

Introduction

The present study examines the ways in which Russian women writers responded to Sentimentalist literary conventions during the first two decades of the 19th century, in particular to the notion that women have an inherent affinity with nature, which literary works of the time often presented as an earthly paradise. The study considers particular features in writings by several 18th- and early-19th-century Russian women authors including Anna Bunina, Alexandra Khvostova, Anna Volkova, Anna Labzina, Mariia Sushkova, Mariia and Elizaveta Moskvina, Ekaterina Ursusova, Alexandra Murzina, Anna Turchaninova and some of their anonymous colleagues. Particular features in works by non-Russian female writers including Isabella Lickbarrow, Charlotte Smith and, especially, Antoinette du Ligier de La Garde Deshoulières (Mme Deshoulières) also come under scrutiny. Particular attention is paid to works by three women authors who have so far received scant scholarly attention: Mariia Pospelova (1780/1783/1784–1805), Mariia Bolotnikova (dates unknown; published 1817), and Anna Naumova (c. 1787–1862). A chapter has been dedicated to each of them.

To contextualise Russian women's writing of the period, I have compared specific aspects with features in works by contemporary male Russian writers, primarily Nikolai Karamzin, but also Iakov Kniazhnin, Mikhail Popov, Ivan Khemnitser, Denis Fonvizin, Nikolai L'vov, Vasilii Zhukovskii, Andrei Bolotov, Mikhail Kherasov, Ivan Dmitriev, Alexander Radishchev, Alexander Sumarokov, Vasilii Trediakovskii, Mikhail Lomonosov, and Gavril Derzhavin. Alongside Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose writings greatly influenced Russian Sentimentalism, other non-Russian male authors relevant to my study include Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, François René de Chateaubriand, John Locke, Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, Charles Bonnet, Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, James Thomson, Edward Young, and the Swiss painter and poet, Salomon Gessner.

Rather than attempting to present a comprehensive overview of Russian women's writing in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the study addresses responses to specific Sentimentalist conceptions of writing, nature, and the feminine in the literary discourse of the time. A chapter each is dedicated to Pospelova, Bolotnikova, and Naumova because of their different responses to the broader literary and social constraints and potentials which governed their writing lives. The most important chapter focuses on Naumova's copious and wide-ranging collection of poems in order to do justice to the complexity, diversity and fascinating nature of her response to Sentimentalist conceptions of writing, nature and the

feminine, and to the way in which she addressed topics relating to fate in the emerging Romantic period. In contrast, shorter chapters cover Pospelova's copious but less diverse work and Bolotnikova's writings, which address an intriguing diversity of topics but take up fewer pages than Naumova's.

For the past two decades, Sentimentalist Russian women's writing has commanded a considerable amount of attention. In particular, the feminisation of women's writing subsequent to Karamzin's stylistic reforms has generated a great many works.¹ Studies dedicated to the lives and literary activities of men and women who lived in the provinces have also been published.² Moreover, the Sentimentalist conception of nature as an earthly paradise has been investigated, as has the reception of Rousseau in Russia.³

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- 1 For a detailed list of works on this topic, see Chapter Two.
 - 2 Mary W. Cavender: *Nests of the Gentry. Family, Estate, and Local Loyalties in Provincial Russia*. University of Delaware: Newark 2007;
Catherine Evtuhov: *Portrait of a Russian Province. Economy, Society, and Civilisation in Nineteenth-Century Nizhnii Novgorod*. University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh PA. 2011;
Olga E. Glagoleva: *Dream and Reality of Russian Provincial Young Ladies. 1700–1850*. Carl Beck Papers: Pittsburgh 2000;
Olga Glagoleva (ed.): *Dvorianstvo, vlast' i obshchestvo v provintsial'noi Rossii XVIII veka*. Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie: Moscow 2012;
Olga Glagoleva: *Ruskaia provintsial'naia starina. Ocherki kul'tury i byta Tul'skoi gubernii XVIII—pervoi poloviny XIX vekov*. RITM: Tula 1993;
Olga Glagoleva: 'Imaginary World. Reading in the Lives of Russian Provincial Noblewomen (1750–1825)'. In: Rosslyn, Wendy (ed.): *Women and Gender in 18th-Century Russia*. Ashgate: Aldershot 2003, pp. 129–146;
Laura J. Olson and Svetlana Adonyeva: *The Worlds of Russian Village Women. Tradition, Transgression*. University of Wisconsin Press: Madison Wis. 2012;
Hilde Hoogenboom: 'The Importance of Being Provincial. Nineteenth-Century Russian Women Writers and the Countryside'. In: Dowler, Lorraine / Carubia, Josephine / Szczygiel, Bonj (eds): *GenderScapes. Renegotiating, Reinterpreting and Reconfiguring the Moral Landscape*. Routledge: New York 2005, pp. 240–253;
Katherine Pickering Antonova: *An Ordinary Marriage. The World of a Gentry Family in Provincial Russia*. Oxford University Press: Oxford 2013;
Priscilla Roosevelt: *Life on the Russian Country Estate. A Social and Cultural History*. Yale University Press: New Haven 1995;
Irina Savkina: *Provintsialki russkoi literatury. Zhenskaia proza 30—40 godov XIX veka*. Göpfert: Wilhelmshorst 1998.
 - 3 Stephen Lessing Baehr: *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia. Utopian Patterns in Early Secular Russian Literature and Culture*. Stanford University Press: Stanford CA. 1991;

Two aspects which have yet to receive due scholarly attention, however, are the gender connotations of Sentimentalist conceptions of nature, and the way in which they affected the choice of topics by Russian women writers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. My study attempts to close this gap.

Another aspect which has so far escaped scholarly attention is the democratic potential of Sentimentalism as applied to the woman question. Socialist literary studies found at least some revolutionary egalitarian potential in writings from almost any period. In the two decades after the fall of the Socialist regime in the early 1990s, many attempts to explore the implications of democratisation and egalitarianism met with resistance from Russian literary scholars: as one of them pointed out to me, 'we have heard so much about egalitarian potential in literary works, we do not need any more research on this topic.' However, an overlooked aspect is precisely the Sentimentalist egalitarian discourse which encouraged some women—Bolotnikova among them—to raise their voices in criticism of the patriarchal social order and to claim their right to be authors. Moreover, scholarly attention has yet to be directed towards revisions of Sentimentalist gender conceptions as manifested in depictions of nature and the feminine. My chapter on Naumova is of particular interest in this regard; it also addresses literary

Joachim Klein: *Die Schäferdichtung des russischen Klassizismus*. Harrasowitz: Berlin 1988;

Klaus Garber: *Der locus amoenus und der locus terribilis. Bild und Funktion der Natur in der deutschen Schäfer- und Landlebendichtung des 17. Jahrhunderts*. Böhlau: Köln 1974;

Terry Gifford: *Pastoral*. Routledge: London 1999;

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;

Heidemarie Kesselmann: *Die Idyllen Salomon Gessners im Beziehungsfeld von Ästhetik und Geschichte im 18. Jahrhundert*. Scriptor: Kronberg 1976;

Natal'ia Kochetkova: *Literatura russkogo sentimentalizma. Esteticheskie i khudozhestvennye iskaniiia*. Nauka: St Petersburg 1994;

Thomas Newlin: *The Voice in the Garden. Andrei Bolotov and the Anxieties of Russian Pastoral. 1738–1833*. Northwestern University Press: Evanston IL 2001;

P. Orlov: *Russkii sentimentalism*. Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta: Moscow 1977;

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

Chantal Mustel (ed.): *Rousseau dans le monde russe et soviétique*. Musée Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Montmorency 1995;

M. Rozanov: *Zh.Zh. Russo i literaturnoe dvizhenie kontsa XVIII i nachala XIX v. Ocherki po istorii russoizma na zapade i v Rossii*. Tipografiia imperatorskago Moskovskago universiteta: Moscow 1910.

manifestations of salon culture and divination, which have been the object of important recent studies.⁴

The book is structured as follows: Chapter One discusses Sentimentalist gender concepts and considers their Western origins, in particular Rousseau's paradigms, e.g. his conception of civic virtue; his wish to exclude women from the republic; and his characterisation of women as elements of disorder, the female character of Fate in particular. Given that these notions were highly influential across Europe, the chapter also considers their reception in Russia, with a special focus on the concept of a male public sphere and a femal private one.

Chapter Two examines the impact of Sentimentalist gender conceptions on Russian literature. It argues that the democratic potential of Sentimentalist discourse shifted formerly marginalised groups such as serfs or women to the centre of literary attention. At the same time it instrumentalised women by requiring them to be virtuous and by equating them with nature conceived of as an earthly paradise. The chapter also explores literary representations of Fate in emerging Romantic literature.

Chapter Three considers the ways in which women authors responded to Sentimentalist notions of nature and writing, arguing that women wishing to be published were expected to be decent, modest, pious and virtuous. Some of them may therefore have felt the need to justify their writerly activities by adopting Sentimentalism's essentialist conceptions of women. One of these notions was women's alleged affinity to nature and estrangement from culture; another was that women were particularly suited to writing as a spontaneous act. Female authors also found subtle ways of challenging Sentimentalist *topoi* such as pastoral gender patterns or representations of Sappho.

Chapter Four examines poems and prose by Pospelova, an author who tended to present her female lyrical persona as an angelic being in harmony with Creation. This can be interpreted as her endorsement of many Sentimentalist literary concepts, including her belief in woman's inherent goodness and assumed affinity with nature.

Chapter Five focuses on works by Bolotnikova, who subverted certain aspects of the value system of Sentimentalist discourse, for instance when referring to a heightened regard for nature in the creation of her self-image as a provincial woman author, or adducing nature as an argument to claim social equality for women.

4 Detailed bibliographical information on Russian salon culture can be found in Chapter Two.

Chapter Six is dedicated to Naumova, who also espoused the Sentimentalist idealisation of women, particularly when presenting herself as a morally superior being who was therefore entitled to criticise other people's behaviour. She also rejected some Sentimentalist notions about women, however, such as the equation of woman with nature, or the topos of the naive girl who must kill herself for failing to live a virtuous life. Moreover, Naumova questioned and revised the purely negative connotation of Fate with disorder which transpired from writings by many Sentimentalist poets and political thinkers.

The Sentimentalist period saw an increase both in women writers and in submissions of literary works for publication by non-established, nor even well-educated, women writers. Although none of the three main authors under scrutiny here attained great literary fame, their works nevertheless illustrate the extent to which the literary, cultural and political discourse of the time allowed women writers to create their authorial self-images and express themselves on important aspects of life.

Of the three authors under consideration in this study, Pospelova received the most attention, both from her contemporaries and from scholars. In her day, her precocious talent made her a literary sensation. Recent feminist studies occasionally mention her as a Sentimentalist counter-example to the more neo-Classicalist Anna Bunina (1774–1829).⁵ Conversely, Bolotnikova, whose writings reflect the view of a provincial woman on specific aspects of the discourse of her time, went all but unnoticed in her time and has received very little critical attention. Finally, although Naumova, a provincial woman author, enjoyed relatively high renown in her provincial town, her work again has received scant critical attention. We know her to have been part of a social network of literary individuals, which placed her in a position to share her views on Sentimentalist and pre-Romantic cultural and literary ideals in a way that eluded Bolotnikova.

My enquiry covers some four decades, from c. 1780 to the 1820s, a period when Sentimentalist aesthetic ideals coexisted with neo-Classicalist and pre-Romantic ones. With regard to the classification of literary periods, I have adopted the distinction between the terms of 'trend' and 'movement' suggested by Rudolf Neuhäuser, who argues that, in order to establish the literary profile of a period we must examine its literary trends, several of which may exist in parallel. Neuhäuser considers such a trend to be a 'movement' if and when it defines a period's literary

5 Judith Vowles: 'The "Feminization" of Russian Literature: Women, Language, and Literature in Eighteenth-Century Russia'. In: Clyman, Toby / Greene, Diana (eds): *Women Writers in Russian Literature*. Praeger: London 1994, pp. 35–60.

profile. Indeed, he postulates a Sentimentalist movement for the period from 1770 until 1790. However, Sentimentalist trends continued on into the first two decades of the 19th century.⁶

The scholarly debate on the emergence and decline of Russian Sentimentalism continues. In her work on the period, Natal'ia Kochetkova provides an exhaustive overview of various opinions. Tracing adumbrations of Sentimentalist ideals back to pre-1760s Russian literature, she observes that the likes of K. Nazaretskaia or L. Pastushenko locate the rise of Russian Sentimentalism in the 1760s or 1770s, specifically identifying early indications of Sentimentalist ethics and aesthetics in works by Mikhail Kheraskov (1733–1807), who placed great emphasis on spiritual introspection. Kochetkova considers the 1770s to be the decade in which Sentimentalism became an autonomous literary trend, and the three decades from c. 1780 until c. 1810 to be the period when Sentimentalism was a literary movement. She further observes a growing interest in European Sentimentalist literature, including the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) and Jean-François Marmontel (1723–1799), in the first two decades of the 19th century, which is when numerous translations of their works were published.⁷

In his seminal work on 18th-century Russian literature, Joachim Klein examines the rise of the Russian pastoral since the 1750s and the role of non-Russian models in its development. Klein identifies its beginnings in the publication of some of Simeon Polotskii's (1629–1680) works in the second half of the 17th century and in the 1730 translation by Vasilii Trediakovskii (1703–1768) of the description of an imaginary voyage by Paul Tallemant the Younger (1642–1712), *Le voyage et la conquête de l'Isle d'amour* (*A Voyage to the Isle of Love*⁸) originally published in 1663, followed by love idylls and eclogues by Alexander Sumarokov (1717–1777). By the 1770s, however, Sumarokov-style pastorals were being eclipsed by translations and adaptations of Salomon Gessner's (1730–1788) pastorals. Klein observes further stages in the development of the genre in idylls from the 1820s to 1830s by Nikolai Gnedich (1784–1833) and Anton Delvig

6 Rudolf Neuhäuser: *Towards the Romantic Age. Essays on Sentimental and Preromantic Literature in Russia*. Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague 1974.

7 Kochetkova 1994, pp. 8, 22.

8 English translation by Aphra Behn published in 1675, see James J. Bloom: *The Imaginary Sea Voyage. Sailing away in Literature, Legend and Lore*. McFarland: Jefferson N.C. 2013, p. 118.

(1798–1831), followed by Nikolai Shcherbin's (1821–1869) idylls published in the 1840s and 1860s.⁹

Now that more women writers are being written into literary history, time frames of literary periods may have to change and the Sentimentalist movement may have to be extended to the 1820s (from the so-far assumed early 1790s) given that many women wrote in a Sentimentalist style during the first two decades of the 19th century.

Having said that, it may prove difficult to identify distinct literary trends in works by Russian women writers, who often continued to emulate aesthetic ideals already abandoned by their better-known male counterparts. For example, *Bednaia Liza* (Poor Liza), a novella by Nikolai Karamzin (1766–1826), had appeared in 1792, and excerpts from his *Pis'ma russkogo puteshestvennika* (Letters of a Russian Traveller) had been published in 1791 and 1792. By the time Pospelova published her works—which exhibit the Sentimentalist belief in an individual's innate goodness—at the turn from the 18th to the 19th centuries, Karamzin had grown sceptical of this view. Evidence of the change can be found in his novella, *Moia ispoved'* (My Confession, 1802), a polemic against Rousseau's *Confessions*.¹⁰

Pospelova's work represents the epitome of values which Bolotnikova and Naumova were to revise in their writings produced at a time of transition between two strong literary currents and influences. Sentimentalist ideals had already been consigned to the past by the time Bolotnikova's collection of poems appeared in 1817 and Naumova's two years later, in 1819.¹¹ Moreover, the allegorical figure

9 Ioakhim Klein: *Puti kul' turnogo importa. Trudy po russkoi literature XVIII veka. Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury*; Moscow 2005, pp. 19–23.

10 Rudolf Neuhäuser: 'Karamzin's Spiritual Crisis of 1793 and 1794'. In: Black, J. (ed.): *Essays on Karamzin. Russian Man-of-Letters, Political Thinker, Historian. 1766–1826*. Mouton: The Hague 1975, pp. 56–74 (p. 63);

Ilya Serman: 'Chateaubriand et Karamzin, témoins de leur temps'. *Revue des études slaves* 74, 2002–2003, pp. 701–718 (pp. 706–707);

Iurii Lotman: 'Russo i russkaia kul'tura XVIII veka—nachala XIX veka'. In: Zhan-Zhak Russo: *Obshchestvenno-politicheskie traktaty*. [n.ed.] Nauka: Moscow 1969, pp. 555–604 (p. 583).

11 Mariia Pospelova: *Luchshie chasy zhizni moei*. Tipografiia gubernskago pravleniia: Vladimir 1798;

Mariia Pospelova: *Nekotorye cherty prirody i istinny, ili ottenki myslei i chuvstv moikh*. Tipografiia senata u Selivanovskago: Moscow 1801;

Mariia Bolotnikova: *Derevenskaia lira, ili chasy uedineniia*. Tipografiia Reshetnikova: Moscow 1817;

of Fate and elements of folk culture in Naumova's poems adumbrate a Romantic world-view.

Finally, her criticism of many aspects of Sentimentalist aesthetics neatly illustrates Iurii Tynianov's view of literary evolution, which is that emerging writers often take issue with specific aspects of the literary ideals which held sway during their formative years.¹²

This study focuses on the literary genre of the pastoral, exploring topoi and metaphors used by Sentimentalist women writers to create their authorial self-images and to justify their incursion into the male-dominated territory of authorship. If the Classicist attitude to literary genres was quite rigid, Sentimentalism displayed a marginally greater degree of flexibility. In terms of the pastoral, Amanda Ewington argues that women writers welcomed 'the thematic focus on love and virtue, more than the opportunity to experiment with form' practiced by male Sentimentalist authors.¹³

A thematic approach most clearly reveals the intriguing and often surprisingly innovative, not to say somewhat subversive, aspects in Bolotnikova's and Naumova's writings. On the other hand, in the context of this study, discussions of literary quality and formal features such as meter and rhyme are of minor relevance; anyone interested in these issues is therefore referred to Ewington's excellent study on Russian women writers of the 18th and early 19th centuries.¹⁴

Anna Naumova: *Uedinennaia muza zakamskikh beregov*. Universitetskaia tipografiia: Moscow 1819.

- 12 Iurii Tynianov: *Poetika. Istoriia literatury. Kino*. Nauka: Moscow 1977, pp. 270–281.
- 13 Amanda Ewington (ed. and transl.): *Russian Women Poets of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*. Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies at the University of Toronto: Toronto 2014, p. 13.
- 14 Ewington's work includes detailed analyses of meter and rhyme in the works of 18th- and early-19th-century women's poetry as compared to poetic traditions and to prevalent patterns in works by male authors; see Ewington.