

Occidentalism in Russian Travel Literature in the 18th Century: Example of Nikolaj Mihailovič Karamzin

Summary

The purpose of this research is to explore how the national and cultural identity of Russia was constructed in the eighteenth century through the vehicle of travel writing. At the heart of this research is a close analysis of the travels of the Russian author Nikolaj Karamzin to the Western Europe. Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveller* is a travelogue in the form of memoir in epistolary arrangement based on his travels through the states of Germany, Switzerland, France and England in 1789-1790.

The era and the author chosen are justified by the graveness that the eighteenth century has for the history of the Russian literature. An era of major transformations in all social and cultural aspects of the till-then known Russian lifestyle set the ground for a move towards modernity. By travelling to the Western Europe and displaying the values and rich greatness of some aspects of the cultural, political and social lives, Karamzin proposes a set of alternative national ideals. These ideals would assist the country and the nation to get closer to the standards of the Western traditions and subsequently closer to 'paradise' and the 'perfect' life.

As a contextual backup for the analysis of Karamzin's *Letters* I dedicate an explanatory chapter with several themes apropos to the understanding of the study which include genre of travel writing, historical and cultural background of eighteenth century Russia, enlightened literature, sentimentalism, national and cultural identity. I then propose the fundamental theme of the research, namely the discussion of the role of the Russian travel writing for the Russian national identity through the appropriation of European traditions.

The second axis developed by the research concerns the study of Self and the Other. Works of classical travel narratives of European literature will be used to analyse concepts such as Constructivism, Imagined Communities, Otherness, Occidentalism and Orientalism, aesthetics and semiotics. All of the background theory proposed generates the question of the national identity and its representation. Therefore, this thesis work is interdisciplinary in nature due to the various tools of scientific analysis.