekov'. In: Fainshtein, Mikhail (ed.): *Russkie pisatel'nitsy i literaturnyi protsess v kontse XVIII—pervoi treti XX vv.* Göpfert: Wilhelmshorst 1995, pp. 29–42. Napoleon is said to have intervened personally in the *Code Civil* in order to restore the husband's authority over his wife.

39 Tishkin, pp. 31–34;

Mikhail Fainshtein: 'Litsom k litsu. "Zhenskaia tema" v proizvedeniakh pisatel'nits Rossii i Germanii na rubezhe XIX i XX vv.'. In: Ganelin, R. (ed.): *O blagorodstve i preimushchestve zhenskogo pola. Iz istorii zhenskogo voprosa v Rossii.* Sankt-Peterburgskaia Gosudarstvennaia Akademiia Kul'tury: St Petersburg 1997, pp. 110–116.

Further examples of polemics about the roles of men and women that appeared in the press during the first decades of the 19th century can be found in Yael Harussi: 'Women's Social Roles as Depicted by Women Writers in Early Nineteenth-Century Russian Fiction'. In: Clayton, J. Douglas (ed.): *Issues in Russian Literature Before 1917.* Slavica Publishers: Columbus 1989, pp. 33–48.

between men and women. On a social level, this fascination was reflected in pedagogical experiments aimed at the creation of a natural, and therefore morally good, human being. The ideal object for this kind of experiment was what Iurii Lotman has termed the 'child-woman', a *tabula rasa* or clean slate in a double sense due to her being excluded from the allegedly corrupting influences of civilisation both as a woman and as a child.⁴⁰

Labzina, for example, spent some years of her youth in the house of poet and Freemason Mikhail Kheraskov, where she was deliberately kept in a state of ignorance and isolation in order for her innate goodness to be preserved. Like a child, this young married woman was expected to share every thought with her educators, a fact which is most revealing of the Sentimentalist image of women. The example also demonstrates that the concept of innate goodness was a gendered one and was chiefly projected onto women. By contrast, men were regarded as generally failing in their attempts to be morally good, and therefore 'condemned' to live in a state of corruption. In other words, a man could choose whether or not he wanted to adopt and emulate the idea of innate goodness, while women, thought to be endowed with natural goodness, were unable to escape.

Kheraskov's treatment of Labzina reflects his idea of woman's innate goodness and educational ignorance. In contrast, influenced by the teachings of St Augustine, he and his fellow Freemasons believed in Original Sin, meaning that man was born corrupt and therefore in need of continuous moral instruction if he wished to achieve goodness and restore his original state of innocence. The Freemasons held that man was a 'rough stone' which had to be cut and polished, whereas woman was already as virtuous as man wished to become. To achieve moral perfection, therefore, woman did not require the same degree of culture and education as man.

Summary

Chapter One outlined some of the foundations of Sentimentalism and its reception in Russia. Chiefly due to Rousseau's influence, ancient and medieval Western ideas reached Russia during the 18th and early 19th centuries. Together with the Sentimentalist ideal of female domesticity, the exclusion of women from the public sphere is based on a fear of the female element, which is thought to bring disorder to the republican brotherhood. The fear manifests itself in associations of Fate with the female, found repeatedly in Western and Russian cultural history.

40 Iurii Lotman: *Russlands Adel. Eine Kulturgeschichte von Peter I. bis Nikolaus I.* Böhlau: Köln 1997, p. 329–344.

By the time Rousseau's ideas reached Russia, the country had undergone a process of Westernisation in the course of which women were encouraged to participate in the (authentic) public sphere. However, the concept of a division of society into a public sphere reserved for men and a private one for women does not necessarily apply to all aspects of Russian society, where the family was regarded as belonging to the authentic public sphere. Moreover, in their role as estate managers, many Russian women were active in both the public and the private spheres.

The Sentimentalist ideal of female domesticity threatened to reverse this progressive feature of Russian society. Nevertheless, the symbolic elevation of women in Rousseau's writings appealed to many women, both in Russia and in the West. An important element of the Russian reception of Western Sentimentalism in the style of Rousseau was the religious component and its egalitarian conception. In general, Sentimentalism in Russia produced many debates on egalitarian aspects of society, including the question of serfdom, Decembrist calls for an egalitarian order of the state, and the woman question. However, the Sentimentalist fascination with alleged human primordial goodness risked having a negative impact on women, who served as its main objects of projection and were therefore threatened by exclusion from the public sphere of culture and education.