

Alexander Veselovsky

The Age of Sensibility (1904)¹

The following essay represents the first chapter of Veselovsky's last major work, his study of Vasily Zhukovsky (1783-1852), subtitled *The Poetry of Sentiment and of the "Heart's Imagination"* (1904). This somewhat cryptic subtitle points to a psychological dynamic that Veselovsky shows to have been a distinctive property of the "age of Sensibility," whereby an emotion elicited by experience ("sentiment") is supplemented by the capacity to produce and nourish feeling through imagination. Techniques of the "heart's imagination"² range from recollection (personal or shared among friends) to scripted encounters with natural scenery. The most powerful method for producing emotion, however, is constituted by the Sentimentalist practices of reading, writing, citing, and reciting poetic texts.

When Veselovsky describes the ways in which literary texts give form to emotional experience, he is far from merely exposing or celebrating literature's impact on life. In fact, his painstakingly researched study – which, in part due to its massive use of archival evidence, remains an essential source for students of nineteenth-century Russian

¹ Chapter 1 of A. N. Veselovskii, *V. A. Zhukovskii: Poeziia chuvstva i "serdechnogo voobrazheniia"* (V. A. Zhukovsky: The Poetry of Sentiment and of the "Heart's Imagination"); first published in 1904. This translation, by Boris Maslov and Lev Blumenfeld (metrical translations of Karamzin's verse), is based on the edition by A. E. Makhov (Moscow: Intrada, 1999). Annotations by Boris Maslov; thanks are due to Jennifer Flaherty and Gabriel Tropp for their help in preparing the translation, and to Thomas Kitson for his editorial work. For further discussion of this work by Veselovsky see Chapters 3 and 4.

² The phrase is used by Alexander Turgenev in a letter; see Veselovskii, *V. A. Zhukovskii* 223. See n. 28 on Novalis's "herzliche Phantasie".

literature – is one of the most compelling elucidations of a historically specific coordination of literary praxis, individual biography, and political (or civic) engagement.

Whereas the preceding generation of Russian poets only “played in” Sentimentalism, a sentimentalist worldview came to dominate and structure Zhukovsky’s emotional life. This occurred because of a complex dialectic between “poetic cliché” and actual experience: while a set of tragic occurrences in Zhukovsky’s early life was articulated in the language of Sentimentalism, a cult of melancholic recollection validated this conventional language, *ex post facto*, as a genuine correlate of his psychic life. In the Romantic age, Zhukovsky no longer represented a prevalent historical psychology, but had become a rather unique figure, even a maverick, among his closest friends. Indeed, although he never attained in his writings the poetic greatness that his contemporaries expected of him, by letting his life be molded by poetry – and thus allowing the two meanings of *perezhivanie* (persistence of poetic form and personal experience), one of Veselovsky’s key concepts, to coincide – Zhukovsky became Russia’s only “true” Sentimentalist poet.

The chapter here translated, a notably self-contained piece, provides a broadly comparative background to Zhukovsky’s poetic and emotional formation. On the one hand, it presents an overview of European Sentimentalism, foregrounding the ways in which the poetic language of sensibility came to buttress a particular kind of subjectivity. On the other hand, Veselovsky points out that the rise of the sentimentalizers is a product of the political reaction.³ The preservation of a sentimentalist sensibility clearly correlates with Zhukovsky’s political conservatism and support for the throne. The odd

³ The argument that individualism and a cult of nature coincide with periods of disengagement from society recurs from his earlier work; cf. “From the History of *Naturgefühl*” (1883), discussed in Chapter 1, Section 3.

effects of Zhukovsky's sincere efforts to "sentimentalize" the life at court, for example, provoked criticism among his friends already in the late 1810s; yet those efforts on Zhukovsky's part attest to a resistant and evolving cultural-historical nexus, which Veselovsky links to late Gogol, the Slavophiles, and Dostoyevsky⁴ and which explains, to a significant extent, the intellectual viability of the Russian monarchy throughout the nineteenth century. It is hardly an accident that Veselovsky's book was written at a time of unprecedented social ferment, on the eve of the 1905 Revolution. By adopting an ostensibly objectivist, ironic as well as generally empathetic approach to a figure who was seen as an emblem of sincere, heartfelt conservatism, Veselovsky offers a profound commentary on how culture and tradition are perpetuated in and through the lives of individual historical agents.

From the first third of the 18th century, a new style begins to install itself in European literatures. Wherever it was engendered, it was preceded by a corresponding mood [*nastroenie*] of the social psyche, a reflection of the recently accomplished social revolution. This is what happened in England, which explains England's leading role in the ensuing currents of European thought, the influence of its didactic comedy and its *comédie larmoyante*, its novelists, whom Diderot and Rousseau indulged in reading. This influence had an uneven impact, depending on how well prepared, in a given society, the soil was to receive the new seeds: in France, it came to buttress a social movement, in Germany, it settled into literary schools.

⁴ Veselovskii, V. A. *Zhukovskii* 304-305.

The essence of the newly dominant mood amounted to a reappraisal of reason and sentiment and their significance for individual and social life. Reason had created an artificial culture, with its laws, moral foundations, and salon etiquette; it bridled sentiment with the demands of ritualistic decorum, and fantasy with restrictive literary forms. It trusted in its own infallibility, in the enlightening force of its logic and science, whose law “altereth not.”⁵ All this bound the individual’s freedom, and so protest grew. An ideal of the human being newly emerged from the hands of the Creator—a humanity kind by nature, unspoiled by civilization – was opposed to the conventions of the culture of reason. This ideal had already been formulated in the 17th century (Aphra Behn 1640-89) and was further developed by Rousseau. Sentiment was placed above reason. “Reason is, half of it, sense,” Sterne declared;⁶ “Humble love, / and not proud reason, keeps the door of heaven; / Love finds admission, where proud science fails,” wrote Young.⁷ For Hamann, sentiment represented the unmediated, first-hand revelation of truth, the beginning of human consciousness, whence an all-embracing knowledge should develop; for Jacobi, the unmediated understanding achieved by sentiment and faith transcends the science discovered by reason. To know one’s own heart is the sole wisdom; to follow one’s heart without impeding any of its inclinations and desires, the sole virtue. One must trust one’s inner feeling, believe one’s heart; in this course of action, humanity would find its freedom. Similarly, Mercier would say: in the heart of each human being lies concealed a sacred fire of sensibility; one must keep watch so that the fire is not put out, for it illumines our moral life. The power of reason is negative, constrained by unbelief, failure to understand – Madame de Stael repeated again and again in the beginning of her German “Romanticism”: one needs a philosophy of faith and

⁵ Veselovsky is making use of an idiom deriving from Dan. 7:8. All footnotes belong to the editor, except if marked otherwise.

⁶ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, 7, 13.

⁷ The reference is to Young’s *Night Thoughts*, IX.

enthusiasm, a philosophy that would use reason to confirm the revelations of sense;⁸ Saint-Simon would call these enthusiasts of sentiment *les passionés*. “The philosophy of sentiment” appeared, along with literary representatives of sentiment and of sensibility; they were reading Richardson and Fielding, Young and Sterne. Rousseau systematized for them the scattered and imprecise traits of the emergent doctrine of sentiment and the heart; of nature and the natural; of nature as the teacher of the good, mercy, and morality; of the freedom of passions and the ideal of democracy.

This program was adopted and put into practice in various ways. Psychologically, two groups of practitioners may be distinguished; they blended, however, and transitions from the “sentimentalizers” to the “stormy geniuses” were possible, as K. F. Moritz’s autobiographical novel *Anton Reiser* demonstrates.

One group is characterized most luminously by the actors of the German *Sturm-und-Drang* of the 1760-80s. They made a distinction between science and the illumination of a genius, an enthusiasm that is inborn. A genius may slumber in every one of us – so Young suggested to them – one has only to learn how to reveal and educate it, and genius will flutter up, a “rank enthusiast.”⁹ Young’s *Conjectures on Original Composition* was an indicator of the times. His teaching about the inborn genius, supported by Sterne’s and Fielding’s cultivation of a human nature that is spontaneous, healthy and entirely given over to sentiment’s impulse, created the character of the German *Kraftgenies*, geniuses of might, with a calling for heroic action and struggle. They saw themselves as free of all superstitions of reason, which up until that time had been regarded as the norm of existence. They were drawn away from bourgeois dissipated

⁸ Veselovsky appears to be freely summarizing the thrust of de Stael’s *De L’Allemagne* (1810); religion and enthusiasm are discussed in Part IV of the work.

⁹ *Night Thoughts*, VI.

artificial culture to nature, to the people and their songs, to an idealized folk antiquity, to the vistas of world poetry, to a renewal of literary forms. England's influence in all of this is beyond doubt; the English at that time had rediscovered a Promethean Shakespeare, whose popularity spread to France (Mercier) and Germany. The demand for the freedom of sentiments extended to moral issues: new solutions were put forward, any dogmatism being abhorrent to "geniuses." They yearned for breadth, brimmed with self-consciousness, and sought to claim life fully and to love in a way that was real. "We are gods, we are free" said Lenz. Heinse's Ardingello is a "genius" just like Karl Moor.¹⁰ Young Schiller was fascinated with virtuous, majestic criminals, who in due time would descend to the lowly type of Rinaldo Rinaldini and of the *Räuberromane*. Next in line were the figures of Prometheus, Faust, and Muhammad; "Kerl" became a typical word for a man of tempestuous aspirations.

Another group existed alongside these people of "passionate sentiment": tranquil enthusiasts of sensibility, limited by the enclosure of their own hearts, who lulled themselves into quiet transports and into tears by analyzing their sensations that made it possible emotionally to anticipate heaven beyond life's futility. They adored Klopstock; pietists and mystics, they could adapt to any sort of ecclesiastical-religious reaction, even get on with political reaction, since they had withdrawn from the public into the world of their miniscule "ego," into an abstraction of humanity and inner "freedom," into solitude and a nature that proclaimed the gentleness of the Creator. They looked on nature as an object of – a pretext for – sentimental and religious outpourings; emotional excess did not sharpen the eye, sentimentalists were no *visuels*; everything hinged on the mood. For this reason, they were so fond of music; self-analysis

¹⁰ Ardingello is the protagonist of Heinse's *Ardinghella und die glückseligen Inseln* (1787) Karl Moor is a character in Schiller's *Die Räuber* (1781).

reached a pathological delicacy. In this way, they nourished “virtue” as their “humanness” matured – their *schöne Seele*, Rousseau’s *belle âme*, Karamzin’s *dusha* [soul].

Kraftgenies and *Schöne Seelen* (Schlegel’s “le genre furibond et le genre lamentable”¹¹) shared the same psychological substrate: a hypertrophy of the sentiment. The sentimentalists, for their part, were fascinated with the heart, nursed it – the “weak”, “delicate”, “sick” one (*Don Carlos*), the one that, “suffused with despair, had its fill of tears” (*Stella*). “Ah! everyone can know what I know, but my heart belongs to me alone!” says Werther.¹² There appeared Werthers, Siegwarts,¹³ *René*’s¹⁴ and Valérie’s,¹⁵ along with demonic egotists of the sentiment like Allwill, representatives of irreparable *Schwermut* like Woldemar,¹⁶ or flaccid sentimentalists like the hero of MacKenzie’s novel (*The Man of Feeling*), who dies of consumption – and under the strain of a confession of love for which he had braced himself only on his deathbed.

In such a milieu, love took on a peculiar overtone: it was full of pity, sorrowful, gloomy, ignorant of laughter; Saint-Preux¹⁷ is fond of touching paleness, love’s true pledge, and abhors importunate salubrity. Hence a penchant for contrasts: between morning and evening, spring and autumn. Spring in particular often incited feelings of sorrow; one was nourished by sights of bleak, wild nature, by half-tints and twilight. A setting sun, a gloaming that induces sadness, a moon concealed by clouds that are filled with tears. The poetic vocabulary responded to this mood: to breathe, to flutter, to murmur, the divine, the heavenly; one spoke of a glimmering moon – and of a glimmering (*dämmernde*) soul, glimmering thoughts. This was a love that abutted the idea of death, the idea of love beyond the grave, where souls that yearned for each

¹¹ [Veselovsky’s note:] A. W. Schlegel. *Sur le triomphe de la sentimentalité*.

¹² “Ach, was ich weiß, kann jeder wissen – mein Herz habe ich allein.” Letter from May 9 (Book 2).

¹³ *Siegwart, eine Klostersgeschichte* (“Siegwart, a Tale of the Cloister”, 1776) by Johann Martin Miller

¹⁴ *René* is a short novella by François-René de Chateaubriand, which first appeared in 1802

¹⁵ Julie de Krudener, *Valérie ou Lettres de Gustave de Linar à Ernest de G.* (1803)

¹⁶ The reference is to two novels by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: *Edward Allwill’s Briefsammlung*, and *Woldemar*

¹⁷ Character in Rousseau’s *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761).

other would meet, souls in whose sentiment the healthy real impulse had been lost in a new generalization, in what later would be called *amitié amoureuse*. It was an attachment that vacillated between passion and amicability, failing to satisfy either; M-me Roland, however, apparently knew what the issue was, and did not vacillate. “Quiet, sacred friendship has a fulcrum where it always keeps its balance (un point d’appui où tient toujours le balancier),” she wrote to [Louis Augustin] Bosc, whose friendly feeling for her threatened to transform itself into a passion. “Sweet, yet cruel passions drive us beyond ourselves only to abandon us later; but the honesty of one’s soul and one’s actions, the trust of a straightforward and sensible heart, the moderation of a character that is established by reason in good principles – this is what confirms a union, whatever cooling it may suffer. This is my pledge, my friend, that you will always find me to be the same.”¹⁸

Alongside *amitié amoureuse* another peculiar sentiment that also mixed love and amicability developed, which involuntarily suggests a comparison with a similar psychological phenomenon in the Renaissance. We need a friend in order to become appealing to ourselves and to enjoy ourselves, said Young;¹⁹ German sentimentalists, beginning with Klopstock, fostered this jealous, anxious, and exacting sentiment as if a beloved woman were at issue. In literature, Posas and Don Carloses, Xavers and Kronhelms ([representing Johann] Miller and F[riedrich] Stolberg in Miller’s novel *Siegwart*) appeared; in life, the friendship between Neuffer and

¹⁸ Cf. the French original: “La tranquille et sainte amitié a un point d’appui où tient toujours le balancier. Les passions, délicieuses et cruelles, nous emportent de nous-mêmes et nous laissent enfin; mais l’honnêteté de l’âme et des procédés, la confiance d’un coeur droit et sensible, la modération d’un caractère sage et fixé par de bons principes, violâ ce qui assure une liaison, tel refroidissement qu’elle paroisse souffrir. Voilà, mon ami, ce qui vous promet de me retrouver toujours la même [...]” cited in Charles-Aimé Dauban, *Étude sur Madame Roland et son temps* (Paris: H. Plon, 1864) lxxxii.

¹⁹ *Night Thoughts*, II: “Needful auxiliars are our friends, to give / To social man true relish of himself. / Full on ourselves, descending in a line, / Pleasure’s bright beam is feeble in delight: / Delight intense, is taken by rebound; / Reverberated pleasures fire the breast.”

Hölderlin and, in the Romantic period, between Tieck and Wackenroder, Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, etc.; exempla were drawn from antiquity, such as David and Jonathan, Orestes and Pylades, Nisus and Euryalus, Achilles and Patroclus. Sir Charles Grandison undertakes to construct a temple of Friendship on the spot where Miss Harriet, who was in love with him, embraced her antagonist, his wife.

The capacity to shed tears indicated a sensible, well-equipped heart. Sterne spoke of the *joy of grief*, and would himself cry over a donkey he encountered or over a captive birdie; Young discovered a “philosophy of tears”²⁰ and a smooth path for the sentimentalists: tears began to pour down, a gift of griefless tears was revealed. Mrs. Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) is inundated with such tears: Emily, the novel’s protagonist, cannot bear the sight of the moon, the sound of a guitar, an organ, and the rustling of pines without tears. Thackeray knew of no novel in which more tears are shed than in *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. Heinrich Stilling’s mother had that precious ability: in the spring, when everything was in bloom, she did not feel quite herself, as if she were from a different world, but as soon as she saw a withered flower, a dry blade of grass, she began to cry, and felt so well, so well it surpasses words, but she was not joyous. Werther and Lotte admire a departing thunderstorm; her eyes are filled with tears; “Klopstock!” she says, putting her hand on Werther’s; he recalls Klopstock’s wonderful ode and kisses the girl’s hand, blissful tears in his eyes. This scene was copied by Miller in his *Siegwart*: Therese lowers her head over the *Messias*, and Kronhelm hears the girl’s tears falling on the pages; he takes her by the hand, but she instead places his hand on the book, and he feels that the page is wet. Then he swears in his heart to be always loyal to Therese, and the thunder and wind grow stronger. “A holy, solemn night!” says Kronhelm. In the same novel, Siegwart and Mariane

²⁰ *Night Thoughts*, V.

listen to a grasshopper sing and weep. In *Wilhelm Meister*, the singer sings “Kennst du das Land,” and the audience is aflutter: women fall on one another’s necks, men are embracing one another, and the moon is a witness to tears most noble and chaste. Parting friends would take turns drinking from a glass into which each had dropped a few tears; the play of a moonbeam on an emerging tear was regarded as a poetic effect, one familiar to Count Shalikov.

The sentimental sphere fostered its own Muse: the thoughtful Melancholy who haunts ruins, ancient cells, and mirthless shades. Its charms were sung by the seventeen-year old Warton (*The Pleasures of Melancholy* 1745): he is fond of sitting beneath a “ruin’d abbey’s moss-grown piles ... at twilight hour of eve, where through some western window the pale moon pours her long-levell’d rule of streaming light, while sullen sacred silence reigns around, save the lone screech-owl’s note who builds his bower amid the mould’ring caverns dark and damp, or the calm breeze, that rustles in the leaves of flaunting ivy, that with mantle green invests some wasted tower;” “far remote from Mirth’s mad shouts” he listens to “the lowly cricket’s drowsy dirge,” in the evening, in a “brindly-glimmering gleam” of smoldering embers. In his last poem [“Ode for Music”] (1769), Gray placed the “soft-eyed Melancholy” near Freedom, in the same despondent landscape, but he also enriched this landscape, in his well-known “Elegy” (1751), with the images of the graveyard, as Young enriched it with his vision of the night and with the idea of the life hereafter. This idea infused the latter’s *Night Thoughts*, poems elicited by a real and grievous bereavement. Young is overcome by this idea and revels in it. Death reigns in the world, it is inescapable, but in death there is consolation: death is “the crown of life,” it gives human beings wings that allow them to be transported to the ethereal heights, where they will receive “more than was in Eden lost.”²¹ This is an apotheosis of death, illuminated by a pale

²¹ *Night Thoughts*, III.

Cynthia-Moon, in the midst of night's silence that "proclaims eternal day" and immortality. Until then, the Moon rarely appeared as an expression of a sorrowful or mysterious mood. A certain 17th c. *secentista* even dared to call it a "celestial fried egg." Young reinvented it, MacPherson's Ossian buttressed its future popularity, and Klopstock put it into wide circulation. Virgil's *amica silentia lunae* became the rallying-cry of the new poetic mood in Zachariae, Gessner, Cronegk, Wieland, and from young Goethe to Longfellow and beyond: the Moon is "the divinity of chaste souls," pale like timorous, rejected love; one spoke of a melancholic moon, of a moon that spreads over the woods the great mystery of melancholy, which it is fond of whispering in the ears of ancient oaks (Chateaubriand), of a moon shining in one's heart ("Mondschein im Herzen"). In this context, the fashion of using the epithet "silvery" of light and sound emerged among the poets of the Göttingen circle: a silvery voice and even a "silbernes Klavier." The poets of pseudo-classical tastes, for example, Pope and his school, have similarly generalized the epithet "golden": they, however, were fascinated by the sun, which by now had set. Carducci finds in the moon the symbol of Romantic poetry, in contradistinction to the Classical sun;²² we are replacing Romanticism with Sentimentalism. Let us also add to the mysterious setting we have endeavored to depict Ossian's vapors and the world of exotic apparitions – now we have before us the full system of conceptions and images that nourished the ballad, regarded as a product of Romantic fantasy. In fact, this is not Romanticism, which rested on an explicitly theoretical basis, but pre-Romanticism (called *preromantismo* by the Italians) rooted in sensibility.

In this way, a literary movement was created that conjured into existence heaps of skulls and skeletons, hosts of apparitions and sepulchral meditations, all of them enveloped by night or

²² Veselovsky is referring to Carducci's poem "Classicismo e Romanticismo".

illuminated by a pensive moon. Ladies, unlucky in love, made pilgrimages to tombs and took to drawing sepulchral mounds upon which they would inscribe their own names. Tears and thoughts about death, uncontrolled resignation, were now a literary manner, and one would play at melancholy (Chateaubriand's "morose pleasures of the melancholic heart"). The adherents of tender feeling [*chuvstvitel'niki*] developed an etiquette of their own; the enjoyment of one's heart was regimented by reason, and under the new flag the desires of the old sentimental eclogue were often concealed. This mood gripped not only the young generation in France and Italy, but also the veterans: the gallant Arcadia ceased from billing and cooing and tuned to tears. Such an eclectic as [Vincenzo] Monti composes *Entusiasmo malinconico*; Pindemonte is sentimental in his *Poesie campestri*; an Italian journalist, a Jesuit, gives us a tour of Campo-Santo in Bergamo in the company of Young – the piece is entitled *Il bello sepolcrare*.

The recently found diary fragments written by the 16-year old [Friedrich von] Matthisson, whose sentimental poetry fascinated Zhukovsky and the young Turgenevs,²³ give us a notion of the moral atmosphere in which the poet's worldview was formed. The diary's cover was painted by the author: below and above are wavy strips, colored blue against a white background; in the middle, against a red background, garlands of flowers. This is a diary of self-observation, a secret confession addressed to oneself ("geheimes Tagebuch"); the author, still a schoolboy, is happy that he decided to return to his diary, a serious undertaking indeed, and reproaches himself bitterly for having somehow neglected it, enticed away by an interesting book: "May God forgive my trespassing." Not a single day passes without a note:

This day has passed in an interchange of joy and grief, yet I have never felt such a gracious, quiet calm in my soul: a sweet, wistful melancholy (wehmütiger Schwermut),

²³ [Veselovsky's note:] A. I. Turgenev's letters to N. I. Turgenev, p. 86, 147.

which tuned me to pleasant and serious sentiments, was for me a source of reflections about my future fate, and they all led to one conclusion, that without virtue and fear of God I should not be happy.²⁴

He prays to God that he may receive strength for struggling against sensuality, excited temperament, idleness, light-mindedness; he vigilantly observes himself; he is jubilant when a day has passed of which he is not ashamed, and laments when once on the king's birthday he drank several glasses of wine, on the eve of the communion. All of this is interlaced with prayerful entreaties and moral self-incriminations. The pietist boy quotes from a spiritual hymn of [Christoph] Sturm – with whose mystical works Zhukovsky became acquainted in the Moscow University Boarding School for Noblemen – but he also read *Siegwart*, identified with its protagonist, and wanted to meet another celestial being like Mariane.²⁵ He converses with his companions about the ennobling influence of pure, chaste love, and involves them in something like a scholarly society of friends. Ripping himself from the embraces of a “most tender friend,” he sheds sweet tears and sinks into melancholy for the entire day.²⁶ “A quiet, calm life, removed from all turmoil, among tender friends, and a blameless conscience to boot – that is what harbors secret joys for the human being” [105]. And then there is Nature. The author wants to become her apprentice; she would be an appropriate guide for him [106].

How often today I looked at the moon! A sense of awe came to possess me; thoughts about death and eternity illumined my soul; the souls of deceased friends seemed to hover

²⁴ P. 86. See fn. 27 for full bibliographic reference. Further references to page numbers of the publication of Matthison's diary are given in brackets.

²⁵ “O! wie selig würde ich sein, ein solches Mädchen wie Marianne nur einmahl zu sehn – doch dies ist ein phantastischer Wunsch!” etc. (p.105)

²⁶ This is a summary of the following entry: “Der Verlust meines besten zärtlichsten Freundes (ich sage nicht zu viel) der sich heute aus meinen Umarmungen wand; machte mich den ganzen Tag schwermüthig, die süssesten Thränen so wie sie die wärmste reinste Freundschaft weinen heisst, hab ich seinem Andenken geheiligt – die genauste Übereinstimmung fesselte Herz an Herz: O! wie empfand ich seinen Verlust so hart, wie umwölkte er meine ganze Seele mit düstrer Schwermuth!” (101).

around me. All was so sad, so solemn that I forgot about the world and in this holy hour of meditation I would have rushed to meet death with open arms. Let it come soon, [...] and then my soul, transfigured, would soar up to the Almighty. I will know neither want nor grief, and my dear ones shall soon follow me. [Ibid]

He admires the setting sun, and the reflection of the crimson sky in a pond [108]. On his travels, he desires to take along his Kleist and Vergil, so that he is able to experience more fully what those great ones have described [Ibid]. He feels himself to be a Gessnerian shepherd [114]. The only thing he lacks is love, which would have added charm to the spring, compelled him to love the Creator even more, seeing him in every flower (an a propos picture: a tilted urn, whence there pours ash, and a flower) [110]. The heart is beating somehow too strongly, the author seeks to calm it down, enters into a conversation with it. He is in love with an angel, a God's angel; from afar he watches the village where his dear one lives; the evening star for him is the star of love [111]. He gives himself a promise to look at the moon, which she is perhaps also admiring while thinking of him [112]. In stormy weather, he incises her name on the bark of a beech [Ibid]. But why is he thinking only of her? "If that be a sin, forgive me, Lord! Yet where is she, the holy one, where is she?" [112]. He saw her; she will remain his forever. "And, whenever I think of parting, bitter tears wet my visage" [113].²⁷

Goethe, Schiller, Jean-Paul Richter have had in their youth a sentimentalist period before each set out on his own path. In Schiller, this mood resonated for a longer period; Novalis's *Hymns to the Night*, experienced through "the heart's imagination,"²⁸ echo with his reading of Young's *[Night] Thoughts*. The difference between these works lies in poetry, and in a new

²⁷ [Veselovsky's note:] Karl Helm, "Ein Tagebuch aus Matthisons Jugend." *Neue Heidelberger Jahrbücher* 10.1 (1900) 81-114. The diary dates from Jan. 13 to Apr. 19, 1777.

²⁸ Veselovsky provides a fuller discussion of Novalis and his effort to construct his emotional life based on "the heart's imagination" (Novalis's own term is "herzliche Phantasie") in *V. A. Zhukovskii* 234-239.

stylistics; we are now on the ground of Romanticism. The mania of tears and sorrow produced not only poets, but also types of unmotivated melancholics, a variety of “problematic characters;” like the stormy geniuses, they also entered the currents of Romanticism and Byronism.

The sentimentalist currents also came to light in Russia, superseding the influence of the Enlightenment, cerebral 18th c. literature. Due to historical conditions, we could not avoid imitating, yet we did so without having lived through the socio-psychic process that makes such influences viable. We had not been so sick with reason as to seek rescue in sentiment; in the West, the protest in the name of sentiment was a matter of principle; in our case, it was directed against ugly manifestations of our Enlightenment, with its simplistic materialism, naïve play at unbelief, and passion for the Western salon culture. Discourses on “the misuse of reason among certain recent writers” (Lopukhin) emerged; Kheraskov wrote that “evil was born of intellectualism,” and Sumarokov could assert that, with the development of the sciences, “natural simplicity perished and along with her, purity of heart.”

The age of the heart had arrived. While it was serious in Novikov’s pietistic circle, it was manifested as an overflow of sensibility in light literature. The contradictions between classicism and sentimentalism were perceived as literary, not intrinsic; the sentimentalist literature, failing to appeal to actual feelings, only opened new sources of sensibility; it inculcated a particular standard of poetic clichés, but did not open readers’ eyes to Russian nature and Russian reality. Young and Ossian had already made an impact on Derzhavin; Bolotov was reading [Johann

Georg] Sulzer (*Moralische Betrachtungen über die Werke der Natur*, 1745) when his eyes opened for the first time to see nature as a source of “blameless merriments” and pietist ecstasies. For Karamzin, Young was “a friend of the wretched, a solace for the wretched,” whereas Ossian’s songs “pour into one’s languid spirit a most tender anguish, and tune us to sad fancies, yet this grief is slight and sweet for the soul” (“Poeziia” [Poesy] 1787). In Karamzin’s library, we find Rousseau, Bernardin de Sainte-Pierre, Richardson, Thomson, Sterne and his French imitators, and the German sentimentalists. Karamzin was the organizer of our literary sentimentalism. The scheme of this worldview is well-known: Nature that glorifies the Creator; a sentimental heart (“God, the father of sentimental hearts” in “Pesn’ Bozhestvu” [Song to the Divinity], 1793); holy poesy is “the god of sentimental hearts” in “Darovaniia” [Gifts], 1795); the celebration of virtue and friendship; the social ideal is a man

...who,

Content with what he has attained,

His spirit free, senses unchained,

His soul as upright as his spine;

He seeks no fortunes from far lands,

For sea-borne ships he does not pine,

Against loud winds he firmly stands,

Owens his abode under the sun,

Lives out his life's days one by one,

Nor peeks beyond one day's frontier;

Who keeps his honest eyes fixed straight
At other faces, nor whose plate
Is poisoned by a pauper's tear;

Pleased with his share, he will not shirk
Light rambles or demanding work;
Who likes to take his rest at noon,
Who to his neighbors would as soon
Aid with his hand as with his mind,
Who can be a congenial friend,
A loving spouse until the end,
A kindly father to his child;

Who in his idleness embraces
The Muses and the tender Graces,
Who on his kith and kin bestows
Delight with poetry and prose,
Who lets his purest heart release
His laughter — for there is no harm
In laughing at what has some charm —
His life will be lived out in peace.

(“Poslanie k Aleksandru Alekseevichu Pleshcheevu” [Epistle to Alexander
Alexeevich Pleshcheev], 1794)

Such a man, “whose spirit and conscience are immaculate” (“Poslanie k Dmitrievu” [Epistle to Dmitriev], 1793; cf. “pis’mo Filareta k Melodoru” [Letter from Philaretos to Melidoros] 1794), is not afraid of death; it is a “quiet haven” where those who have parted shall unite again (“Bereg” [The Shore], 1803) and, for those who knew how to love, “love will be perennial” (“Mysli o liubvi” [Thoughts about love], 1797); the “Graveyard” (“Kladbishche”, 1793) is an “abode of eternal peace”. All this creates an atmosphere of melancholy; it is “sullen”, not even spring’s smile can dispel it (“Vesenniaia pesn’ melankholika” [A spring song of a melancholic], 1788), but it contains a peculiar pleasure: “most tenderly

You flow from pain and grief to cheerfulness;
No joy is come, but there is no distress;
Despair is gone... but, having dried your tears,
You dare not contemplate the world, and tremble,
And your dear mother, sorrow, you resemble.

(“Melankholiia, podrazhanie Deliliu” [Melancholy, in imitation of Delille], 1800)

Or else a “gauze” is invoked, “a transparent cover of sensibility”, through which the hero’s eyes blaze (“Rytsar’ nashego vremeni” [The Knight of Our Time]).

A school developed around Karamzin; he himself was following in another’s tracks, but his school best reveals the deficiencies of craftsmanship. The journals *Time spent pleasantly and usefully* [*Priiatnoe i poleznoe preprovohzdenie vremeni*] and *Hippocrene* [*Ippokrena*] are filled with Youngian and Ossianic motifs, excerpts, and imitations. This was where F. G. Pokrovsky (the philosopher of the Alaun Mount²⁹), who happened to have been Zhukovsky’s boyhood teacher, practiced; his melancholy is sometimes tuned, in a real-life-altruistic mode, to

²⁹ Feofilakt Pokrovsky’s *nomme de plume*.

the topic of “human sufferings and beneficence.”³⁰ Count Sibirsky, for his part, was a well-fed sentimentalist, whom landscapes around Moscow reminded of descriptions in one of Radcliffe’s novels;³¹ he likes to “occupy himself” with melancholy, when sitting by a “bright red fire and reminiscing about absent friends and his dear one.”³² He plays at melancholy. Imagining himself to be one of the progeny of Ossian’s fantasy, he sinks into sullen pensiveness, but then thinks better of it: what use is there for tears and sadness if a man of pure soul, after the vale of life’s lamentations, shall come upon Eden’s blooming plains and angels’ songs? This contradiction is resolved – by sleep, as the author “has perceived the weight of Morpheus’s leaden scepter.”³³

Count Shalikov is especially illustrative of this playful sentimentalism; “he has something warmish in him,” wrote Karamzin, defending him from Dmitriev’s attacks.³⁴ The spring brings upon him melancholy and tears; in the eye’s crystal, the sun’s ray plays, but “often the moon’s gentle radiance replaces it (crystal? ray?) on a turquoise heaven before my eyes.” The poem “Graveyard” turns into a hymn to “gentle, holy melancholy”; in his epistle to “the Philosopher of the Alaun Mount,” the poet reminisces about how they both philosophized over the graves underneath an old spreading oak while “the melancholic moonlight increased the melancholy of the place and the objects;” on their way back, their attention was arrested by a mournful Gothic castle; it was a prison house. “The Moscow River” and “Dnieper” evoke sorrowful thoughts – for a reason that we don’t see. The actual object disappears, but across the Dnieper are “small groves, the havens of love and bliss” etc. “O nature! O sensibility!” The Russian landscape and local impressions are valued inasmuch as they are suggested by Western

³⁰ [Veselovsky’s note:] *Priiatnoe i poleznoe preprovozhdenie vremeni* XII, 1796, p. 3 ff.: Темный лес или чувство бедствий человеческих и благотворения [Dark woods, or the sentiment of human sufferings and beneficence].

³¹ [Veselovsky’s note:] Мои желания при наступающей весне [My wishes at the spring’s arrival], *Ippokrena*, 1799, part 2, p. 260.

³² [Veselovsky’s note:] Ibid, part 4, p. 255-6: Меланхолия [Melancholy].

³³ [Veselovsky’s note:] Ibid, part 3, p. 202 ff.: Подражание Оссиану [An Imitation of Ossian].

³⁴ [Veselovsky’s note:] Dmitriev M. A. *Melochi iz zapasa moei pamiaty*. 1869, p. 93.

impressions and readings. When travelling, Karamzin always has a Western “poet . . . in his thoughts and hands” – or in his pocket, for easy reference: he admires the views and sentimentalizes in places where von Haller, Gessner, and Rousseau had come before him, and in their style. Shalikov transplants this device to the Russian landscape. “The Spring, in my eyes, would not have been so beautiful had not Thomson and Kleist described all of its beauties for me,” Karamzin confesses (Works, II, 71):

Reading James Thompson and Lambert,
To their unreal world I compare
The true world, which I think the best;
The grove is fresher for its shade,
The rill more tender on the glade;
I watch with joy within my breast
What Jacques Delille and Kleist depict,
Keeping their verse in memory;
I pick the trails that they have picked;
And their trace gives delight to me.

 (“Derevnia” [Village], 1785)

In the garden of Lopukhin’s estate near Moscow, Zhukovsky saw a “Young Island” and, on this island, an urn dedicated to Fénelon’s memory, which included a depiction of Madame Guyon and Rousseau. “This place involuntarily induces a certain doleful, pleasant meditation.”³⁵

For Count Shalikov, it is memory that suggests something of this sort: his poem “A May morning” [“Maiskoe utro”] evokes images of Werther and Héloïse, “Cloister” [“Monastyr”]

³⁵ [Veselovsky’s note:] “About Fenelon”, 1809. Voeikov has put this note into verse; see his “Opisanie russkikh sadov” [Description of Russian gardens], *Vestnik Evropy* 1813, no.7 and 8, p. 194.

recalls “the mysteries of the Druid rites” and “stern oracles” – and the author wishes to penetrate the secret interior of the monk’s heart, for the history of each of them is a chain of griefs. Somewhere in the Ukraine he discovered a Swiss tinge: “Is it possible for one who has a little imaginative verve and a sentimental heart not to know Switzerland and, having never been there, not to know its nature, the most beautiful in the world? Who has not read the *New Héloïse*, or *The Letters of a Russian Traveler*?”³⁶ Passing on to the landscape that extended before his gaze, he asks himself: “Is this not a small Jura? A small Clarens?” He attempts to imitate Russian folk songs (“Dolgo li mne, molodoi, kruchinit’sia” [“For how long shall I, the young one, grieve?”]; “Nynche byl ya na pochtovom na dvore” [Today I visited a village post office]), but, when translating *Tableau slave* (Paris, 1824) by Countess Zinaida Aleksandrovna Volkonskaia (“Slavianskaia kartina piatogo veka” [The Slavic tableau of the Fifth Century]), he did not notice that a marriage song included there is a rendition of a Russian folk song, and translated it back from French, but not in the folk style (“A young pine stood in the yard near a shack”).³⁷ His description of a “village festivity” begins with a confession: “For a friend of *humanity* and nature there is an unspeakable pleasure in the *pure* merriment of *pure-hearted* villagers.” And here is a description of St. John’s Eve [Kupala]:

In the evening, following the sunset, on a *green* meadow and on the *small* islands of a *clear* river, by a pine grove and in its interior, tar barrels blazed up... Impatient villagers flocked from all sides to the site of merriment; country Dietzes³⁸ struck with their fiddle-bows. Here *tender* flutes rang out, there loud songs; young peasants and peasant girls

³⁶ The latter is a work by Karamzin.

³⁷ [Veselovsky’s note:] This is the beginning of the song in *Tableau slave*: “Un jeune pin s’élevait sur les monts auprès d’une chaumière”; In *Olga*, by the same author, one also finds renditions of folk songs: 1) Assise dans un donjon élevé j’entends la voix du faucon; 2) O fleuve, fleuve cheri; 3) Bon feyer échauffe toi; 4) Dans la prairie est une joli tilleul.

³⁸ A reference to the virtuoso violinist Ferdinand Dietz (1742-1798), who worked in Russia from 1771 and taught music to the future emperor Alexander I.

joined in *lively* dances; the elderly sat at the tables where from large vessels spread the fragrant scent of their *nectar* and *ambrosia* – cheap vodka and fresh bread; some rushed to the swings... others dispersed over the grove and the meadow. We walked around, and made marry with the happy villagers. The goodly landowner was sincerely happy for their bliss which he shared with us in his *sentimental* heart. All that Virgil, Gessner, Florian, Delille sang on their immortal flutes *became alive in my memory, in my soul ... I love the fields, I love virtue, and I also love you, Delille.*

Youngian melancholy in a graveyard – and folk life, seen from the windows of a landowner’s villa, with pure-hearted happy villagers, tender flutes, lively dances on a green meadow, by a clear river, and with vodka for ambrosia. Reality might have suggested something different, but it was impossible to get rid of Young and Delille, and not to recall “the deceits of both Richardson and Rousseau” (*Eugene Onegin*).³⁹ This is sentimentalism for pleasure, permitting even a measure of lustfulness. When Zhukovsky entered its atmosphere, Russian society was going through a reaction; the word *society* [obshchestvo] itself was removed from literary circulation. Yet it was not forbidden to sentimentalize. Karamzin’s mother displayed a remarkable propensity for melancholy, and spent whole days in deep pensiveness; sentimental novels were her favorite reading.⁴⁰ Ekaterina Afanas’evna Protasova,⁴¹ who would later become a stern rigorist, in her youth indulged in reading *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and a sentimental book about education, *Adèle et Théodore*.⁴² Gogol’s father was fond of designing gardens and would give an individual name to every valley; in a neighboring wood, he instituted a “Valley of

³⁹ Bk. 2, 29.

⁴⁰ [Veselovsky’s note:] Karamzin, *Works*, III, p. 242, 253-5.

⁴¹ E. A. Protasova was Zhukovsky’s blood sister, who declined his proposition to her daughter Maria, Zhukovsky’s long-time pupil, on the ground of their close kinship.

⁴² [Veselovsky’s note:] Zeidlits, *Zhizn’ i poezii V. A. Zhukovskogo*, p. 13, fn.1

Quiet”: it was forbidden to use axes and even to do laundry on the pond by beating linen – lest the nightingales were scared away.⁴³ In the summer of 1810, Gnedich found Batiushkov ill, “apparently, due to Moscow’s air, infected with sensibility, moist with tears shed by authors, and thick with their heavy sighs.”⁴⁴ For his part, Batiushkov makes fun of “fashionable writers who spend their whole nights on coffins and frighten poor humanity with apparitions, ghosts, the Last Judgment, but most of all with their style,” as they give themselves up to “sullen reflections on the futility of things, which everyone is permitted to engage in in this age of melancholy” (“Progulka po Moskve” [A Walk Through Moscow], 1810).

Zhukovsky also began to sentimentalize – the only true poet of our age of sensibility and the only one who experienced its mood not only in a literary manner [*literaturno*], but through life’s grief, at a time when the heart demands love’s care, and later, when it looks for reciprocity. This experience left deep traces in the man and gave a particular direction to his sentiment, binding him forever with “recollections;” the motifs of sentimental poetry supported his mood, but it had stamped them with sincerity, an elegant pensiveness, which interrupts convention with the voice of the heart. This poetic cliché, the echo of what had been experienced and won through suffering, had a binding force on him: new times had arrived, there was a glimpse of late happiness, yet the doleful cliché recurs amid the jests of Arzamas⁴⁵ and new passions, amid the “Reports on the Moon”⁴⁶ and an epitaph for a “squirrel.” Like a Leitmotiv, which the poet cannot rid himself of.

⁴³ [Veselovsky’s note:] Shchegolev, *Istoricheskii vestnik*, 1902, February, p. 661.

⁴⁴ [Veselovsky’s note:] Tikhanov, *Nik. Iv. Gnedich*, p. 40.

⁴⁵ A progressively-minded literary group (1815-1818), of which Zhukovsky was a member; its meetings were dominated by a jocular, parodic spirit.

⁴⁶ Addressed to the empress Maria Fedorovna (1820), one of Zhukovsky’s attempts to apply sentimentalist language to court life (see Veselovskii, *V. A. Zhukovskii* 244-5).