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N. M. Karamzin

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N. M. Karamzin : Letters of a Russian Traveller 1789-1790: An Account of a Young Russian Gentleman's Tour Through Germany, Switzerland, France and England before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Letters of a Russian Traveller 1789-1790: An Account of a Young Russian Gentleman's Tour Through Germany, Switzerland, France and England:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A sentimental journey at the start of Russian literatureBy S. Smith-PeterThis review begins my own journey into Russian literature. This is something I've thought about doing for some time and I've decided to start reading through Russian literature, from Karamzin to the present. Certain rules apply: I'm just going to read those books I have at home. Then I'm going to review them here. At the midpoint I'll get to the big books everyone knows, like Crime and Punishment and War and Peace. But there was a lot before and after that.I start at Karamzin, as he's often seen as the first to create a new Russian prose style that brought in European models and updated earlier styles that had been influenced by Church Slavonic.This book is a fascinating record of the journey of a young Russian - just in his early 20s - through Germany, Switzerland, France and England. Karamzin is not a great writer, and if he was born in the mid-nineteenth century we probably wouldn't still know him. A lot of critics have

noted his superficial style. However, there's also something rather modern about that too. I could imagine these letters, which he really wrote for publication, as a series of blog entries. Karamzin's aim was to teach his fellow Russians about the newest trends in European thought and writing. And teach he did. Victor Terras notes that several generations of Russians learned of Europe from this book and that echoes of it show up in *The Brothers Karamazov*. So what Karamzin says here is important. Karamzin is most comfortable in German-speaking Europe. He speaks with Herder and Kant. Great German authors embrace him and write him sentimental letters, possibly because they are flattered at the thought of Karamzin translating them into Russian and thus reaching a new audience. Switzerland is described as a land of great beauty and authenticity. France, in contrast, is shown as down at heel, with shabby palaces inhabited by dirty town dwellers. His trip in 1789-90 of course took place during the French Revolution, so his less exalted response to France is a result of that too. Karamzin was an aristocrat and the revolution was not something he could approve of. The part that was especially interesting to me was how Karamzin described England as a land of egoists. But if you read it closely, you can see that this is partly because he feels ignored. He notes in passing that English isn't spoken the way it is written and that the English couldn't understand what he was saying. So instead of the meeting of minds he was constantly having in German-speaking Europe, in England he doesn't mention any person he speaks to. This whole idea of England as cold egoists becomes a cliché of Russian literature. Obviously there are some such English people, but I suspect that if Karamzin had known English better, his portrait of England would have been much warmer. The introduction by Leon Stilman is interesting and notes that Karamzin went from being a Mason and then moved away from those beliefs. This relates to the conflict between sense and sensibility found in his work, including this one.

Hardcover.

Language Notes Text: English, Russian (translation) About the Author Karamzin /f Nikolai /i Mikhailovich