The Autocrat and the Revolutionary:
Catherine the Great, John Paul Jones, and the Enlightenment’s “Woman Question”

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Honors Thesis
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University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

2018

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Acknowledgements

As I present this completed work, there are many individuals that I must thank for enabling me to develop this project. First and foremost, all my gratitude goes to Louise McReynolds, my advisor, who led me through the ups and downs of this process for over a year. She consistently challenged me to push farther and farther into my analysis, and while her expectations were high, she always inspired me to live up to them. Our meetings, her comments, and our constant email chains from multiple continents not only culminated in this project, they crafted me into a better student and historian. To Kathleen DuVal and Donald Raleigh, I also owe my appreciation for their advice on the trajectory of this paper and the theoretical framework of my argument. I sincerely thank Donald Raleigh and Jay Smith for taking the time to read my project and sit on my oral defense committee. Their comments and suggestions strengthened the final version of this thesis innumerably.

This research was made possible by the generous donation of the Kusa family to the David Anthony Kusa Undergraduate Research Award in the History Department of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Kusa Award allowed me to spend a summer in Annapolis and Washington, DC, conducting research in the Naval Academy and Library of Congress archives to supplement my thesis. The Kusa family’s support for UNC’s aspiring historians has impacted not only my academic career, but also gives numerous other students the opportunity to pursue dynamic research that changes the way we look at the world around us.

Additionally, I owe another debt of gratitude to Jim Cheevers and Tracie Logan at the United States Naval Academy Museum in Annapolis, MD. Their initial generosity in helping me access the John L. Senior Moscow Papers, the cornerstone of this project, and also taking the
time to personally walk me through the museum and point me towards secondary materials on
John Paul Jones made this project more cohesive.

To all of these individuals and the nameless others who helped me along the way, peace
and all good. Without the support of such a dedicated and genuine community, this project
would not have been possible.
Notes on Names and Dates

As with any project on Russia, certain appropriations must be taken in regards to names and dates. Where possible, I have Anglicized the Cyrillic names of major figures, thus Ekaterina becomes Catherine, Elizaveta becomes Elizabeth, Pavel becomes Paul, and Pyotr becomes Peter. For other conversions of Russian names to the Latin alphabet, I follow the ALA-LC Romanization standards.

For ease of access, all dates cited in the text are in-line with the Gregorian calendar, though Russia followed the Julian calendar until 1918.
Introduction: Catherine the Great as Autocrat and Revolutionary

On September 24, 1786, the palatial nobles of old Muscovy, decorated in the latest Parisian finery; the uniformed officers of the guards regiments, representing the surest makers of tsars and tsarinas; the dazzling princes and princesses, sporting elegant tunics and gowns encrusted with diamonds; and all the other elements of the glittering court of Catherine II, Empress and Autocrat of all the Russians, came together for a night at the theatre. The Hermitage theatre, a neoclassic, marble semicircular stage, flanked by a series of austere, ionic columns and statues of the goddess Minerva, stood on the east wing of the complex, across the Winter Canal from the modern-day Hermitage museum. On this night, Russia’s elite came to view The Siberian Shaman, the third installment of a trilogy by an anonymous playwright. The play showed a bumbling family fascinated by the seemingly alien power of a shaman to “deceive those who wanted to deceive themselves.”

The play ended on a relatively strange note. Prelesta (roughly translates to English as “lovely” or “darling”), a young girl forced into a marriage contract by her father, Bobin, slips out of first-person speech and begins referring to herself with the third-person она, the Russian equivalent of the English “she.” Prelesta’s slippage represents an effort by an oppressed woman to claim the only autonomy available to her in a patriarchal system designed to constrain her. By assuming a removed, third-person persona, Prelesta achieves a small level of individual voice. Prelesta’s story, fictional as it may be, nevertheless enjoyed a powerful champion. The anonymous playwright was the Empress herself, the autocratic ruler of over an eighth of the

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world, and her views on what a woman was and the importance of her voice were revolutionary in their own right.

Catherine II sat on the throne of patriarchal Russia, a female who usurped a traditionally male role. Catherine was not the first of Russian Empresses, but rather the last, placing her as the heir to a mixed history of gender and power. Catherine bore and continues to bear cultural significance in the discussion and discourse on women and gender in early modern history. Her cultural production and extensive writings made her a *philosophe* in her own right. She, like Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Diderot, used the Age of Reason as a means to rationalize and question points of the social order. Catherine was not solely important because she ruled; she was equally important because she wrote.

Catherine anticipated an understanding of gender outside the conventional norms of the Western Enlightenment, which, through her direct intervention, fostered a culture in Russia that placed greater importance on a woman’s “voice.” It is, of course, anachronistic to say that Catherine was a feminist before her time. Rather, she argued that she lay somewhere between masculinity and femininity, embodying the positive aspects of both genders, as her society defined them. Her expectation of a nondichotomous, multiplicity of genders separated her from the main body of Enlightenment thought about women and their role in society, as perpetuated by the French *philosophes* and their British contemporaries.\(^4\) Catherine’s divergence led her to spearhead a climate that, while certainly not granting equality, gave Russian noblewomen greater intellectual and societal agency than their French and British counterparts. The Enlightenment,

very much an inspiration to Catherine, emboldened the Empress to advocate for greater agency and opportunity for women in her Russia.

The woman’s “voice,” which Catherine prioritized, had many considerations. Catherine encouraged women to claim a greater role in intellectual agency, as she herself did in her correspondence with the *philosophes*. Noblewomen in Catherinian Russia held access to classical education, administrative appointments, and international correspondence.⁵ Moreover, women’s voices carried weight in matters of domestic and sexual violence. Catherine herself survived an exceptionally tumultuous marriage to Peter III of Russia (r. 1762), fraught with cruelty, neglect, verbal (if not physical) abuse, and infidelity on both sides. She chose to never publically remarry while she ruled Russia.⁶ As Empress, Catherine directly intervened in cases of extreme spousal abuse and rape, acting to protect not just noblewomen in her court, but also peasants and immigrants. Catherinian Russia, for all its limitations, produced a model in which Enlightened thought provided women with greater agency.

The philosophers and adherents of the Western Enlightenment held different views of women than the Russian Empress. While Catherine was certainly a friend to many of the *philosophes*, namely Voltaire and Diderot, their ideas on gender and especially women’s place in society stood in stark contrast to her own. The solidification of separate and inherently unequal roles for women in British and French society proliferated the belief that “proper” women should

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⁶ Catherine II, *The Memoirs of Catherine the Great*, trans. by Mark Cruse and Hilde Hoogenboom (New York: Random House, 2006), 198, 207. Catherine described many examples of Peter III’s mistreatment of her over the course of her memoirs. Some examples include denouncement as a traitor to the Empress Elizabeth, torturing rats in her room, abandonment for days after the difficult delivery of their son, Paul, and threats to divorce her and lock her away in a monastery, quite typical for the Romanov tsars.
be chaste and obedient—the roots of the cult of domesticity. Catherine’s clear stance against this “ideal” earned her the mockery of French and British writers and newspapers, as their readers felt threatened culturally as well as geopolitically by the Russian Empress. The perpetuation of myths surrounding the Empress’s sex life point toward this phenomenon. Fundamentally, Catherine and the West disagreed on the differences between biological sex, definitions of gender, and their relationship to carnal sex.

The interaction between Catherine and the ex-American Revolutionary Admiral John Paul Jones highlighted this difference in conception. Jones served in the Russian Imperial Navy from 1788 until 1789, taking an active part in the Liman campaign off the coast of the Crimean Peninsula during the Russo-Turkish War of 1787-92. When he was recalled to St. Petersburg in 1789, Jones faced an accusation of rape from a ten-year-old girl, Katerina Stepanova Golzvart. The young girl, backed by her mother and members of Jones’s household, brought her case to the police chief of St. Petersburg, who passed it on to the Admiralty. Despite Jones’s fervent denial, word of the case spread in St. Petersburg society and reached the Empress, who subsequently shunned Jones. As the accusation garnered international attention, mainly due to the efforts of the French ambassador to Russia, the Comte de Ségur, fault lines between Russians and the West grew increasingly evident as British, French, and American opinions assumed Jones’s innocence while Russians took the side of Katerina Stepanova. Through the example of the international reaction to the accusation of rape, the differences in understanding women between Catherinian Russia and the Enlightened West became increasingly apparent.

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The Cast of Characters:

Sophie Friederike Auguste von Anhalt-Zerbst-Dornburg, the girl who would be Empress, entered the world as a minor German princess in 1729, the daughter of Christian August, Prince of Anhalt-Zerbst, and Joanna of the Holstein-Gottorp family. Born in the city of Stettin, part of the Pomeranian region of Prussia, she traveled to Russia in 1744 as a potential marriage match for Grand Duke Peter of Holstein-Gottorp, her second cousin and the nephew and heir of Elizabeth Petrovna, Empress of Russia. Converting to the Russian Orthodox Church in 1745, Sophie changed her name to Ekaterina Alekseyevna (Catherine), becoming a Grand Duchess through marriage to Peter. Following the death of the Empress Elizabeth in 1762, Catherine orchestrated a coup d’état in her favor, dethroning Peter and claiming the ancestral throne of the Romanovs for herself. Catherine would rule as supreme autocrat of all the Russias for over three decades, during which she presided over an era of military reemergence for Russia in Europe and the Levant. Domestically, she overhauled the administrative system of the Imperial and provincial governments, using Enlightened precepts of law-based rule. Contemporaries gave her the epithet velikaya (or, the Great) while she still lived. As Empress, she oversaw the introduction of a new wave of domestic suppression of dissent while simultaneously becoming the financial supporter and confidant of the other philosophes—the perfect picture of an enlightened despot.8

John Paul Jones was born in 1747, the son of a gardener from Kirkbean in southwest Scotland. His naval career began at thirteen, when he joined as an apprentice to a captain bound for Virginia. He served on a number of slave and merchant ships around the British North

American colonies and the West Indies, having a brother who lived in Virginia. Jones survived a few scandals, most stemming from allegations of excess cruelty in his handling of sailors under his command, before eventually electing to join the American revolutionary struggle shortly after its outbreak in 1775. His service in the Continental Navy culminated in the battle that earned him his immortality, the naval duel between Jones’s vessel *Bonhomme Richard* (named for Benjamin Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanac*) and the HMS *Serapis* off the coast of England on September 23, 1779. Jones triumphed over the British vessel, giving rise to the possibly apocryphal legend that he shouted “I have not yet begun to fight!” in response to a call to surrender and strike his colors. Louis XVI of France knighted him for his victory, and Jones preferred to be referred to as “Chevalier” for the remainder of his life. After the 1783 Treaty of Paris, Jones served the new United States as an agent to various courts in Europe, ending in Copenhagen where he accepted an offer to join the Russian Imperial Navy in 1788. After his Russian service ended, Jones continued to roam Europe until his death in Paris in 1792. His body remained in France until its return to the United States in 1906, to be interred in the United States Naval Academy Chapel in Annapolis.9

**Epistolary and Ego Texts: Letters and Memoirs as Gendered Evidence**

This project draws heavily from primary sources in the forms of letters and memoirs. I chose these media to be the basis of this exploration because Catherine’s prioritization of women’s voices began with a prioritization of her own voice, relayed through these sources. These documents carry with them the connotation of the private, yet in Catherine’s world, they were instruments of a woman’s voice in the public sphere. Catherine, despite wielding autocratic

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power, nonetheless used these conventions of Enlightened discourse to enter into the transnational conversation with men of letters in the German states, France, and Great Britain. She wrote frequently in French, Russian, and German, engaging her audience in their *lingua franca*. Not only were letters and memoirs literary forms that demonstrated the literary prowess of the Empress, they also represented her understanding of her gendered place in society and her ability to resist culturally and intellectually.

Letters were one way in which Catherine, like other Enlightened women, engaged in public dialogue. Dena Goodman, in her monograph *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, introduced the argument that Enlightened French women used letter writing as a cultural, rather than literary, production, and that writing was “a crucial step in developing a consciousness of themselves as gendered subjects in the modern world.”10 Letters were an expression of the private that populated the public sphere, where women lacked a voice in the Enlightenment. Women letter writers challenged the notion of the “modern woman, defined by her sensibilité and maternal love and idealized by Enlightenment men of letters such as Rousseau and Diderot,” decrying the cult of motherhood as a “learned social, intellectual, and material practice”11 Goodman concluded that letter writing for women was an expression of “modern subjectivity in the world women inhabited and the words they chose to use” and further study of these texts expand the conversation about gender in the eighteenth century, “rather than assuming that the only path to modernity is the one forged by men.”12 Catherine, with her international correspondence, engaged in this practice of cultural production to present her private thoughts to public and transnational discourse.

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12 Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, 337
The Empress further engaged the public sphere through the private space of her memoirs. Over the course of her life, Catherine wrote three distinct sets of memoirs, beginning in 1756, while still Grand Duchess of Russia. The first set of memoirs covered the events of her life up until 1754. She revisited and expanded them during the Russo-Turkish War of 1771-1773, encompassing the years 1756-1758 and outlining 1759. During the twilight of her reign and life, Catherine returned to and rewrote her memoirs for a third time in 1794, adding a copy of her will in 1796. Though Paul I (r. 1796-1801) ordered many of his mother’s papers burned, copies of her memoirs circulated among members of the Imperial family and aristocratic circles, even finding their way into the hands of Alexander Pushkin, though they officially remained a sealed secret of the emperors Paul, Alexander I (r. 1801-25), and Nicholas I (r. 1825-55). Father of Russian socialism Alexander Herzen published an expatriate edition in London in 1859, with mass Russian publication accompanying the relaxation of censorship laws following the Revolution of 1905. All three versions of the memoirs describe a lesser known portion of Catherine’s narrative: her life before the crown. Collectively, the memoirs depict Catherine’s arrival at the court of Empress Elizabeth and betrothal and marriage to the then Grand Duke Peter, ending two years before the coup d’état that made her Empress of Russia.

Memoirs, like letters, became a method for Catherine to make the private something public. In her introduction to her essay collection on the Russian memoir, Beth Holmgren asserts that Russians understood memoirs to be a “form of autobiography with a conscience or an

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14 Cruse and Hoogenboom, preface to *The Memoirs of Catherine the Great*, xiv. Catherine insinuated in her memoirs that her lover Sergei Saltykov, not Peter III, was Paul’s father, so Paul repressed publication following his mother’s death, a practice upheld by his sons Alexander and Nicholas.
15 Cruse and Hoogenboom, preface to *The Memoirs of Catherine the Great*, xiii-xiv.
agenda,” yet still something presumably true. Catherine tapped into this collective understanding of the mode of memoir writing when she chose to record her early years in Russia in her various memoirs. Yet, as Mark Cruse and Hilde Hoogenboom asserted in their preface to a new translation of Catherine’s third set of memoirs, the Empress viewed her memoir writing as an intellectual exercise, hence her revisions over the course of her life. Catherine’s memoirs became a dual-educational exercise. Catherine both taught herself self-discovery and also made herself an example to readers. The connotations of the Russian memoir gave Catherine an outlet of expression to the broader world in which she could develop a personal sphere with a public audience, much like letter writing. Catherine was not alone in this understanding of memoirs. Holmgren further asserts that memoir writing was a form of cultural production in which “Russians dared to demarcate their own autonomous circles of presumably truthful perception and real-world influence, to pioneer the rights and capabilities of the individual in an autocratic, bureaucratic state.” Memoir writing was, however, not just a means of resistance to autocracy, but also a means for the autocrat to create her own autonomy within the confines of Imperial and gendered limitations.

Ways to Discuss Eighteenth-Century Gender

Catherine understood gender in a dichotomous manner, rather than as the spectrum we understand today. The word gender itself carries with it a certain cultural connotation, especially in the academy, that generally accepts that there are a multiplicity of gender identities and expressions which varies based on cultural and social contexts. However, an investigation into

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17 Cruse and Hoogenboom, preface to *The Memoirs of Catherine the Great*, xiii-xix.
eighteenth-century gender identity must meet the conversation on eighteenth-century terms. *Gender,* to Catherine and her contemporaries, was a series of classifications. The French, German, and Russian languages use gendered words, or “the class of nouns or pronouns distinguished by inflections that they and their syntactically associated words are required to have.” In addition to language, gender came to classify people. The idea of gender in relation to people originated from the Old French *genre humain,* an attempt to classify mankind. Through this mechanism, the linking of gender and biological sex came about, based on physical characteristics and their assumed social implications.  

Second-wave feminism created the modern understanding by dividing the two categories, as Gabrielle Griffin asserted, the division “expressed the acculturation of an individual into femininity or masculinity as practiced in a given culture; that is, it was regarded as socially constructed, whereas sex was viewed as biologically given through female or male bodily traits.” During the Enlightenment, however, gender and biological sex were intrinsically linked, which further connected gender with carnal sex.

**John Paul Jones: Making a Rapist of a National Hero**

A quick walk around the crypt of John Paul Jones in the chapel of the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis immediately indicates the lack of conversation on Jones’s Russian service. The Navy etched the names of vessels he commanded in life in a ring around his final resting place. The names include the *Ranger,* the *Serapis,* the *Providence,* the *Alfred,* the *Alliance,* and the *Bonhomme Richard.* Noticeably missing is the name of the ship Jones commanded in the Imperial Russian Navy, the *Vladimir.* An obscure plaque in the corner of the

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crypt, detailing honors Jones received in life lists the Order of St. Anne granted to him by Catherine II of Russia. One enduring legacy of Jones’s time in Russia is the allegation of rape, which might explain the lack of scholarly interest in this period of his life. In fact, the seeming refusal to address Jones’s service in Russia and his private actions while there persist throughout the historiography of the life of the Scots-American.

John Paul Jones’s memory continues to enjoy popular respect in the American national consciousness. He benefits from the reverence, if not deference, afforded to most members of the American revolutionary cohort. The American national myth surrounds figures such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and John Paul Jones with the idea that their private lives matter much less than their public service in the founding of the nation. An irrefutable example is the fact that it was not until 2000 that a comprehensive report on the sexual relationship between Jefferson and his slave, Sally Hemings, became part of the national conversation, despite the accusations arising during Jefferson’s first term as president.22 The myth of Jones originally centered on his Revolutionary naval victories, and this is the image of the man that persists. When France returned Jones’s body to the United States and it was reinterred in 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt commemorated the event by declaring “every officer in our Navy should know by heart the deeds of John Paul Jones,” and that “every officer in our Navy should feel in each fiber of his being an eager desire to emulate the energy, the professional capacity, the indomitable determination and dauntless scorn of death which marked John Paul Jones above all his fellows.”23 Roosevelt’s assessment demonstrated the national focus on Jones’s military career and the lack of recognition for his time in Russia.

23 Theodore Roosevelt, “Reinternment of John Paul Jones” (speech, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD, April 24, 1906).
Only one published monograph has ever fully addressed Jones’s service in the Russian Imperial Navy: Lincoln Lorenz’s The Admiral and the Empress: John Paul Jones and Catherine the Great, published in 1954. Lorenz, one of Jones’s most dedicated biographers, took up a defense of the Rear Admiral that became the accepted version of events of Jones’s life in Russia. Lorenz, writing in the 1950s, used his account of Jones as an indictment of the Stalinist system in Eastern Europe, claiming that “in the tragedy of John Paul Jones in Russia, history is prophecy of the Iron Curtain as revealing as the sun.”24 His clear mistrust of Russia materialized in his description of the country as a product of the “military aggression of its Germanic founders from Scandinavia, the ruthless cruelty of its assimilated invaders the Asiatic Tartars, the superstitions of its adopted Greek Orthodox Church, and the typical Eastern treachery.”25 Lorenz’s assessment of Catherine was not much kinder. He labeled her a tyrant whose “inordinate feminine vanity went hand in hand with her absolutism,” and asked “what raiment of royal splendor, what jewels of Eastern brilliance, what allurement of Oriental feminine graces, what domination of autocratic power were not on parade” at her court.26

Lorenz’s main contribution to the historiography was the establishment of the accepted story of Jones’s involvement in Katerina Stepanova’s rape. Lorenz is one of the only biographers of Jones to read the John L. Senior Moscow papers, a collection of documents collected by John Senior, an American ambassador to the USSR and direct descendent of Jones, and deposited in the Naval Academy Museum Archives in Annapolis.27 The Senior papers consolidated all the documents concerning Katerina Stepanova’s rape, and most are translated into English. Lorenz

25 Lorenz, The Admiral and the Empress, 35.
26 Lorenz, The Admiral and the Empress, 35, 149.
27 Lorenz, The Admiral and the Empress, 186.
read the papers and included copies of them in his text, yet concluded he did not trust them, instead choosing to accept the version of events promulgated by Jones and the Comte de Ségur. Lorenz declared that Katerina Stepanova was “the girl decoy” in a licentious plot rooted in “the treachery of the Empress Catherine and her favorites in plotting war and love together so as to serve their despotic ambitions even at the price of trying ruthlessly to destroy the professional and private good name of Jones.”

Subsequent Jones biographers, accepting the version of events established by Lorenz, have ignored the Senior papers and the story they tell of the rape of Katerina Stepanova. Samuel Eliot Morris, author of *John Paul Jones: A Sailor’s Biography*, wrote an extensive chapter on Jones’s Russian service yet still accepted Lorenz’s conclusion that Jones likely kept Katerina Stepanova as a prostitute and she was used to shame him. Morris earned himself the ire of Lorenz, who chided Morris for not going far enough to indict Catherine for the role he believed she exercised in the affair. Another prominent example is the relatively new Joseph Callo biography *John Paul Jones: America’s First Sea Warrior*, sponsored by the Naval Institute. Despite presenting his work as a “fresh look at America’s first sea warrior,” which “avoids the hero worship of past biographies and provides a more complete understanding of his accomplishments,” Callo based his conclusions on Jones’s and the Comte de Ségur’s letters and concluded, “the girl was, in all probability, a prostitute whose services Jones had employed. Jones already had a reputation as a womanizer, and his detractors very effectively used that as the weak point at which to attack his character.” Further, he mirrored Lorenz’s argument that

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28 Lorenz, *The Admiral and the Empress*, 17, 123.
Catherine planned the entire affair, noting “the Empress continued to act as if she had been deeply offended by his alleged behavior [sic].”31

The contemporary cult of silence surrounding Jones and the allegations of rape against him demonstrate a continuation of a darker side of the Enlightenment and its legacy. While the men of letters, the philosophes, and the republican revolutionaries fought for liberty of conscience and voice for men, they did not extend the same courtesy to women. Enlightened women found other avenues, such as letter and memoir writing, to claim their own limited autonomy, but they nonetheless felt the confining effects of a world made equal for men, not them. Catherine, through her philosophical and practical challenge to this normativity, represented resistance to this expression of Enlightened thought.

31 Joseph Callo, John Paul Jones: America’s First Sea Warrior (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2006), 167.
Chapter I: Catherine the Great’s Reclassification of Gender

Introduction

In the Château de Ferney, a palatial, baroque-style retreat near the Swiss border in eastern France, a man, hunched by age, sat at a sprawling, oak writing desk, littered with yellowed parchment and splattered ink. In his youth, the terse quill pen now clutched in his withered hand had spun miraculous diatribes, scathing satires, and revolutionary philosophies; now, it served mainly the purpose of letter writing. Memories circulated in his mind: the bustle and throng of city life in Paris, his childhood home; the stone casing of his solitary cell in the Bastille, tucked away from light and human voice; the military precision and pomp of the Prussian court, where he held the ear of the king, Frederick the Great. This man, François-Marie, better known as Voltaire, long lived the life of a philosophe, and his was one of the most celebrated minds in Europe.

His list of friends and acquaintances spanned a continent or two: fellow Frenchmen Denis Diderot and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, former employer, Frederick the Great, frequent visitor from the British colonies, Benjamin Franklin, and, most importantly, his greatest fan and financial backer, a minor German princess, who was now Tsarina of all the Russias, Catherine the Great. Their correspondence began when she assumed the throne of the Romanovs and it continued for fifteen years until his death in 1778, at which point she purchased his library. Their letters contain the friendly banter of intimate friends, though they never met. They discussed the “fire in the minds of men” sweeping through the private salons of the Parisian elite, critiqued each other’s numerous writings, and lavished exultations of praise on one another.

In his last letter to the Empress, the stooped man at the desk joked that the Russian autocrat held the most unfortunate name, a saint’s name. Nothing poetic can be done to a saint’s name. “Virgil and Homer,” he wrote “would be hard pressed to deal with those names,” and her name would never survive on a calendar.\footnote{Voltaire to Catherine II, November 1765, in Voltaire and Catherine II, Selected Correspondence, 38-39.} He suggested a number of alternatives, taken from the female goddesses of the Roman pantheon: Juno, queen of heaven, Venus, love incarnate, or Ceres, growth and fertility.\footnote{Voltaire to Catherine II, November 1765.} The Empress’s response now lay open on the desk before him, articulated in the arching and flowing French handwriting of a woman who ruled over an eighth of the globe, “I shall not change my name for that of the envious and jealous Juno; I have not enough presumption to take that of Minerva; I want nothing to do with the name of Venus: that fine lady has too much to account for. Nor am I Ceres: the harvest has been very poor in Russia this year.”\footnote{Catherine II to Voltaire, November 28/December 9, 1765, in Voltaire and Catherine II, Selected Correspondence, 39-40. Though Catherine disavowed affinity to Minerva, she commissioned various pieces of art depicting herself in the guise of the goddess, see Jean-Pierre-Antoine Tassaert, “Catherine the Great as Minerva, Protectress of the Arts,” 1774-79, marble, St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum.} The Empress was a woman outside the mold, and neither poet nor philosopher, calendar or myth, would define her.

Catherine’s rejection of standard feminine archetypes expanded far beyond her correspondence with Voltaire. The Empress questioned the traditional notion of dichotomous gender espoused by the French \textit{philosophes} and the West. Through her writings and patronage of art, most notably her memoirs, Catherine challenged the traditional, eighteenth-century structuring of men and women as separate and different, instead arguing that individuals could embody positive forms of both masculinity and femininity. Catherine claimed that dual nature for herself in the form of a non-binary, third gender, and ultimately used her understanding to promote greater intellectual freedom for women in the Russia she ruled.
Traditional Gender and Power Dynamics in Eighteenth-Century Russia

Catherine, like all Russian women, understood the normative role of gender in her adopted society. Fundamentally, the role of women in Russia developed alongside Byzantine, rather than Western European, norms. This mode of thinking emerges in the pages of the *Domostroi* (*The Book of Household Management*), a mid-sixteenth century Muscovite text on the proper running of a domestic household attributed to the hand of Sylvester, a monk close to Ivan the Terrible (r. 1547-84). According to its precepts, “good women” were to “keep house, manage their household, instruct their children and servants, obey their husbands, and ask their advice in everything, and submit to them.” Wives held a subordinate place to the authority of their husbands, yet still exercised power over children and servants within the home. By no means did the *Domostroi* represent the realities of Russian life, but it did create an ideal image of what elite family life “should be” and link the social family unit to the state. The prescriptions of the *Domostroi* translated into the state apparatus in the form of the terem. For Muscovite royal women up until Peter I’s reforms in the early eighteenth century, life consisted of a series of non-public, isolated spaces, including an upper room of the Kremlin palace labeled the terem, where they were veiled from the eyes of men and held no prospects for marriage, as the family of the tsar could not marry beneath their rank, or foreigners for religious reasons. Women in the terem

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37 Ivan IV, or Ivan the Terrible, ruled the Muscovite state, the precursor to Imperial Russia, from 1547-1584. He was the first ruler to claim the title “Tsar of all the Russias,” upon inheriting the united Russian dominions of his grandfather, Ivan the Great.
40 Peter I (Peter Alekseyvich) transformed Russian society in the late-seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, molding the semi-medieval Muscovite Tsardom of his father, Alexei Mikhailovich, into a Western-styled empire. His reforms overhauled the state bureaucracy, modernized the military, developed the Russian navy along English and Dutch models, transformed the style of dress to the European fashion, and moved the capital of Russia from Moscow to St. Petersburg, a city Peter founded on the banks of the Neva River on the Gulf of Finland. For more on
certainly wielded power over each other and could influence marriage, but their power was
different in substance and form than that wielded by men.41 As Barbara Alpine Engel termed it,
“a woman, too, gained power and status with age, but her power, while substantial, never
equaled a man’s.”42

This assessment is not to say that Muscovite and early Imperial women lacked any
agency, but that they had to find means of exercising authority within the confines of a
patriarchal order. Marriage was a severely deliberating institution for peasant and noblewomen
in early modern Russia. Both Russian Orthodox teachings and tradition dictated that “a woman’s
submission was a given, understood as an essential ingredient in marriage and a successful
family economy.”43 This submission took extreme forms, as N.V. Zanegina found in her study of
noblewomen in Tver province from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, “a woman
was completely subordinated to the arbitrariness of her husband who with impunity can insult
her deprive her of maintenance commensurate with her position, and to drive her out of the
house.” Yet even within this context, Russian women found means of working within the system
to get what they wanted, regardless of if their desires contradicted those of their husbands, such
as owning and managing their own estates, or their husbands’ lands. 44 Power for Russia’s
women across society varied along class lines, but universally existed as a subsidiary to
patriarchal authority.

Peter’s revolution, see Lindsey Hughes, Russia in the Age of Peter the Great (New Haven: Yale University Press,
1998).
41 Russel E. Martin, A Bride for the Tsar: Bride-Show and Marriage Politics in Early Modern Russia (DeKalb:
42 Barbara Alpern Engel, Between the Fields and the City : Women, Work, and Family in Russia, 1861-1914 (New
43 Engel, Between the Fields and the City, 23.
44 N.V. Zanegina, “Osobennosti otoshenenii muzha i zheny v dvorianskikh sem’iakh Rossii v kontse XVIII-pervoi
poloviny XIX v. (na materialakh Tverskoi gubernii),” in Rod i sem’ia v kontekste tverskoi istorii: sbornik nauchnikh
statei (Tver’: Lilia Print, 2005), 68-74.
Peter the Great’s (r. 1682-1725) redefinition of social and cultural norms altered the place of women in elite Russian society, yet maintained their subordinate role. Women remained objects of sexual desire for the evolving, passionate, masculine ideal. Peter I liberated Muscovite women from the terem, yet reinforced their definition by sexuality in forcing them “to wear clothes of foreign design, to participate in public ceremonies, and to dance, drink, and play cards at court parties.” Barbara Evans Clements argued that these “French dresses, cut low to reveal cleavage, were embarrassing to women used to clothes that covered them from head to toe.” Regardless of the aesthetic change, men still remained at the pinnacle of power, and women still existed as supportive agents to patriarchal authority. Nancy Shields Kollmann presented the case that Peter I’s making of a “new man,” founded on precepts of “new masculine assertiveness, industriousness, and secular self-definition,” intrinsically idealized the image of “man’s higher faculties.” Substantively, Russia’s elite women still contended with a power structure through which their main means of agency was rooted in sex. The terem cloistered royal women on account of their sexuality; the Imperial throne cloistered Empresses by forcing them to employ their sexuality as a means to exercise power.

Russia’s Empresses inherited this mixed history of Muscovite and Petrine norms in establishing their authority. They faced a dilemma quite different than women at other levels of Russian society, for they represented the top of the patriarchal order, rather than resistance to it. Laura Engelstein introduced the idea that the Imperial state operated under a system of

45 Nancy Shields Kollmann, “‘What’s Love Got to Do With It?’: Changing Models of Masculinity in Muscovite and Petrine Russia,” in Barbara Evans Clements, Rebecca Friedman, and Dan Healy, eds. Russian Masculinities in History and Culture (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 24-25.


48 Kollmann, “‘What’s Love Got to Do With It?’: Changing Models of Masculinity in Muscovite and Petrine Russia” 24-5.
“delegated absolutism,” with power devolving down from the autocrat in a series of dependent relationships that created, in the words of Susan Morrissey, “an ethos of submission and obedience.”

Along the same lines, Marc Raeff asserted that Muscovite and early Imperial rule “emphasized the moral and social responsibility of a prince toward his people, equating it with the responsibilities of a father for the good conduct, moral life, and religious orthodoxy of his children.”

Russia’s Empresses therefore met the challenge of being the “father” of an extended family unit in an authoritarian society in which women always bore a subordinate role to the male patriarch.

The various Empresses navigated this role differently. Following Peter I’s death, Alexander Menshikov, the tsar’s closest friend and confidant, convinced the regiments of Imperial guards to proclaim Peter’s widow, Catherine, the new sovereign. Catherine, an illiterate, Livonian laundress, became Catherine I, Empress of Russia. Evgenii Anisimov argued that Catherine I (r. 1725-27) maintained power by styling herself as a continuation of her late husband. She surrounded herself with his loyal retainers, allowed Menshikov and others from Peter’s inner circle to hold the reins of government, and hosted late-night revels in which she outdrank many male courtiers, all harkening back to the Great Reformer. After Catherine I’s death and following a brief repose under the boy-tsar, Peter II (r. 1727-30), a woman once again ruled Russia with the ascension of Anna Ivanovna (r. 1730-40), daughter of Ivan V and niece of Peter I. Though descended from tsars and holding the precedent of Catherine I, Anna seemingly


relied heavily on a man as her instrument of government. Her liaison and relationship with Ernest Johann Biron gave her reign the negative epithet “Bironovschina,” “Age of Biron.”

Isabel de Madariaga, in her biography of Catherine II, insinuated that both Catherine I and Anna certainly had no interest in their favorites becoming tsars, but that they nonetheless used their sexuality as a means of ensuring loyalty from competent administrators and to answer Russia’s desire “to be ruled by a man.” Ivan VI (r. 1740-41), the baby-tsar, succeeded Anna after her death, but he was quickly ousted in a coup d’état spearheaded by Elizabeth Petrovna (r. 1741-62), the daughter of Peter I. In his monograph Scenarios of Power, Richard Wortman ascribes Elizabeth’s blending of religious and classical symbolism in massive demonstrations of court ceremonies as her main method of creating the illusion of power, undermining patriarchy through spectacle. Throughout the eighteenth century, women occupied the Imperial throne, but had to invent ways to establish and maintain their authority in a patriarchal state.

As a student of Russian history, Catherine II understood that power in the Imperial Russian state was intrinsically linked to gender. Like the Empresses before her, Catherine’s power base consisted primarily of men. On her arrival in Russia, she was a Grand Duchess by virtue of being the wife of a Grand Duke, and as her relationship with Peter (her husband) disintegrated, her only claim to power hinged on her place as mother of the heir, Paul Petrovich. Catherine acknowledged the tenuous nature of her role in a letter to Sir Charles Hanbury-Williams, ambassador to the Russian court from Great Britain, speculating that her first

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54 Isabel de Madariaga, Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981), 575-81.
56 A brief note on names: Russians use a system of “отчество,” or patronyms, where a person’s name shares an omnipotent link to their father. Paul Petrovich or Elizabeth Petrovna both denote a child of Peter, with endings dependent on the gender of the child. This system is inherently misogynist, with the father’s, not the mother’s, name, staying with the child.
move after the death of Elizabeth would be to position herself in Paul’s room, physically taking
control of the body of the heir.57 Even after seizing the throne, Catherine justified her revolt by
claiming a pseudo-regency for Paul and remained dependent on the Orlov brothers and their
allies in the guards for the security of her crown. Understanding the societal limitations imposed
on her by her gender, Catherine, through her memoirs, sought to redefine these notions, as
applied to herself and the women around her.

Catherine’s Memoirs: An Exploration of Non-Conformity

As Cruse and Hoogenboom noted in their introduction to her memoirs, Catherine was
Machiavellian in her approach to power. The Empress understood the power of writing history.58
She held no qualms about exercising direct control over the narrative painted of her life, for “the
passion of history [or storytelling] carried away her pen.”59 Catherine’s early awareness of her
own ambitions, and belief in “the invisible hand which … led me along a very rough road”
towards them, lend credence to the idea held by many historians that Catherine’s writings are
merely self-serving.60 However, Catherine viewed writing as a form of teaching. In the high-
Enlightenment style of the French salon, Catherine wrote for the sake of conversation, using a
communicative style that held deep roots in the contemporary apparatus of epistolary.61

Essentially, Catherine was well aware of the ideas of questioning and discussion at the core of

57Catherine II, letter to Sir Hanbury-Williams, August 18, 1756, in Correspondence of Catherine the Great When
Grandduchess, with Sir Charles Hanbury-Williams, and Letters from Count Poniatowski, ed. and trans. by the Earl
58Cruse and Hoogenboom, preface to The Memoirs of Catherine the Great, xiii-xviii.
59From the French, “j’en con- viens, mais la rage de l’histoire a emporté ma plume,” Catherine II, letter to Friedrich
Melchior, Baron von Grimm, January 12, 1794, in Lettres de Catherine II à Grimm, ed. by Imperial Russian
Historical Society (St. Petersburg: A.A. Polostov, 1876).
60Catherine II, letter to Sir Hanbury-Williams, August 18, 1756, Correspondence of Catherine the Great with Sir
Charles Hanbury-Williams, 90.
61For more on the cultural phenomenon of epistolary in the eighteenth century, see Dena Goodman, Becoming
a Woman in the Age of Letters (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009).
the Enlightenment and used these precepts as a tool to tell her stories, through letters, plays, and her memoirs. From her 1767 *Nakaz (Instructions)* to the legislative assembly to her correspondence with Diderot and Voltaire, Catherine intended her writings to be read aloud and discussed. She envisioned her writings akin to modern spoken-word poetry, a conversation starter. As she explained to the Baron von Grimm, “I never write to you, I chat with you.”

Through the mechanism of writing, Catherine simultaneously instructed and brought into conversation both her own people and the Western world at large.

Catherine’s third set of memoirs provides a blueprint for her ideas on non-binary gender in the person of the sovereign. Constructions of femininity emerge immediately in her memoirs. Catherine prefaced Part One with a discussion of fortune, claiming that “in people it is also more specifically the result of qualities, of character, and of personal conduct” and writing out a Socratic syllogism: “conduct and character will be the major premise. Conduct the minor. Fortune or misfortune, the conclusion. Here are two striking examples. Catherine II. Peter III.”

While one may dismiss this preface as a casual jab at Peter III, the mechanism of the jab invites further investigation. In defining fortune and misfortune, Catherine explored its effects on “people,” not specifically men or women, and directly placed herself on a comparative footing with Peter III, ignoring any type of gendered hierarchy. She also ignored Russian perceptions of loyalty to spouses, as she explicitly undermines and mocks her one-time husband. While the idea of the obedient wife in the *Domostoi* faded in the post-Petrine era, the sentiments persisted, as Russian men still considered themselves “the master of the house” and considered it

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62 From the French, “je vous ai dit mille fois que je ne vous écris point, je jase avec vous,” taken from Catherine II, letter to Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, August 24, 1778, *Lettres de Catherine II à Grimm*, 100.


64 “The Domostoi,” University of Durham. Catherine certainly undermines the Muscovite view of spousal relations, still dominant in provincial Russia, particularly the charge that “in all affairs of everyday life, the wife is to take counsel with her husband, and to ask him, if she needs anything.”
emasculating and “shameful for a husband to let himself be dominated by his wife like a ninny.”

By playing with concepts of gender inequality, Catherine subverted them. She cleverly camouflaged her subtle contextualization by masking it in language of meritocracy. Her assessment of personal “qualities, of character, and of personal conduct” harkened back to the language of Peter the Great’s reforms, where ability, not birth, exercised the greatest influence on one’s ability to climb the social ladder. Catherine’s use of gender in her memoir began with an undermining of inherent separation, which she expands on through an exploration of the concept of eighteenth-century femininity.

Over the course of her memoir, Catherine depicted two types of femininity, conventional and unconventional. Catherine’s conventional woman did what is expected of her: she married, she bore children, she “endure[d] her suffering patiently,” she did not “meddle in [men’s] affairs,” or “dare breathe in front of” her husband. The unconventional woman defied these stereotypes; she was bold, well-read, familiar with the classics, stylish (“at a court where one changed outfits three times a day”), pragmatic and showed “no preference for any side,” while maintaining a “serene air” and displaying “attentiveness, and politeness for everyone.” Most importantly, the unconventional woman wielded power. To typify these two categories, Catherine assigns two women to embody the characteristics she describes. Like a modern

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66 In Peter’s attempts to westernize the Muscovite state, he overturned the traditional system of aristocratic privilege in favor of a meritocracy. He instituted a “Table of Ranks” for government service, through which talented commoners could achieve noble status. For some of Peter’s compatriots, notably Alexander Menshikov, this system awarded power almost equal to that of the tsar himself. For more information, see Lindsey Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
psychologist, Catherine elected to use two siblings as her case study, Anna Petrovna and Elizabeth Petrovna, the two daughters of Peter I, by his second wife, the future Catherine I.

Anna Petrovna, from her initial inception in the Catherine’s third set of memoirs, takes on the persona of a typical woman in the eighteenth-century world. Catherine begins Part One of her memoir with the sentence, “the mother of Peter III, daughter of Peter I, died of consumption about two months after bringing him into the world in the little town of Kiel in Holstein, from the despair of being consigned to live there and from being so unhappily married.” Anna, born in 1708, undertook a political marriage to Karl Friedrich, Duke of Holstein-Gottorp for her father (Karl was heir to the throne of Sweden, Peter I’s enemy in the Great Northern War, 1700-1721, so the 1725 match marked a reconciliation attempt), and bore a child, in the style of Catherine’s conventional woman. Anna “endured her suffering patiently,” consummating her marriage to “a weak, ugly, short, sickly, and poor prince” because that is the norm, though, ultimately, she died of despair. Through Anna Petrovna, Catherine depicted the trajectory of women who followed the precepts of society, unhappiness and despair. Catherine’s conventional woman, therefore, represents a toxic femininity, one that society imposes and that leads only to death, be it literal or philosophical. It follows that the path to happiness for a woman in Catherine’s worldview is to break that mold.

In stark contrast to her sister, Catherine’s depiction of Elizabeth defied all norms of femininity. Catherine did not concentrate her portrait of Elizabeth in a single passage or vignette; rather, she gathered personality traits from across the arc of the narrative. Unlike Anna, Elizabeth

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70 Catherine II, The Memoirs, 3.
never married (her intended fiancé, Catherine’s maternal uncle, died of smallpox in 1727) nor bore children, refusing to replicate that societal norm. Elizabeth also refused to be complacent—she orchestrated her own revolution and installed herself as Empress. Most importantly to Catherine, Elizabeth was powerful. The Elizabeth that emerges from the memoir is truly the daughter of Peter the Great; like her tsar-giant of a father, she instilled fear and awe in her court. Catherine described her as “very tall and [a] a somewhat powerful build” with “a particular grace in all that she did,” so beautiful that “one would have liked to gaze only at her, and one turned away only with regret because no object could replace her.” Yet, the Empress possessed a darker side, as Catherine writes that she often “got so angry that she no longer controlled her fury … showing as much disdain as anger.” During these episodes, the Empress became “extremely red in the face … her eyes flashing,” though even her rage held marked “intelligence and perspicacity.” When compared to the conventional womanhood embodied by her sister, Catherine’s Elizabeth broke all molds to reign over the Russian empire—a quality clearly admired by Catherine.

The depiction of Elizabeth in Catherine’s memoirs drew upon a pre-existing cultural norm of gender blurring in Elizabethan Russia. Catherine describes the physical blurring of genders in her memoirs by describing Elizabeth’s penchant for cross-dressing masquerade balls:

In 1744, in Moscow, the Empress had enjoyed making all the men appear at the court masquerades in women’s clothing, all the women in men’s clothing, without masks on their faces. It was a day of perfect metamorphosis at court. The men wore large hoop skirts with women’s coats and were coiffed like the ladies were every day at court, and the women were in men’s outfits like those worn on court days. The men did not like much these days of metamorphosis.

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76 Catherine II, *The Memoirs*, 93; For more information on Elizabeth’s balls, see Antonina W. Bouis, *Russian Splendor: Sumptuous Fashions of the Russian Court* (New York: Skira Rizzoli Publications, 2016). The masquerade balls fit into Mikhail Bakhtin’s assessments of the “Carnivalesque,” a concept he explores in his two treatises
At these court functions, gender lines blurred in notable ways. Not only were roles clearly not rigid, but the true gender bending disseminated from the top. Elizabeth decreed that gender lines be crossed at these events, so they were; however, it did not end with a simple order and ball. Catherine made note that, at these events, “no women looked truly and perfectly good in men’s clothing except the Empress herself … [who] had a particular grace in all she did whether dressed as man or woman.”

In this construction, an interesting idea emerges. The Empress Elizabeth embodied a dual nature of femininity and masculinity; she could pass, and look beautiful, as both. Within the overarching context of the memoirs, where Catherine already identified Elizabeth as an unconventional feminine figure and the all-powerful ruler of Russia, this pronouncement further associated a certain kind of gender with the sovereign, a blending of feminine and masculine identity.

Catherine’s assessment of a non-binary gender in the form of the sovereign drew its roots from her acute understanding of statecraft and government during the Enlightenment, specifically the gender-neutrality of the state. Like Maria Theresa and Joseph II of Austria and Frederick the Great of Prussia, Catherine was an avid supporter of the philosophy of enlightened despotism. A product of the Enlightenment’s influence upon absolutism, enlightened despotism was an attempt to rule well and apply the concepts of rationality and social contract theory to the

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*Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics* and *Rebelais and His World*. The carnivalesque is something that subverts the dominant ideology of a particular culture for a limited time, using mediums of humor and chaos. For medieval Western European peasants, it was a subversion of feudalism; for Russian aristocrats, it was a subversion of regimented spaces for men and women. For more, see Mikhail Bakhtin and Caryl Emerson, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) and Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rebelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

art of governing. At its heart, however, remained the assumption of absolutist government, rule invested in the sovereign, the embodiment of the state, a national polity centered in one person. Louis XIV’s maxim, “L’état, c’est moi,” personified the core of the political theory. The monarch, though serving the will of the people, still remained the representation of the state apparatus. Through her *Nakaz*, or *Instructions*, to the legislative assembly, Catherine extolled her firm belief in this political system, declaring that, in Russia, “the Sovereign is absolute; for there is no other authority but that which centers in his single Person that can act with a Vigour proportionate to the Extent of such a vast Dominion. The Extent of the Dominion requires an absolute Power to be vested in that Person who rules over it.” Catherine’s use of the gender-neutral “мы,” or the English “royal we,” in her publications further evidences her belief that the sovereign was truly the body politic of the realm. Under enlightened despotism, the sovereign was neither male nor female, but “we,” the physical incarnation of the state.

Catherine’s memoirs show that the Empress Elizabeth did not fully conform to either gender: she was a successful monarch, and therefore, the embodiment of the state. Replicating Elizabeth’s example, Catherine claimed this phenomenon for herself. In fact, Catherine explicitly ended her memoirs with just that assessment. Catherine wrote that she had “a mind infinitely more male than female. But for all that, I was anything but mannish, and in me, others found, joined to the mind and character of a man, the charms of a very attractive woman … this writing

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81 Catherine II, *Grand Instruction*. See also Catherine’s 1785 Charter to the Nobility, which begins with the line “Мы Екатерина Великая” or “We, Catherine II.”
itself should prove what I say about my mind, my heart, and my character.” Catherine did not conform to a gender, by her own admission. She was neither entirely male nor entirely female; rather, she was a meshing of the two. In describing herself in this manner, based on her political philosophy, Catherine created a logical progression in her memoirs. The syllogism is quite clear. A sovereign is neither male nor female, but “we,” inherently gender non-conforming as the embodiment of the state; the Empress Elizabeth was a third gender, a composite mixture of masculinity and femininity, and a legitimate sovereign; Catherine also identified with this third gender, the mixture of the others. The logical conclusion to this progression is that Catherine, too, should have been a legitimate sovereign, linking the idea of non-binary gender to power.

Application outside the Memoirs: Art and Politics

Catherine translated her ideas outside her memoirs, as she simultaneously used fashion and art to promote her philosophy. As Isabel de Madariaga notes, Catherine “fully understood the importance of using all the arts in furtherance of her political ascendancy.” For example, Catherine commissioned portraits that depicted her in the guise of a man, often in field uniform and riding a horse, notably straddling the horse as a man would, not side-saddled, as noble women of the age rode. One such commissioned portrait hangs in both the Peterhof palace and the Hermitage museum in St. Petersburg:

82 Catherine II, The Memoirs, 199-200.
83 De Madariaga, Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great, 532.
“Catherine II on horseback,” produced in 1762 after Catherine’s coup d’état, blurs the lines of masculinity and femininity in her person.

In person, Catherine used her clothing as a medium to convey her philosophies. The State Hermitage maintains a collection of dresses Catherine commissioned for ceremonies involving different regiments of guards, in which she would meld the button counts, collars, and epaulets of traditional guards’ uniforms with women’s fashions of the day:

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84 Vigilius Ericksen, “Catherine II on horseback,” post-1762, oil on canvas, 358x388cm, St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum.
Both dresses demonstrate a mix of regimental regularity and high fashion; however, they also preclude ideas of female sexuality. Neither article of clothing features a low-cut neckline, a prominent feature of post-Petrine fashion that emphasized a woman’s sexual potential; rather, the military-styled high collars give off the aura of authority and masculine precision. The military schema further obscures the wide skirts on both pieces. While clearly gowns, these dresses lack the emphasis on a woman’s chest and hips, hallmarks of Western and post-Petrine style in Russia, setting them apart from the traditional reading of a woman conveyed through her clothing. Through art and fashion, Catherine applied her ideas of a non-binary gender that included elements of masculinity and femininity—visual art became a means of propaganda for the Empress’s philosophy.

Catherine did not limit her ideas to salons or her art collections; rather, she advocated for their application in Russia. Practically, the Empress’s ideas of non-conformity to stereotypes translated into increased opportunities for women. Catherine personally appointed Yekaterina

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Romanovna Vorontsova, the Princess Dashkova, to head the Petersburg Academy of Arts and Sciences and eventually to be first president of the Russian Academy in 1782-83, where the princess oversaw the issuance of a Russian Language dictionary. Princess Dashkova became the first woman to hold a ministerial appointment in the Imperial bureaucracy, demonstrating Catherine’s enforced equality of the genders: a woman could hold the same position as a man in Catherinian Russia, if she demonstrated her tenacity and intelligence.86

The Empress was also known to intercede in cases of extreme marital strife to protect women, though nominally the Imperial government ceded most of its authority over family law to the Russian Orthodox Church in the years following Peter the Great’s abolition of the patriarchate.87 One notorious case involved Duke Friedrich William Karl I of Württemberg and his wife, who appeared at the Imperial court in the mid-1780s while the duke was in Russian service. In December of 1786, the duchess threw herself at Catherine’s feet and begged for Imperial intervention, as the duke often beat her. Catherine took the duchess under her personal protection, offering her first rooms in the Winter Palace then an estate and pension, while stripping her husband of his rank and giving him three days to withdraw from Russia entirely, remarking that his actions warranted corporal punishment.88

87 Engel, “Women, the Family, and Public Life,” 309-10. Peter the Great abolished the Patriarchate of Moscow and all Rus (in Russian, Патриарх Московский и всея Руси) in 1700 by refusing to name a successor after the death of the Patriarch Adrian. He established the Holy Synod to govern the church in 1721, vesting ecclesiastical authority in a government body headed by a lay member. See James Cracraft, The Church Reform of Peter the Great (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1971).
Catherine occasionally used her power to the benefit of women in divorce proceedings, though jurisdiction over family law nominally rested with the Russian Orthodox Church. In the case of Count Alexander Stroganov and his wife, Countess Anna Stroganova, Catherine used her authority to benefit Anna Stroganova by refusing to intervene when Stroganov asked for her help in obtaining a divorce. The Stroganovs had a rocky marriage, fraught with infidelity, abuse, and constant bickering, leading the British ambassador George Macartney to attest that divorce remained “the only thing in which, it is said, they ever agreed in.”

Frustrated by official channels, Stroganov directly petitioned Catherine in November 1764 on the grounds that his union with Anna Stroganova was invalid because it was a forced union, which directly contradicted Peter I’s edict barring parents from forcing their children into marriage. Anna Stroganova, despite clearly wanting a divorce, disputed the charge of forced marriage, instead claiming she entered into the union of her own accord. On December 2, Catherine refused Stroganov’s petition, claiming “a divorce does not depend on me, but is specifically church business, in which I cannot and will not intervene,” but adding that she also refused because Anna Stroganova was not present nor petitioning for a divorce. She told the couple that they may live apart if they wished, granting Anna Stroganova the right to use her maiden name. Catherine’s actions in this case highlight the importance she placed on a woman’s voice. Anna Stroganova was not part of the petition, so Catherine felt she could not intervene without hearing what the wife had to say.

90 Arkhiv Kniaizia Vorontsova, v. 34. Bumagi raznykh soderzhanii (Moscow: Universitetskaiia tipografiia, 1888), 341. Alexander Stroganov was a friend of Catherine’s—she granted him the right to live in her former apartments in the Winter Palace. Despite their relationship, she still decided against his petition.
92 Arkhiv Kniaizia Vorontsova, v. 34. Bumagi raznykh soderzhanii, 350.
While Catherine used her authority to raise the status of women in specific circumstances, she furthered the cause of her ideas on gender by infusing them into the Russian education system. Catherine chartered the Imperial Society for the Education of Young Noblewomen (Vospitatel'noe Obshchestvo Blagorodnykh Devits) in 1764, opening a boarding school on the banks of the Neva in Petersburg, commonly referred to as the Smolnii Institute.93 The idea that became an all-female boarding school originated with Ivan Betskoy, who approached the new Empress with a plan to start a series of boarding schools across Russia for “the heart of all the youth” within her “empire of reason,” regardless of gender, in 1763.94 The female branch of this school, the Smolnii Institute, though founded for “the creation of the ideal man and perfect citizen,” boasted a curriculum that incorporated subjects belonging traditionally to the spheres of both female and male educations.95 Students received instruction in traditionally “female” subjects, such as religion (specifically Russian Orthodox), sewing, and the equivalent of modern home economics, yet also subjects definitively in the public, masculine sphere, including literacy, languages (German, English, and the classics), physics, chemistry, geography, mathematics, and history.96

Catherine personally prescribed the curriculum for this early school, basing it on her own self-education, drawing from her reading lists as outlined in her memoir, including Plutarch,
Cicero, Voltaire, and Montesquieu. Though Paul I, Catherine’s son and successor, and his wife, Maria Fyodorovna, altered the curriculum of the Smolnii Institute to only include domestic, feminine skills, the original inception of the school, as a mixing of both masculine and feminine education for women coincided with Catherine’s ideas of the interaction of masculinity and femininity. Through the Smolnii Institute, Catherine prepared a generation of noble women educated under a simultaneously male and female system, enabling them to assume the role of non-conformity Catherine established.

Conclusion

Catherine, as an avid reader and student of her adopted home, intimately understood the relations between men and women in Russian society. She inherited the gendered system of Russia’s expression of patriarchy, where women’s power invoked a complicated system of accommodation and resistance. Aware of the need for masculinity to support women on Russia’s throne, Catherine’s memoirs provided a philosophical blueprint that defied that notion, introducing a third gender. Catherine, like the Empress Elizabeth before her, mastered elements of both masculinity and femininity. Discarding the negatives of both, the Catherine that emerges from the pages of her memoirs is well-read, intelligent, resourceful, charming, gallant, powerful, and ambitious. Essentially, she is a woman, as she says, with the mind of a man, destined to rule. Catherine not only theorized, but also applied, using art and fashion to provide a reality for her ideas—her portraits and dresses became instruments of advocacy for her theories. Beyond simply dressing the part, Catherine incorporated her ideas of gender into her rule of Russia. By appointing the Princess Dashkova as head of the Russian Academy, intervening in extreme cases

97 Catherine II, The Memoirs, 20-2; De Madariaga, Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great, 488–502; For more information on Catherinian pedagogy, see J. L. Black, Citizens for the Fatherland: Education, Educators, and Pedagogical Ideals in Eighteenth-Century Russia (New York: 1979).
of spousal abuse, and establishing the *Smolnii Institute*, Catherine supplied practical applications of her theory of a non-binary gender created from the best the traditional two could offer.

The Enlightenment lay at the heart of Catherine’s assessment of gender. Her ideas on women’s potential as statesmen, universal education, and even the mode of life writing found their roots in the philosophical groundwork of the Age of Reason. Though her ideas stemmed from Enlightened thought, they certainly did not mirror its realization in the West. Similarity of origin did not breed a similarity of expression, and Catherine’s understanding of the Enlightenment manifested separately from and simultaneously in conversation with the West. Catherine, with her ideas of gender directly contrasting those espoused by the *philosophes* and Western institutions, created an alternate reading of Enlightened gender for Russia. This put Catherine, and by extension, Russia, in intellectual contrast to Western Europe, which in turn ostracized Catherine for taking its ideas farther than it was willing to go.
Chapter II: “Enlightened” Ideas of Womanhood and Catherine the Great

Introduction

While few have intimate knowledge of Catherine the Great’s reign in Russia, many have heard one enduring tale of the Empress, the “horse story.” The story goes that “Catherine the Great of Russia had an immense sexual appetite, which led to her death when a horse was lowered onto her too suddenly,” and “that in the depths of the Kremlin armory, in Moscow, sit the horseshoes of Catherine’s favorite steed … made of pure silver, forged in the shape of hearts.” While no one can be certain when and where the story originated, John T. Alexander, a Catherinian biographer, asserted that the tale circulated orally for a number of decades after Catherine’s death, most likely because it was considered too crude to write down.

The story came out of a culture of sensual prose, poems, and images of the Empress Catherine, which permeated the Russian underground, despite the efforts of tsarist censors, and also Western Europe. Foreign diplomats to the court in St. Petersburg recorded pornographic poems attributed to Ivan Barkov, which decried the Empress’s sexual desires. One such poem uses Catherine’s 1787 Crimean Tour as a canvas, detailing how the Empress, when asked “How many…a day/Do you desire a supply report about?” responds that “It is Lent, so it is a sin/ I am tired from the road/Three will be sufficient!” In the West, French historians of the

101 William H. Hopkins, “The Development of “Pornographic” Literature in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Russia,” Ph.D. diss. (Bloomington, IN, 1977), 188, 245-46. Catherine toured the newly conquered territory of the Crimean Peninsula in 1787, accompanied by Joseph II of Austria and her favorite, Prince Grigori Potemkin. The term “Potemkin Village” emerged from this progress, as Potemkin reportedly erected fake villages of adoring peasants to greet the Empress along her route.
revolutionary period wrote extensively on how Catherine employed doctors and *les eprouveuses*, “testers,” to protect herself from venereal disease.\(^{102}\) Further, both French and British satirical printers attacked Catherine’s “supposedly insatiable appetite for barnyard sex.”\(^{103}\) A culture of perversion surrounded the image of the Empress, so the emergence of the tale of her death as a zoophilic excursion is hardly surprising.

The “horse story,” in all its licentious inaccuracy, nevertheless points to an enduring legacy of the Empress: her sexuality. Under the influence of Enlightenment-inspired ideas of gender and sex, thinkers in Britain and France found Catherine’s ideas of sexuality and gender relations alien, so they reacted by conversely overemphasizing her libido. In fact, Catherine clearly split from Enlightenment philosophy on the role of women in society. Her very character complicated the philosophical dispute because Catherine’s influence reached far beyond the borders of Russia. Her military campaigns and partition of Poland brought her political borders closer to Western Europe, and her exchanges with Voltaire, Diderot, and other *philosophes* brought her intellectually into contact with the West.\(^{104}\) The fact that English noblemen willed her their libraries and portrait collections prove the extent of her reach.\(^{105}\) This proximity forced the West to contend with Catherine and, by extension, her ideas. In Great Britain and France, the interpretation of Enlightenment thought led to a relegation of women to a separate role from men, making men and women inherently unequal. Catherine represented an alternative understanding that empowered, rather than constrained, noble women. Since Western writers

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\(^{102}\) Morgan and Tucker, *Rumors*, 81-82.

\(^{103}\) Alexander, *Catherine the Great*, 332-33.

\(^{104}\) The Three Partitions of Poland (1772, 1793, 1795) granted large tracts of territory of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to Russia, Prussia, and the Austrian Empire, culminating in the final dissolution of the nation in 1795. Catherine was at the center of the diplomatic channels which culminated in these annexations. For more, see Jerzy Lukowski, *The Partitions of Poland: 1772, 1793, 1795*, (London; New York: Longman, 1999).

understood both gender relations and sexuality much differently than Catherine, they condemned what they viewed as her excesses and “unnatural” foray into the realm of masculinity.

Catherine’s sexuality bears some discussion. She was not the first Russian Empress to take a favorite, or the men the Empresses chose as their sexual partners without any premise of sharing power. Anna I had Biron and Elizabeth had Alexei Razumovsky. However, Catherine, over the course of her life, took many favorites among such sources as the Guards regiments and foreign diplomats, as both Grand Duchess and Empress. The most famous of these were Sergei Saltykov, Count Stanislaw Poniatowski, and Prince Grigorii Potemkin. Much like the other Empresses, Catherine’s favorites received stipends and access at court, but held very little tangible authority. The exception was Potemkin, whom Catherine loved dearly and with whom she had a three-decade long affair. Unlike the tenuous positions of other favorites, Potemkin and the Empress ruled together for nearly seventeen years. Catherine granted him vast sums of money, estates, offices, and made him a Prince of the Russian and Holy Roman Empire. As Simon Montefiore claims, “their love affair and political alliance was unequalled in history …

106 The Russian word for these men was “фаворит,” which most directly translates as “favorite.” The relationships between the favorites and the Empresses should not be misconstrued as purely platonic or entirely romantic. While the Empresses almost certainly loved their favorites, they had no intentions of granting them autocratic power. The favorites, Biron, Razumovsky, and Potemkin with Catherine II, held prominent ministerial positions while in favor, and courtiers used them to gain the ears of the Empresses, though true power still rested with the tsarinas; Alexei Razumovsky, the chief favorite of Elizabeth was a Ukrainian serf, who impressed the Empress with his bass vocal range. She purchased him from his master and kept him as a companion for the rest of her life. Evidence suggests she secretly married him while Empress, and she lobbied Charles VII to make Razumovsky a count of the Holy Roman Empire in 1742. His influence earned him the epithet “Emperor of the Night,” as he shared Elizabeth’s confidence.

107 Catherine II, The Memoirs, 133, 184-5. The lineage of Catherine’s children has often been a point of historical debate. Catherine seems to imply throughout her memoirs that Paul was not the biological offspring of Peter, but rather the son of Sergei Saltykov, one of Catherine’s lovers sanctioned by Elizabeth in her desire for an heir. Anna, too, may have been the progeny of Count Stanislaw Poniatowski, a Polish envoy to the Russian court and a man Catherine essentially made King of Poland after her ascension to the Imperial throne. Peter III, rumored to be impotent, likely suffered from phimosis and received a circumcision in the early 1750s. The similarities in appearance and temperament shared by Peter III and Paul I make it likely that Peter was truly Paul’s father, despite Catherine’s implied claims. For more on this debate, see John T. Alexander, Catherine the Great: Life and Legend (New York: Oxford UP, 2001).

because it was as remarkable for its achievements as its romance, as endearing for its humanity as for its power.”

Potemkin also represents a scholastic effort to “normalize” Catherine’s love life. Montefiore is one proponent of the argument that Catherine secretly married Potemkin. Catherine calls Potemkin “husband” in letters beginning in December 1774, and Montefiore sees substantial evidence in the wording of Catherine’s correspondence to support his claim of marriage. However, a more recent biographer of Catherine, Virginia Rounding, disavows any notion of a private nuptial. The debate on the supposed marriage reveals an interesting assessment of Catherine: some scholars want to believe that Catherine married, to normalize her sexual behavior. Regardless of their marital status, when Potemkin died in October, 1791, Catherine wrote an anguished letter to the Baron von Grimm, describing “the terrible, crushing blow struck me” by the death of a man who “combined a sublime understanding and an unusually expansive spirit with a superior heart.” While far from monogamous, Catherine was not the sexual deviant she appeared as in British and French depictions. Despite her long-term affair with Potemkin, contemporaneous, Western audiences remembered Catherine for her excesses, rather than her more stable relationship.

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109 Montefiore, Prince of Princes, 5. For a detailed analysis and anthology of the volume of letters exchanged between Catherine and Potemkin, see Douglas Smith, ed. Love and Conquest: Personal Correspondence of Catherine the Great and Prince Grigory Potemkin, (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 2004).

110 Montefiore, Prince of Princes, 135-8.

111 Virginia Rounding, Catherine the Great (London: Hutchinson, 2006), 282-5.

112 From the French, “un terrible coup de massue hier a frappé de nouveau ma tête,” and “à un coeur excellent il joignait un entendement rare et une étendue d'esprit peu ordinaire.” Catherine II, letter to Baron von Grimm, October 13, 1791, in Lettres de Catherine II à Grimm, ed. by Imperial Russian Historical Society (St. Petersburg: A.A. Polostov, 1876).
“Enlightened” Gender and the De-Liberation of Women

In Great Britain and France, ideas of carnal sex and socially-constructed notions of gender were intertwined. To be a woman meant to be an object of sex. As Barbara Taylor asserted, the Western Enlightenment simultaneously proliferated a culture of “liberty over despotism” and “truth over prejudice,” yet only for men. Taylor believed Rousseau, Voltaire, and their contemporaries personified an ideal that gave rise to a series of “anti-feminist dogmas,” which persisted through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.113 “Reason,” an idea at the heart of the Enlightenment, meant a constant search for logical order, which passion jeopardized. As women became more and more associated with carnality, they became more and more distant from the idea of pure reason. Because women were thought to be solely creatures of carnal desire, the philosophers of the Enlightenment promoted a separation between the roles of men and women in society, based on biological sex alone.

Conduct manuals in Great Britain, distributed over the course of the eighteenth century, demonstrate the assumed relationship between carnal sex and “being a woman.” The conduct manuals captured the popular, male discourse of the period that women were naturally inclined to licentiousness. Writing in 1682, Robert Gould decried the lust of Eve, who seduced Adam into sin, and warned Lucifer that women would raise a civil war in Hell equitable to the English Civil War, due to their obsession with sex.114 The Marquis of Halifax, offering advice to his daughter on how to be a proper woman in 1688, mirrored the sentiment by asserting, “men, who were to be the Lawgivers, had the larger share of Reason bestow’d upon them,” whereas women were

“better prepared for the *Compliance.*” Despite this difference, Halifax argued that true power lay in a woman’s sexual appeal, that women “have more strength in your *Looks,* than we have in our *Laws.*” Sermons and essays abounded condemning the societal woes of prostitution, but also arguing for the minimal detrimental effects it had on women, as their inclinations and physiology supported it. British Enlightenment thought asserted a fundamental difference in the roles of women and men, rooted in the belief of the innate connection between women and sexual desire.

The British Enlightenment’s response to this assumed relationship between women and carnal desire was the promotion of “a virtuous woman.” Though not quite the Victorian model, the idea of a “virtue” coincided with Enlightenment ideas of “Reason.” In the minds of Britons, a truly enlightened man sought virtue in all things, therefore, a woman should as well. Chastity lay at the heart of propriety, for, as Wetenhall Wilkes wrote in 1740, “chastity heightens all virtues,” while, “she, who forfeits her chastity, withers by degrees into scorn and contrition.”

Proper women were to be chaste until marriage, and to scorn whores, as they bred evil in society. The British Enlightened community viewed women outside this mold as detrimental to the public good and warranting disavowal. Catherine, with her famous series of love affairs and lack of a public marriage, obviously contrasted this “ideal.”

Like Britons, the French *philosophes* reinforced the notion that women were innately tied to sexuality. Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile* faced criticism from his contemporary, Mary Wollstonecraft, for promoting a view of women focusing on the “crude” and “old-fashioned”

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notions of female sexuality. Voltaire maintained that women were anatomically different than men, and therefore socially different. In his *Philosophical Dictionary*, he wrote “woman is in general less strong than man, smaller, and less capable of sustained labor.” Because “physics always govern morals,” he says, “women being weaker of body than [men] … they are necessarily entrusted with the lighter labors of the interior of the house, and, above all, with the care of children.” Voltaire’s cause for the physical difference was simple: the female genitalia. Voltaire saw the menstrual cycle as evidence for the physical weakness of women. Further, despite his relationship with Catherine, Voltaire believed that hunger for carnal sex limited women. The commonality between these two factors is female reproductive organs, integral in both the menstrual and sexual components of Voltaire’s disdain.

To Voltaire, the differences in the physical nature of men and women accounted for the discrepancies in their public interaction. “It is not astonishing,” he wrote, “that in every country man has rendered himself the master of woman, dominion being founded on strength.” Voltaire asserted that men have “a superiority both in body and mind,” though “very learned women are to be found in the same manner as female warriors, but they are seldom or ever inventors.” He alluded to women in power, such as Isabella of Castile, Elizabeth of England, Maria Theresa of Austria, and even the “legistratix in the north,” Catherine II, but clarified that they were “as much respected as the sovereign of Greece, of Asia Minor, of Syria, and of Egypt.” The allusions to Theodora of Byzantium, Semiramis of Assyria, Zenobia of Palmyra, and Cleopatra

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120 Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792; New York: Cambridge UP, 1995), 175-78. Mary Wollstonecraft’s daughter, Mary Godwin, would marry Percy Shelley and write *Frankenstein, or, A Modern Prometheus* before she turned twenty.
121 Voltaire, *A Philosophical Dictionary*, vol. 6 (London: C.N. Reynell, 1824), 388.
VII of Egypt all share a similar theme: they are all women noted for their abnormal sexuality. Because their sexual impulses so strongly governed them, these women never achieved the level of virtue and reason Voltaire saw at the heart of good rule. Their physical traits, and therefore their public traits, rooted in their genitalia and sexuality—making them inferior to men.

**Western Views of Catherine the Great**

Catherine the Great naturally existed outside the norms asserted by Enlightenment thought in Great Britain and France, so Western sources almost unanimously condemned the reign of Catherine as one of feminine excess, a “girl gone wild” story. Western critics mirrored the assertions of “good women,” outlined by the *philosophes* and conduct guides when assessing Catherine and her reign; they emphasized her sexual excesses and vanity. Interestingly, the critics most responsible for the proliferation of the legend of Catherine’s sexuality were the British Romantics. The first wave of Romantics, William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, came of age in the twilight years of Catherine’s reign and the Enlightenment, the second wave, the Shelleys, John Keats, and Lord Byron, were part of the following generation. However, despite their seeming distance from Enlightenment thought and Catherine herself, the Romantics were products of, and reactionaries to, Enlightenment “reason,” and Catherine was often the subject of their pens.

Though he belonged to the generation after the Enlightenment, George Gordon, Lord Byron, the prolific author and poster child of nationalist and republican revolutionaries the world over, engaged the pan-Western European debate on the legacy of Catherine the Great through his epic poem, *Don Juan*. Cantos VI-X of *Don Juan*, released in 1823, depict the title character’s participation in the Russo-Turkish War of 1787-92 and stint at Catherine’s court in St. Petersburg. Catherine in *Don Juan* is a primarily sexual actor, a trait taken to the extreme over
the course of the poem. Given the satirical and crude nature of the poem, the portrayal of
Catherine II in *Don Juan*, may seem anachronistic and hyperbolized; however, Byron’s
characterization reflects dominant British and French views of the Empress during her reign and
the decades following.

Byron’s Catherine is not merely overtly sexual, her sexuality becomes her only identifier. When introduced in Canto VI, the narrator describes Catherine as the “greatest of all sovereigns
and w—s” (“whores”), later calling her the “Queen of Queans,” linking Catherine, from
inception, to the idea of sex and prostitution.126 This assessment carries throughout the cantos,
where Don Juan, cutting the dashing figure in uniform, becomes one of the Empress’s favorites,
consigned “to the genial care” of “l’Eprouveuse,” a woman, the narrator attested, Catherine used
to try the men she intended to take as sexual partners.127 However, Byron’s characterization went
far beyond a mere affinity for sex. As Anya Taylor asserts in her article “Catherine the Great:
Coleridge, Byron, and Erotic Politics on the Eastern Front,” Byron used synecdoche to tie
Catherine and her political power directly to her genitalia—the narrator speaks specifically to
“it,” Catherine’s reproductive organs, for several stanzas, giving them the signifier “thou.”128 In
fact, the narrator invokes Catherine’s genitalia in a muse-esque fashion, pronouncing “Some call
thee ‘the worst cause of War,’ but I/ Maintain thou art the best: for after all,/From thee we come,
to thee we go, and why/ To get at thee not batter down a wall,/Or waste a World?”129 Taylor
argues that this invocation relegates Catherine to a thing, while her vulvae become “thou,” the

92-6. “Quean” is an English word with several layers of meaning. It can be an impudent or ill-behaved woman, a
prostitute, or slang for female genitalia.
127 Byron, *Don Juan*, 9:84.
128 Anya Taylor, “Catherine the Great: Coleridge, Byron, and Erotic Politics on the Eastern Front,” in *Romanticism
person. In promoting Catherine’s genitalia to the status of human and wrapping the Empress in the imagery of prostitution, Byron presented a version of the Empress defined by her perceived sexuality.

Byron’s views on Catherine derived from the writings of an earlier Romantic poet and contemporary of the Empress, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. A friend of William Wordsworth, Coleridge was renowned for his “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel,” and he directly attacked Catherine in his poem, “Ode on the Departing Year,” published in 1796. In this poem, written the year of Catherine’s death, Coleridge records hearing Ambition cry out for “the Northern Conqueress” and the “exterminating fiend.” The Epode of the poem deals primarily with the Russian massacre of Turkish civilians at Ismail during the Russo-Turkish War of 1787-92, a scene replicated in Byron’s Don Juan. Coleridge includes a footnote, clarifying that the Northern Conqueress is the late Russian Empress, and that he “never dared figure the Russian Sovereign to [his] imagination under the dear and venerable character of Woman—Woman that complex term for Mother, Sister, Wife!” Not only is Catherine not a true woman to Coleridge, he saw her primarily as an individual ruled by passion. She becomes, in the poem, the “insatiable Hag,” whom none should pity, due to the “desolating ambition of her public Life, or the libidinous excesses of her private Hours!” He ended his reference by saying any more comment on the Empress would make him “historiographer to the King of Hell.” Coleridge’s assessment of Catherine highlights two distinct elements of her personality, her sexuality and her military conquests, which Byron also made a point of portraying. Neither Coleridge nor Byron

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130 Taylor, “Catherine the Great,” 20.
131 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Ode on the Departing Year (Bristol, UK: N. Biggs, 1796), 7-8; Byron, Don Juan, 8:128-33.
132 Coleridge, Ode, 7.
133 Coleridge, Ode, 7-8.
wrote without influence: their works reflect the popular discourse on Catherine in England from the Enlightenment into the early nineteenth century.

The French take on Catherine’s sexuality combined an assessment of her sexuality with her ambition. Charles François Philibert Masson, a French émigré and private secretary to the future Tsar Alexander I, wrote in his memoirs that Catherine held “two passions, which never left her but with her last breath: the love of man, which degenerated into licentiousness, and the love of glory, which sunk into vanity.”

Though he asserts she was not quite a Messalina, Masson ultimately believed the Empress “often prostituted both her rank and sex.” Paul Henri Marron, a French minister, mirrored these sentiments in his 1792 funeral oration for John Paul Jones, calling Catherine the “Semiramis of the North,” who “had drawn him under her standard,” to breathe the “pestilential air of despotism.”

By focusing on Catherine’s sexuality and tying her to images of bawdy women from antiquity, the French consigned her to pre-conceived conceptions of what a woman should be, as espoused by the Enlightenment.

Mirroring poems and memoirs, the condemnation of Catherine’s sexuality permeated satirical cartoons of the era. One popular French piece, “L’enjambée Imperiale,” published in 1792, depicts the Empress, bare-breasted, straddling the distance between Russia and Constantinople, while the rulers of France, Prussia, Sweden, Austria, Poland, Great Britain, and

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135 Masson, Mémoires, 83. From the French, “mais elle prostitua souvent sa grandeur et son sexe.” Valeria Messalina was the third wife of the Roman Emperor Claudius, noted for her licentious behavior and vicious court intrigues. She instigated a reign of terror through her husband, in which many senators died as a result of her accusations. Claudius executed her in 48 CE on charges of infidelity and treason.

136 Paul Henri Marron, Funeral Elegy for John Paul Jones, quoted in John Paul Jones and Mass. Bibliophile Society, Letters of John Paul Jones: Printed from the Unpublished Originals in Mr. W.K. Bixby’s Collection (Boston, William K Bixby, Horace Porter, and F Sanborn, 1905), 69-70. Semiramis was an Assyrian queen, who ascended to the throne of her husband in 811 BCE. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature associated her with the biblical “whore of Babylon.”
Spain, and Pope Pius VI stare up her dress and make lewd comments:

This image, which clearly sexualizes Catherine, further subjects her through the comments made by Europe’s crowned heads, “oh, the miracle;” “we have never had a better stride;” “I never reproached myself in this regard;” and “this is not the most forbidding overture of peace.”

Here, the West paints Catherine as nothing more than a sexual pleasure for men, her military advances on the Ottomans in Constantinople is merely a means of giving men something titillating to see.

137 “L’enjambée Imperiale,” 1792, LC-USZC2-3547, PC 5 - 1792, no. 6 (B size), Washington, D.C. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.
138 “L’enjambée Imperiale,” 1792, LOC. From the French, “au miracle,” “nous avons fait une bien autre enjambée,” “pour moi, je n’ai rien à me reprocher à cet regard,” and “Ce n’est pas la dure ouverture de paix.”
The satirical prints also took into account Catherine’s power. Two British cartoons, “The Taming of the Shrew” and “The Christian Amazon with her Invincible Target,” depict two sides of Catherine the warrior:

These cartoons emphasize Catherine’s military campaigns, but still relegate her to a subordinate role. In “The Christian Amazon with her Invincible Target,” the satirist identifies Catherine with the Amazons of Greek mythology, a sect of warrior women inhabiting the Crimean peninsula (timely, due to Catherine’s involvement in the Russo-Turkish War of 1787-92 in and around Odessa), who raided the Greek mainland until they are eventually subdued by Theseus of Athens. The analogy is simple. Catherine is an Amazon who must be subdued by men. Further, even in warrior garb, Catherine remains the object of sex. The “invincible target” could refer to

140 James Gillray “The Taming of the Shrew: Katharine and Petruchio; The Modern Quixote, or what you will,” April 20, 1791, LC-USZ62-123029, PC 1 - 7845 (B size), Washington, D.C., Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.
the Sultan, yet the phallic imagery surrounding his bayonet and her shield mean the title is likely a double entendre for her genitalia. The second print, “The Taming of the Shrew,” portrays Catherine as Katharine from Shakespeare’s popular comedy. In it, William Pitt, depicted as Petruchio, subdues a rotund and voluptuous Catherine/Katharine held up by the Holy Roman Emperor and Old-Regime France, who cries out “I see my lances are but straws/My strength is weak, my weakness past compare/And am ashamed that women are so simple/To offer war when they should kneel for peace,” a play on the original Shakespeare lines.¹⁴¹ Even here, Catherine becomes an object of desire. The King of Prussia, seated on the horse behind William Pitt, comments that he would like to give Catherine a “good Prussian stroking.” The identification of Catherine with both the Amazons and the Shakespearean Katharine clearly delineate that Catherine at war was a woman out of her element, one that needed to be put back in place by the men of the West, while conversely continuing to identify her as a sexual creature.

Conclusion

In popular myth, satirical prints, and Romantic poetry, Catherine the Great represented a woman obsessed with sex. This assessment holds firm roots in the Enlightenment thought of both Great Britain and France, which defined women as fundamentally different than men based upon their perceived affinity for licentiousness. Philosophers in those countries believed Eve led Adam into sin, prostitutes led upstanding gentlemen into fornication, and therefore, women were inherently creatures of carnal desire. From this classification, a hierarchy of societally-constructed gender roles emerged, which perpetuated into the subsequent centuries. Because she stood in total contrast to the perceived ideal, Catherine became an “other” and completely

¹⁴¹ “The Taming of the Shrew,” 1791, LOC. From William Shakespeare, The Taming of the Shrew, Act V, Scene 2, lines 170-73, “I am ashamed that women are so simple/To offer war where they should kneel for peace;/Or seek for rule, supremacy and sway/When they are bound to serve, love, and obey.”
defined by her perceived “transgression.” While these traits may be desirable in a male ruler, the double standard of the Enlightenment made them a condemnation of a female one. Catherine, evidenced by her continued cultural production inside Russia, did not adhere to the standards of virtue advocated in Britain and France.

The philosophical differences between Catherine and the Western Enlightenment manifested practically in the person of John Paul Jones, the renowned American Revolutionary Admiral, who entered the Russian service. Working as an American envoy to the court of the King of Denmark, Jones caught the attention of the Russian Empress, who required naval talent amidst her preparations for a renewed war with the Ottoman Empire in the Black Sea. On Catherine’s orders, Baron de Krudener, the Russian ambassador, approached Jones in Copenhagen, offering him a command in the Russian Imperial Navy. The idea of Russian service appealed to Jones. Since the end of the American Revolution, he was a rebel without a cause and an admiral without a commission. He undertook a number of diplomatic missions on behalf of his adopted nation, culminating in his Danish appointment, yet he longed to return to active naval service.

Catherine, in express order to the Admiralty, named Jones a major general of the captains in the Black Sea Fleet on February 15, 1788. The appointment caused some consternation in the ex-American revolutionary. Writing to Thomas Jefferson, then the American ambassador to the court at Versailles, Jones asserted “I can never renounce the glorious title of a Citizen of the United States,” yet he still felt compelled to better his monetary prospects by accepting the

142 Baron de Krudener, letter to John Paul Jones, March 22, 1788, in Peter Force Collection, Series 8D, Microfilm Reel 1672, Washington, DC, Library of Congress Manuscript Division.
144 Catherine II, “Order to Admiralty College,” in John L. Senior Moscow Papers, Vol. 2, #64, Annapolis, MD, United States Naval Academy Museum Archives.
Despite reservations, Jones nonetheless traveled to St. Petersburg to assume his new command. In a dramatic gesture, he compelled Swedish peasants to row him “4 to 500 miles” across a near frozen Gulf of Finland to Reva, then part of the Russian Empire’s Baltic possessions. Upon arrival in St. Petersburg, Jones received the honor of an audience with the Empress. Writing to the Marquis de Lafayette in June 1788, Jones recorded his encounter with Catherine, saying “the Empress received me with a distinction the most flattering that perhaps any stranger can boast of on entering the Russian service.” During his audience, Jones gave Catherine a copy of the newly ratified American Constitution, to which the Empress expressed her belief “that the American Revolution cannot fail to bring about others, and to influence every form of government.” Catherine immediately named Jones Rear Admiral of the Black Sea fleet and he spent a fortnight as the toast of the Imperial court. Following this sabbatical, Catherine placed Jones under the command of Potemkin and sent him south to the ongoing conflict in the Crimea.

Jones himself was a product of the Enlightenment. During and after the American Revolution, Jones was the guest of honor in the French salons, brimming with the ideas of Rousseau, and Voltaire. Further, Scottish by birth, Jones came of age in the Great Britain of conduct manuals and the ideal of the “virtuous woman.” Jones, in coming to Russia, brought a legacy of Western thought and prejudices against women to the court of Catherine the Great. His dealings with the Empress clearly demonstrated his attitudes toward women. In a letter to the Baron de Krudener while in Copenhagen, Jones wrote of Catherine as though she was an

147 Jones to Lafayette, June 15, 1788.
148 Jones to Lafayette, June 15, 1788.
intimate lover, though the two had yet to meet. Jones wrote of the “much too favorable feelings that my zeal...inspired in her Imperial Majesty,” which “fill me with an insatiable desire to merit the precious opinion” of the Empress.149 The trend continued in a letter Jones wrote directly to Catherine on June 14, 1788. In it, he declares, “Nothing is more precious to my sensitive and grateful heart than...the letter you did me the particular favor to write me” and that “I shall never swerve from such important lessons.”150 He ended the letter by describing how “deeply imbued with your kindness” he was and that “admiring your noble character and gentle soul, I pride myself on being devoted to you.”151 The language Jones used, laden with flowery innuendos and suggestions, sounds more suitable for a lover than for the Russian Empress.

The implications of Jones’s language proves that he viewed Catherine as a woman first and an Empress second. Even in addressing a sovereign ruler, Jones chose to speak to her as he would any woman. His attitude toward women took no consideration of their stature—Catherine and women in general, were objects of desire to Jones. His attitudes reflected the broader views of Great Britain and France about women during the Enlightenment, an outlook that would bring him into direct conflict with the most powerful female autocrat of his age.

149 Jones to Baron de Krudener, March 23, 1788.
150 John Paul Jones, letter to Catherine II, June 14, 1788, in The United States and Russia: The Beginning of Relations (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of State, 1980). From the French, “Rien n’est plus précieux de mon cœur sensible et reconnaissant, que le conseil dont votre Majesté m’a honoré et la lettre dont vous m’avez faite la Grace particule lieu de m’écrire. Je ne m’écarterai jamais des leçons si importantes.”
151 Jones to Catherine II, June 14, 1788. From the French, “Pénétré profondément de vos bontés pour moi et admirant votre grand caractère et votre belle Ame, je me fais gloire de vous être dévoué.”
Chapter III: Katerina Stepanova’s Story and her Role in the
Enlightenment’s “Woman Question”

Introduction

On March 31, 1789, ten-year-old Katerina Stepanova accused Rear Admiral John Paul Jones of raping her. The girl, supported by her mother Sophia Fyodorovna Golzvart, brought her case “against the forcible violation of her chastity” before the St. Petersburg Chief of Police, Major General-Cavalier Nikita Ivanovich Ryleyev, who ordered an inquiry by Captain Dmitriev, Ward Inspector of the First Admiralty District, where the alleged assault occurred. Dmitriev undertook an investigation of the matter, interviewing the girl and her mother, as well as several members of Jones’s household: Pavel Dmitrevski, Jones’s Russian interpreter; Johann Bahl, a secretary to the Rear Admiral; Mikhail Yakovlev, a first-seaman from the Vladimir, Jones’s ship during the Crimean campaign; and Ivan Vasilyev, Jones’s peasant coachman. Dmitriev also ordered Katerina Stepanova examined by both a regimental surgeon, Christopher Nilus, and a midwife, Christina Lutkerov, and accepted a written declaration from Jones himself. Dmitriev then reported his findings to Ryleyev on April 5, 1789. On the following day, Ryleyev, recognizing Jones’s status as Rear Admiral, decided he had no jurisdiction over the matter and relayed the case to the State Admiralty College, which dealt with allegations against high ranking naval officers. Through the Admiralty College, the case garnered the attention of

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153 Djaner and Gagin, “Report to State Admiralty College.”
154 Count Tchernyshov, letter to Count Ya. A. Briius, April 21, 1789, in John L. Senior Moscow Papers, Vol. 2, #62, Annapolis, MD, United States Naval Academy Museum Archives.
Petersburg society and, ultimately, Prince Grigori Potemkin and his sovereign, the Empress Catherine II.

The allegation of rape against Jones effectively ended his service in the Russian Imperial Navy and forced him into a European exile. Further, it grew into something of an international scandal, with the Empress Catherine, French newspapers, multi-national ambassadors in Paris, St. Petersburg, and Copenhagen, and the American Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, engaging in an extended dialogue about the guilt or innocence of the ex-admiral. The rape allegation became a microcosm of the extended debate of Catherine and her European contemporaries on the role of men and women in society. Based on Catherine’s personal philosophies, she predictably took the side of Katerina Stepanova, the accuser, while British, French, and American contemporaries predictably rallied behind the accused Jones. Through the example of Katerina Stepanova and Jones, the fault lines between the Western Enlightenment and Catherine’s Enlightenment-inspired, philosophical stance on issues of gender and rape became abundantly clear.

The Allegation of Rape

Katerina Stepanova’s version of events placed her in the vicinity of Pokhodyashina house in the First Admiralty District, the residence of John Paul Jones in St. Petersburg, on March 30, 1789. In her deposition to Dmitriev, Katerina Stepanova swore she was ten years old and that her mother sent her to sell butter near the house. Katerina Stepanova stated that a man-servant summoned her into the apartment on the second floor of the house to sell butter to his master, whom she reported wore “a white uniform, the front of which was embroidered in gold and

155 Katerina Stepanova Golzvart, “Statement of Katerina Stepanova,” in John L. Senior Moscow Papers, Vol. 2, #68, Annapolis, MD, United States Naval Academy Museum Archives. The affidavits of Katerina and Sophia Fyodorovna bear the signature of Johann Christian Kayzer, Sophia’s stepdaughter as neither the mother nor daughter were literate.
decorated with a crimson ribbon and gold star.”¹⁵⁶ The man locked the door behind her, paid her 25 kopeks for a 15 kopeks allotment of butter, and then grabbed her around the waist when she tried to leave and hit her on the chin with enough force to bust her lip, stuffing a white handkerchief in her mouth to stop her from screaming. Katerina Stepanova swore that he took her into a bedroom, “took a mattress off the couch … put it on the floor, threw her down on it and with violence had assaulted her.” The translation from the German by John Senior uses the milder term “assaulted,” though the report leaves little doubt the man forcibly had sex with her.¹⁵⁷ Katerina Stepanova reported that the man spoke Russian very badly, but told her that he would kill her should she tell her mother or anyone else about him, though he let her leave the flat.¹⁵⁸

Two medical examinations corroborated Katerina Stepanova’s account. Christopher Nilus, the regimental surgeon who inspected Katerina Stepanova at the order of Captain Dmitriev, testified that Katerina Stepanova’s “child-bearing parts were swollen and she received a left blow on her jaw, her lower lip having been cut by teeth,” indicating both the physical and sexual assaults that Katerina Stepanova alleged were true.¹⁵⁹ A second examination, conducted by Christina Lutkerov, a registered midwife in the Second Admiralty District where Katerina Stepanova and her mother lived, confirmed that Katerina Stepanova came to her “covered in blood” and “clearly assaulted,” with swollen genitalia and a cut lip. Lutkerov assured the Chief of Police, “having examined the girl, I found that she was truly raped.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Katerina Golzvart, “Statement.”
¹⁵⁷ Katerina Golzvart, “Statement.”
¹⁵⁸ Djaner and Gagin, “Report to State Admiralty College.”
¹⁵⁹ Christopher Nilus, “Report on Examination of Katerina Stepanova,” April 1, 1789, in John L. Senior Moscow Papers, Vol. 2, #70, Annapolis, MD, United States Naval Academy Museum Archives. The translation comes from John L. Senior, though the word “assaulted” seems a more modern term.
Sophia Fyodorovna supported her daughter’s claim of rape and extended the charge that Jones was the perpetrator. Sophia testified that her daughter returned home weeping and relayed to her mother everything that transpired and that they sought the advice of a Lutheran pastor in their district, who sent them to Christina Lutkerov. Leaving her daughter in Lutkerov’s care, Sophia returned to the Pokhodyashina house to ascertain the identity of her daughter’s attacker. She attested that a secretary to Jones informed her that his master lived in the house and he would show her the perpetrator if she returned the next day, as “were a thing like that to happen in the German land, the culprit would be hanged.” Based on this information, Sophia decided Jones was the man who assaulted her daughter and took her case to the Chief of Police.

The testimony of members of Jones’s household alleged further that Jones was indeed with Katerina Stepanova Golzvart on March 30, 1789. Pavel Dmitrevski, Jones’s Russian interpreter, affirmed that he saw Katerina Stepanova in Pokhodyashina house and relayed her to Jones’s chambers on March 30; as he explained her presence, “the admiral liked to select his own butter.” He added further that Katerina Stepanova was with Jones for around a half hour before she came back out the entrance he brought her through. He swore he saw no change in the girl, who returned for her gloves and jug. Ivan Vasilyev, a coachman, attested that Katerina Stepanova visited Jones before, at the London Inn and the Pokhodyashina house, to sell butter, and that he saw her arrive and leave the house over an hour later on the day of the alleged assault. A seaman from the Vladimir, Mikhailo Yakovlev, who was mending boots in the

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162 Sophia Golzvart, “Statement.” Bahl, the man Sophia referenced, was German.
163 Pavel Dmitrevski “Statement Pavel Dmitrievski, April 3, 1789,” in John L. Senior Moscow Papers, Vol. 2, #72, Annapolis, MD, United States Naval Academy Museum Archives.
164 Djaner and Gagin, “Report to State Admiralty College.”
165 Ivan Vasilyev “Statement of Ivan Vasilyev” in John L. Senior Moscow Papers, Vol. 2, #75, Annapolis, MD, United States Naval Academy Museum Archives.
servants’ quarters on March 30, saw the girl enter for her gloves and jug, noticing she was weeping and her face swollen, but also said he had seen her before at the Pokhodyashina house.\textsuperscript{166} Finally, Johann Gottfried Bahl, a lackey to Jones, testified to several details of Katerina Stepanova’s account: that Bahl asked her the price of butter, that he showed Jones three fingers, and that Jones was in his dress uniform when the girl went into his chamber.\textsuperscript{167} Bahl asserted he looked through the keyhole of Jones’s door and saw his master in a nightgown and later saw the girl leaving, her lips covered in blood and face swollen from weeping. He further told the police that he entered his master’s chamber to make the bed that night and discovered drops of blood stains on the floor.\textsuperscript{168}

Jones based his defense of his actions on the supposed moral degradation of his accusers. Evidence points to the fact that Jones engaged in sexual activity with the child Katerina Stepanova on March 30, 1789, yet Jones himself painted a much different account of the encounter. After receiving a folio of the affidavits signed by the Golzvart’s, the medical examiners, and his retinue, Jones responded early to the allegations against him in a letter to Nikita Ivanovich Ryleyev, the Chief of Police in St. Petersburg, on April 2, 1789. In this letter, Jones admitted that he did indeed have sex with Katerina Stepanova, though he calls her “a fallen girl who visited my home several times, and with whom I often frolicked, but for which I have always paid her cash.”\textsuperscript{169} He argued that he “did not despoil her of her virginity” and that she was much older than ten years of age, as the magistrate claimed.\textsuperscript{170} He offered his chivalrous

\begin{footnotes}
\item[168] Bahl, “Statement.”
\item[169] John Paul Jones, letter to Nikita Ivanovich Ryleyev, April 2, 1789, in John L. Senior Moscow Papers, Vol. 1, #57, Annapolis, MD, United States Naval Academy Museum Archives. From the French, “une fille perdue, qui est venue chez moi plusieurs fois, et avec laquelle j’ai badiné souvent en lui donnant toujours l’Argent.”
\item[170] Jones to Ryleyev, April 2 1789. From the French, “mais dont je n’ai point pris la virginité.”
\end{footnotes}
nature and sense of honor as safe-guards of his defense. He claimed to be incapable of doing harm “to this girl, or to any person of her sex.” He further claimed a long affair with the girl, in which “she submitted most willingly to do everything that a man could desire of her.”

At this point, Jones changed his story. Disavowing his admittance to Ryleyev about having sex with Katerina Stepanova, Jones crafted a new version of events that placed him as the victim of a set-up by the girl and her mother. The Comte de Ségur recorded this version in his memoirs of his tenure as ambassador to Russia. Ségur claimed he called upon Jones at his apartment and found the Rear Admiral attempting suicide. Having prevented the Rear Admiral from taking his life, Ségur received the following testimony: that Katerina Stepanova came to Jones’s chamber and “asked if he could give her some linen or lace to mend.” Jones claimed that Katerina Stepanova then “performed indecent gestures,” to which he “advised her not to enter upon so vile a career; gave her some money, and dismissed her.” Jones then told Ségur that Katerina Stepanova, upon leaving his chamber, “tore her clothes, screamed that Jones had raped her, and fell into the arms of her mother,” conveniently waiting outside his door. Through this version of events, Jones molded himself into the victim, rather than perpetrator of sexual violence.

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171 Jones to Ryleyev, April 2 1789. From the French, “je n’ai jamais capable de faire la moindre violence à cette fille, ni à aucune personne de son sexe,” and, “et chaque fois qu’elle est venue chez moi, elle l’est prêts de la meilleure grâce à faire tout ce qu’un homme pouvait désirer d’elle.”


173 Comte de Ségur, Mémoires, 429. From the French, “Je vous jure sur mon honneur, répondit-il, que je suis innocent et victime de la plus infâme calomnie. Voici le fait : il est arrivé chez moi le matin, il y a peu de jours, une jeune fille pour me demander si je pouvais lui donner quelque linge, quelques dentelles à raccommoder; elle me faisait d’assez vives et indécentes agaceries. Etonné de tant de hardiesse à son âge, j’en eus pitié, je lui conseillai de ne pas entrer dans une si vile carrière; je lui donnai quelque argent et je la congédiai. Mais elle s’obstina à rester. Impatienté de cette insistance, je la pris par la main et je la mis à la porte; mais, au moment où cette porte s’ouvrait, la petite scélératé déchire ses manches, son fichu, pousse de grands cris, se plaint que je l’ai outragée, et se jette dans les bras d’une vieille femme qui se dit sa mère, et qui sûrement n’était pas apostée là par hasard. La mère et la fille font retentir la maison de leurs plaintes, sortent et vont me dénoncer: vous savez tout.”
Jones saw the root of the accusation as the cupidity of Sophia Fyodorovna, Katerina Stepanova’s mother, who sought to exploit a powerful man for money.\textsuperscript{174} After sending the letter to Ryleyev, Jones gathered evidence for his defense to present to the Admiralty College. Stephan Holtzwarthen, the biological father of Katerina Stepanova who lived separately from the girl and her mother, presented himself in court to sign an affidavit saying his daughter was truly twelve years of age, not ten as she asserted. He further alleged that his wife, Sophia Fyodorovna, left him for a younger man, resided in a brothel, and was herself quite licentious.\textsuperscript{175} A Lutheran pastor also came to court to swear that Sophia rarely attended church services, proof of her fall from grace.\textsuperscript{176}

Despite Jones’s best efforts, the allegations did not disappear from the eye of Petersburg society or the palace, and in a final plea, Jones appealed to his former commander in the Crimea, Prince Grigori Potemkin, to intercede on his behalf with the Empress. In a letter dated April 13, 1789, Jones reminded the Prince of their mutual bond from the Crimean campaign and begged him to remember a previous promise of patronage.\textsuperscript{177} Jones decried what he saw as police intimidation of his household to acquire testimony and wrote that he was entirely ignorant of the Russian language and therefore could have said nothing to the girl, as she claimed. He again accused Sophia Fyodorovna of being a “miserable, adulterous, debauched woman” and a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[174] Jones to Ryleyev, April 2 1789.
\item[175] Stephan Holtzwarthen, “Declarations du nommé Stephan Holtzwarthen,” in John L. Senior Moscow Papers, Vol. 1, #59, Annapolis, MD, United States Naval Academy Museum Archives. From the French, “je certifie que ma femme Frédérique Sophie Holtzwarthen m’a abandonnée sans aucun motif, qu’elle a été se loger dans la Ville avec un jeune homme, et qu’elle m’a volé furtivement et contre ma volonté ma fille Catherine Charlotte que est actuellement chez elle,” and, “je certifie que ma fille Catherine est âgée de douze ans.”
\item[176] L. Lampe “Statement,” in John L. Senior Moscow Papers, Vol. 1, #60, Annapolis, MD, United States Naval Academy Museum Archives.
\item[177] John Paul Jones, letter to Prince Grigori Potemkin, April 13, 1789, in John L. Senior Moscow Papers, Vol. 1, #58, Annapolis, MD, United States Naval Academy Museum Archives.
\end{footnotes}
“strumpet … without religion and without manners.” He questioned Katerina Stepanova’s state after she visited him and alleged she not only frequently slept with him, but also with his servants. Jones admonished Potemkin by adding:

Will it be said that it is in Russia that a miserable, adulterous, debauched woman, who has abandoned her husband, who has kidnapped her daughter, who live in a house where other strumpets have established their shameful retreat, has succeeded by a bald accusation lacking proof, in attacking the honor and wounding the sensibilities of an officer who has distinguished, and who has merited the orders of France, of America, and of this Empire!

Finally, Jones admitted he enjoyed sex with women, but that “pleasures that have to be torn away from them by force cause me horror.” He swore this all on his “word as a soldier and a gentleman.”

**The Russian Reaction**

In Russia, the debate over the allegations against Jones centered primarily on the Rear Admiral and his conduct. Catherine, Potemkin, and St. Petersburg society based their conclusions on the facts of the case itself. Becoming a battleground for the Empress’s beliefs on gender and carnal sex, the Jones case provided an excellent example of Catherine’s philosophy in action. She took the side of Katerina Stepanova over her officer, the side of a destitute girl over a decorated man. Considering her writings and cultural production, Catherine’s reaction matched her philosophical stance. To Catherine, Jones’s past services and military

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178 John Paul Jones to Prince Grigori Potemkin, April 13, 1789. From the French, “femme de mauvaise vie… elle est sans religion comme sans mœurs,” and “qu’une misérable femme adultere débauchée.”

179 John Paul Jones to Prince Grigori Potemkin, April 13, 1789. From the French, “Sera-t-il dit que c’est en Russie qu’une misérable femme adulte débauchée, qui a abandonné son Mari, qui lui a enlevé sa Fille, qui vit dans une maison où autres Femmes perdues ont établi leur honteuse retraite, est parvenait sur une simple accusation dépourvue des preuves à attaquer l’honneur et à faire blesser sa sensibilité d’un Officier General qui s’est distingué et qui a mérité les Ordres de France, d’Amérique, et de cet Empire!”

180 John Paul Jones to Prince Grigori Potemkin, April 13, 1789. From the French, “j’aime les femmes je l’avoue et les plaisirs que l’on me qu’outre qu’autre qu’après, de ce rapé, mais des jouirons qu’il faut droit leur arracher me font horreurs” and “je vous donne ma Parole de Soldat et d’honnête homme.”
accomplishments held no bearing on the allegations against him. The rape itself was what mattered.

Catherine did not write specifically about the allegations against Jones, so much must be inferred from her actions and the accounts of those close to the throne. For instance, Jones had legal counsel after his case came before the Admiralty College, yet his lawyer suddenly dropped the case, supposedly on orders of the Empress, relayed through the Governor-General of St. Petersburg. While this remains speculation, Catherine’s known reaction was just as swift. She forbade Jones access to court and proceeded with plans to bring him to trial.

The Russian military code was quite clear on how to handle accusations of rape. Jones, as Rear Admiral, fell under the jurisdiction of Peter the Great’s Military Statutes, drafted for the Imperial Army in 1716 and adapted into Naval Statutes in 1720. The Statutes reflect a simultaneous effort to severely punish any offenders, but they also offer a plethora of hurdles to accusers. The Articles also strictly refer to women as victims, though Articles 165 and 166 of the code specifically address male-on-male, nonconsensual sex, reflecting the all-masculine sphere of the military. To determine guilt or innocence, a judge must weigh several factors, such as whether the woman called for help, the state of the victim’s and the accused’s clothing, the testimony of witnesses, if any, and the timeliness a victim came forward. Women had to submit to a medical examination, and even a one-day hesitation in reporting implied consensual sex.

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181 John Paul Jones to Prince Grigori Potemkin, April 13, 1789.
183 Art. 167, Voinskiye Artikuli pri tom zhe i kratika primechaniya 1714 g. in N. L. Rubinshayna, Voinniye Ustavi Petra Velikogo, (Moscow: 1946), 77-8.
184 Art. 165-166, Voinskiye Artikuli, 78.
185 Peter I, “Chapter of Martial Law 20 Article 167 Section,” in John L. Senior Moscow Papers, Vol. 2, #85, Annapolis, MD, United States Naval Academy Museum Archives.
Yet, despite their strictness, the Statutes laid great importance on the notion that “rape is rape, whether the victim be a fornicatress or an honest woman” and that a judge must take special care to pay attention to “the act itself and the circumstances,” regardless of the people involved.\textsuperscript{186} The punishment for officers found guilty of rape domestically or abroad was straightforward: decapitation or penal labor on the galleys for the rest of their lives.\textsuperscript{187}

An initial glance at the statutory codes may imply that Russian custom, not Catherine’s direct intervention, was the driving force behind the legal proceedings against Jones. However, the articles clearly dictated that any delay in reporting a rape, even for one day, implied consensual intercourse.\textsuperscript{188} One of Jones’s main defenses of his actions was just this scenario—Katerina Stepanova and her mother reported to the chief of police slightly over a day after the assault.\textsuperscript{189} According to the codes, and in Jones’s argument, this delay equaled consent. However, the Empress chose to override this condition of the military statutes and proceed with legal action against Jones.\textsuperscript{190} The fact that Catherine, known to favor legalistic autocracy and to send items referred to her back to the Imperial Senate, if she felt could be settled under the existing law and without the verdict of the sovereign, overruled the statutes in the Jones case implied that the facts of this particular charge mattered greatly to her.\textsuperscript{191}

Faced with the realities of the sentence against him, Jones actively sought to re-ingratiate himself to the Empress. His appeals to Potemkin fell on deaf ears, leaving Jones without Russian support against the judgment of the Russian sovereign.\textsuperscript{192} With Catherine’s intransigence on the issue proved by Potemkin’s silence, Jones turned toward his preexisting connections with the

\textsuperscript{186} Peter I, “Chapter of Martial Law 20 Article 167 Section.”
\textsuperscript{187} Peter I, “Chapter of Martial Law 20 Article 167 Section.”
\textsuperscript{188} Art. 167, \textit{Voinskie Artikuli}, 77-8.
\textsuperscript{189} John Paul Jones to Prince Grigori Potemkin, April 13, 1789.
\textsuperscript{190} Comte de Ségur, letter to Comte d’Ésternes, August 26, 1789.
\textsuperscript{191} Isabel de Madariaga, \textit{Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great} (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981), 581-7.
\textsuperscript{192} John Paul Jones to Prince Grigori Potemkin, April 13, 1789.
United States and France to influence the Empress. An international campaign by Jones’s allies at court, spearheaded by Louis XVI’s ambassador to Russia, the Comte de Ségur, altered Catherine’s judicial proceedings. The Empress granted Jones a chilling audience, in which the Rear Admiral kissed her hand. She granted him two years leave abroad to pursue “private business.” Jones was to keep his title and rank, yet Catherine effectively banished him from Russia during the height of the Turkish war. The Empress’s actions here proved her priorities. She dismissed a tried naval commander, especially sought out by her agents abroad, during wartime, showing that she merited the allegations against Jones higher than his potential maritime service.

Jones spent his exile engaging in a propaganda war across Europe and the new United States. He actively sought to defend his conduct during the Crimean campaign and his private conduct in St. Petersburg. With the aid of Ségur, Jones promoted a version of events in which the offense to his honor in Russia necessitated his departure for two years; yet, his actions showed a man desperate to return to the Russian service. Two attempts to join the Danish and Swedish navies failed when Catherine used her influence to block his appointments. While abroad, Jones again wrote to Potemkin, congratulating the field marshal on his recent victory over the Turks and begging the Prince’s intercession with the Empress to allow Jones to return to Russia. The appeal received no reply. Faced with silence from the Russian court, Jones sought out Catherine’s erstwhile correspondent, the Baron von Grimm, and persuaded him to forward letters from Jones directly to the Empress. In one of these letters, Jones admitted “I was afflicted and

193 Comte de Ségur, letter to Comte d’Esternes, August 26, 1789.
194 Comte de Ségur, letter to Comte d’Esternes, August 26, 1789.
even offended at having received a parole for two years in time of war … a parole which it has
never entered my head to wish for, and still less to ask.”  

He again entreated the Empress to remember his service and allow him to return to court.

Catherine refused to reply directly to Jones, but wrote to Grimm about him, picking apart Jones’s claims of his exceptional service. She added that his two-year sabbatical, which caused him such consternation, resulted from “a suit brought against him for rape, which did little to honor his excellence, his humanity, his justice, or his generosity,” and resulted in Russian seamen refusing to serve under him.198 Catherine’s address to Grimm proved the continuation of her belief that the rape allegation colored Jones’s entire Russian service—no battlefield glory, real or imagined, nor desire to serve Russia outweighed the fact that he raped a girl. The refusal of Russian sailors to serve with Jones suggests that other Russians shared Catherine’s opinions on rape and those guilty of it. Catherine succinctly summed up her lingering opinion of Jones in another letter to Grimm. Following Jones’s death in 1792, Catherine wrote “this Paul Jones was a horrible person, much dignified among despicable persons.”199

The International Reaction

The international community almost unanimously endorsed Jones’s version of events surrounding the allegations. In Great Britain, France, and the United States, Jones enjoyed the confidence of statesmen and diplomats. The emerging campaign in favor of Jones and against

197 John Paul Jones, letter to Catherine II, March 8, 1791.
198 Catherine II, letter to Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, May 14, 1791 in Lettres de Catherine II à Grimm, ed. by Imperial Russian Historical Society (St. Petersburg: A.A. Polostov, 1876). From the French, “Or ce congé de deux ans a été au S’ P.J. afin qu’il pût se retirer d’ici, entre nous soit dit, sans diffamation, car il y avait un procès contre lui d’intenté pour viol, que ne faisait pas de tout honneur à son excellence, ni à sa humanité, ni à sa justice, ni à sa générosité, et après ce petit trait il aurait été difficile de trouver parmi les marins quelqu’un qui eût voulu servir sous M. le contre-amiral.”
199 Catherine II, letter to Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, August 15, 1792, in Lettres de Catherine II à Grimm. From the French, “Ce Paul Jones était une bien mauvaise tête et très digne d’être fête par un ramas de têtes détestables.”
Catherine mobilized popular support behind the Rear Admiral across Western Europe. Notably, this campaign simultaneously highlighted Jones’s virtuous nature and Catherine’s licentious personality, molding the debate into one of the merits of Catherine’s rule and reaction to the allegations against Jones, rather than the purported rape itself.

French public opinion swung behind Jones early in the debate, focusing on his past heroics over his contemporary scandal. The Comte de Ségur proved an erstwhile ally of Jones and a significant force in the shaping of French opinion to ignore the accusations against the Rear Admiral. He promoted the theory of a court conspiracy with a vigor second only to Jones himself. In a letter to the Comte d’Ésternes, French minister to Prussia, dated August 26, 1789, Ségur expounded his belief that Jones angered the Prince Potemkin and others close to the Empress, leading to their feeding of false information to the Empress about the severity of the accusations against Jones.200

Ségur believed that carnal sex was at the root of the accusation, but that the fault lay in Catherine’s sexual partners, not the sex between Jones and Katerina Stepanova. Ségur argued two theories: either Jones offended men who shared the Empress’s bed, or Jones himself refused the advances of the Empress, earning her ire either way. Using connections in Paris and Versailles, Ségur arranged lodging for Jones in France and published articles in the Gazette de France and other newspapers lauding Jones’s decorated service in the Crimea and stressing he left Russia having received permission “to kiss the hand of Her Imperial Majesty.”201 In an accompanying letter to the Comte Montmorin, one of Louis XVI’s press officers, Ségur insisted his article must be printed to emphasize Jones’s merits over the accusations and to assert that the

200 Comte de Ségur, letter to Comte d’Ésternes, August 26, 1789.
Empress did not truly send Jones away in scandal. The printing succeeded when the article found its way into many foreign gazettes and Jones received letters of confidence from French diplomats abroad. Further, following Jones’s death in 1792, his funeral oration concentrated on his merits as an admiral and resistance to the despotism of the “Seramis of the North,” rather than the scandal in which he left Russian service. The manner in which the French fixed the blame on Catherine, rather than Jones, suggested that it was easier for them to blame a woman for forcible sex than a decorated veteran.

The British and American press and politicians joined the Jones camp against the Russian Empress. Thomas Jefferson, then serving as Secretary of State in the Washington administration, wrote to Jones that “no proof was necessary to satisfy us here of your good conduct everywhere,” and that Jones held not only the trust of Jefferson, but George Washington and the rest of his cabinet as well. An American agent in Paris, a Mr. L. Littlepage, echoed the sentiment in a letter to Jefferson in which he blamed the British for undertaking a campaign against Jones to “ruin him in the opinion of the Empress,” something he claimed they succeeded in by concocting allegations “too ridiculous.” The British, for their part, bearing little love for either Jones or the Russians, branded Jones’s dismissal from court as a prime example of Catherine leaving a lover, reducing the dismissal as “just sex,” rather than rape. One circulating print depicted Catherine replacing a bust of Jones with another lover in her “hall of fame,” a print

203 Baron de la Houze, letter to John Paul Jones, February 9, 1790, in Sherburne, Life and Character of Chevalier John Paul Jones, 321-22.
laden with phallic images and insinuations of bestiality surrounding the wide-hipped Empress, implying sexual undertones to the relationship between the Empress and her former admiral:

The British and American reactions to the Jones case proved their priorities. Their perceived opinions of the character of Catherine and Jones mattered far more than the details of the case itself.

**Conclusion**

Jones came to Russia with a preconceived understanding of the relations between men and women colored by a Western European world-view. One fundamental piece of Jones’s Russian experience and the accusations leveled against him by Katerina Stepanova was that his reputation, not the young girl’s rape, was the key issue. In Jones’s view, whether or not he engaged in sexual activity with Katerina Stepanova was secondary to what their interaction

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reflected on his personal character. His attacks on the morality of the young girl and her mother were the means through which he tried to defend his own moral standing in the eyes of the Russian and pan-European courts. He consistently appealed to Enlightened ideas of justice and fair trial in his complaints to Potemkin and his friends abroad, yet refused to offer the same courtesy to Katerina Stepanova. Jones blamed Russians for allowing preconceived views of his character to influence the worth of his testimony while he simultaneously used his perception of Katerina Stepanova and her mother’s characters as the basis for his own dismissal of their accusations. In Jones’s view, women with compromised morality held compromised reliability.

In a more nuanced way, Jones’s preconceptions became evident in his letters concerning the allegations—he appealed to men around Catherine to settle the issue. Of four letters sent to defend his innocence, Jones sent one to Ryleyev and two to Potemkin, before directly appealing to the Empress. This fact bears some further analysis. Jones’s first letter to Ryleyev makes sense as he was Chief of Police in St. Petersburg, yet his second and third went to Potemkin, not the Empress. Jones boasted to his friends abroad of his special relationship with the Empress, and she was in close proximity: both she and Jones were in St. Petersburg at the time of the accusations.208 If what Jones wrote of their relationship was true, the Empress would have been an erstwhile ally to have. Yet, Jones wrote to Potemkin over her, though the Prince was still on campaign against the Ottomans in the Crimean Peninsula. In both letters to Potemkin, Jones begged his former commanding officer to use his influence over the Empress to reingratiate Jones, implying that Catherine’s former lover, a man, held power over the mind of the sovereign,

a woman. Jones’s handling of his defense implied an ingrained belief in the dominant Western European views of the power dynamics between men and women.

The international community who supported Jones mirrored the sentiments expressed in Jones’s own defense. Their analysis of the rape focused on the admiral and Catherine, making very little mention of Katerina Stepanova, the rape victim. Even in his letters to his colleagues in Versailles, the Comte de Ségur only refers to the fact that “some girl” accused Jones of rape, proving how little she meant by refusing to name her. De Ségur’s proximity to court and Jones makes his ignorance of the name of Jones’s accuser doubtful. The French diplomat made a point of stressing Jones’s martial prowess and reputation as a gentleman, juxtaposed against the licentiousness of Catherine’s court as evidence for the admiral’s innocence. Jefferson and Littlepage, representing the American reaction to the accusation against Jones, lauded his personal character and provided the excuse of foreign meddling to justify why anyone would accuse him. They made no mention of the Katerina Stepanova, only alluding to the accusation as “too ridiculous.” The British press attacked Catherine’s love life as the cause of the dismissal, not even entertaining the allegations of forcible and brutal rape, despite the testimony. Indeed, the only details of the case to make headway in the foreign presses were the details communicated by Ségur. One theme consistent throughout British, French, and American reactions was a focus on factors other than the actual rape: Jones’s character, international

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209 John Paul Jones to Prince Grigori Potemkin, April 13, 1789; John Paul Jones, letter to Prince Grigori Potemkin, July 24, 1790. There is one letter postmarked to Catherine on May 17, 1789, yet the language and style do not match Jones’s other letters. Some scholars accept it as his, others credit it to the Comte de Ségur. Due to the controversy and its lack of impact on the conclusions drawn, it is not included here. For a copy, see Samuel Eliot Morris, *John Paul Jones: A Sailor’s Biography*, 400-2.

210 Comte de Ségur, letter to Comte d’Ésternes, August 26, 1789.

211 Comte de Ségur, “Article to be inserted in the public prints, and especially in the Gazette of France,” July 21, 1789.

212 L. Littlepage, letter to Thomas Jefferson, March 23, 1791.
politics, and their perception of Catherine’s sexuality mattered more than Katerina Stepanova and her accusation.

The Russian reaction directly contradicted the Western reading of events. The silence of Potemkin, the refusal of Russians to serve under Jones, the icy reception Jones received at court, and his ultimate leave of absence demonstrated that Russia under Catherine prioritized different facts of the rape case than their European counterparts. It did not matter that Jones was a war hero or a decorated veteran. All that mattered was that Katerina Stepanova accused him of rape, backed by substantial evidence. Jones’s repeated efforts to return to the Empress’s service further discredited the idea that it was a personal decision on his part and implied that Catherine forbade him continued residence in her country. The Empress’s reactions, as expressed to Grimm, prove her opinion on her ex-admiral—his war service and flattery did not outweigh his actions in Catherine’s mind. Jones was “a despicable person” because he raped Katerina Stepanova.213

The differences in perception between Catherine and the West became readily apparent when comparing reactions to the Jones case. Catherine, philosophically grounded in her belief that women were not subservient to men, took the side of Katerina Stepanova, taking the girl at her word and responding to Jones as a criminal. In a reflection of their cultural tradition to believe accusers, Russians seemed to agree with their Empress, as Jones faced ridicule from Petersburg society, silence from his former friends while on campaign, and a refusal from Russian sailors to serve under his command. In contrast, Jones’s Western connections rallied to his defense, in the form of the Comte de Ségur and the extended diplomatic circles of France and the fledgling United States, drawing on a shared understanding of women as innately sexual and untrustworthy. The British press, American statesmen, and French public opinion found a series

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213 Catherine II, letter to Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, August 15, 1792.
of excuses and scapegoats to explain away the facts of the case. Katerina Stepanova’s allegations became a conspiracy, the revenge of a spurned lover, or slander, and ceased to be what it was—a rape. One consistent theme in the international reaction remained the absence of a voice for Katerina Stepanova. Her testimony paled to the interpretations of the Euro-American community. The devaluing of Katerina Stepanova’s story pointed toward an emerging theme of the Western Enlightenment, disavowed by Catherine and her Russia: a de-liberation of women in the Age of Reason.
Conclusions: Legacies of an “Empire of Reason”

The Western Enlightenment purported to promote the equality of fundamental liberties and intellectual freedom, yet it fell short of that ideal in its expression in Great Britain and France in regard to women. Intellectuals of the Western tradition, such as Voltaire and Rousseau, emphasized that women were fundamentally different physically, socially, and in mental capacity from men.214 Enlightened thinkers made men and women separate and inherently unequal. Women occupied the space of “other,” the non-man, as man grew to be the ideal.215 If man was rational and just, woman was irrational and impulsive. The emergence of this trend was, in the opinion of Joan Landes, the primary tragedy of the Western Enlightenment. As Enlightened thought built a new concept of state, based on the fundamental rights of citizens, it took on a fundamentally masculine identity.216 Yet, in Russia, under the rule of Catherine the Great, the Enlightenment strengthened an existing culture of restricting the prerogatives of Russian men to the benefit of Russian women.217

Catherine, while Empress of Russia, combined her own understanding of Enlightened thought, as well as the precedent set by the Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, to create a space in Russia where women held greater intellectual freedom than they did in the West. Catherine led by example. Her international correspondence, program of reforms across Russia, and her blurring of masculine and feminine identity through her own persona provided a blueprint of a

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214 Jenny Mander, “No Women is an Island: The Female Figure in French Enlightenment Anthropology,” in Women, Gender, and Enlightenment, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 99.
woman claiming her intellectual right alongside men. Through her memoirs, *Nakaz*, and plays, Catherine introduced her take on the Enlightenment to Russia. Her appointment of the Princess Dashkova to head of the Academy of Sciences and her expansion of education opportunities for noblewomen demonstrated her dedication to expanding the intellectual life of women.

Catherine raised a fundamental challenge to the Enlightenment during her lifetime by asking whose Enlightenment it truly was. From Isabel de Madariaga’s monograph *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* to popular biographies of the Empress, the historiography of Catherine II shared a similar theme in regard to her relationship with the Enlightenment. Catherine is often depicted as a student of the Enlightenment, the darling financial supporter of Voltaire and Diderot, who turned reactionary when she faced the consequences of Enlightened thought in the form of the French Revolution. However, this thesis demonstrates that Catherine did not blindly accept the Enlightenment’s precepts. Instead, she provided an alternative reading in which not only men were endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, but women too had the opportunity to expand their “voice.”

The “voice” claimed by women in Catherinian Russia became one of the most important legacies of the Empress. Catherine put autocratic force behind the Russian government’s handling of cases of domestic and sexual violence. She capitalized on a preexisting Russian system that provided a slightly greaterbelievability to women affected by these violent crimes and made it more receptive to victims through her direct intervention. Numerous cases where the Empress interceded on behalf of victims, sometimes outside protections provided by the law, proved that these issues mattered to Catherine. In the case of Katerina Stepanova, the Empress’s decision to press her case was the one factor that saved it from obscurity. The cult of silence that surrounds John Paul Jones’s Russian service and the accusation of rape demonstrates what fate
awaited Katerina Stepanova’s story if it was only left to Western sources to document and retell it. The culture surrounding rape in Russia, backed up with the authority of the throne, enabled Katerina Stepanova’s voice to be heard.

The Katerina Stepanova case remains important because it offers insight into the issue of power dynamics of sexual violence. The recent #MeToo campaign, the popular unveiling of the sexual abuses of the entertainment industry, and the dialogues about sexual violence on U.S. college campuses may imply that these issues are fairly modern phenomena. Yet, historians retain the unique position of being able to differentiate popular attention from existence. Dynamics of power and status tend to populate the narrative of any act of sexual violence, a fact Jones proved in his interaction with Katerina.

The facts of the case are not unfamiliar—a man with connections and power took advantage of a woman lacking both. Jones was a man in a powerful position, a war hero decorated by three nations and a Rear Admiral of the Russian Imperial Navy, close to both Potemkin and, by his own account, the Empress.218 In terms of social and economic status, Katerina Stepanova lacked agency. Jones held all the power in their relationship. Katerina Stepanova was poor and needed money; Jones had capital, evidenced by his overpaying for the butter he purchased.219 Ultimately, Jones used his position to exploit the young girl. He took her into his chambers on the pretext of buying butter and raped her, reminding her of his power over her by threatening to kill her should she talk.220 Had the cast of characters changed to a U.S. Congressman and aide, or a Hollywood producer and actress, the power dynamic would remain

220 Katerina Golzvart, “Statement.”
static. The threat of violence and reprisal remain a key instrument of ensuring silence: “nearly all of the people TIME interviewed,” for their cover article on the Silence Breakers as the 2017 Person of the Year, “expressed a crushing fear of what would happen to them personally … if they spoke up.”

Further examination of the Jones case reveals a troubling trend. Juxtaposed into the twenty-first century, his words still invoke the same defenses used by those accused of sexual assault. Two letters in particular highlight this trend, Jones’s letter to Nikita Ivanovich Ryleyev on April 2, 1789, and his first letter to Potemkin on April 13, 1789. In his letter to Ryleyev, Jones first asserted that Katerina and her mother were lying, then proceeded to accuse Katerina of being a whore and frequent visitor to his bedchamber, remarking he always paid her well. His defense expanded to remark on other occasions where she consented to sex with him, when he claimed “she submitted most willingly to do everything that a man could desire of her.” In the account given by Ségur in his memoirs, Katerina tried to initiate sexual relations with Jones, then screamed rape when he heroically refused her advances. Jones’s letter to Potemkin mirrored these assertions, though expanded the charge to say Katerina also had sex with his servants. Yet, Jones also appealed to Potemkin as a fellow soldier and man. He told the Prince that he was guilty of loving women, but only respectfully, callously implying a connection with Potemkin

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222 John Paul Jones, letter to Nikita Ivanovich Ryleyev, April 2, 1789, in John L. Senior Moscow Papers, Vol. 2, #65, Annapolis, MD, United States Naval Academy Museum Archives. From the French, “une fille perdue, qui est venue chez moi plusieurs fois, et avec laquelle j’ai badiné souvent en lui donnant toujours l’Argent.”

223 Jones to Ryleyev, April 2 1789. From the French, “je n’ai jamais capable de faire la moindre violence à cette fille, ni à aucune personne de son sexe,” and, “et chaque fois qu’elle est venue chez moi, elle l’est prêts de la meilleure grâce à faire tout ce qu’un homme pouvait désirer d’elle.”

through a shared love of women: a “men-will-be-men” argument. In conjunction with the Ryleyev letter, Jones’s defense mirrored those offered by twenty-first century defendants accused of sexual violence. The groundbreaking documentary *The Hunting Ground*, which assessed sexual violence on American college campuses, claimed that previous consent, “boys-will-be-boys” attitudes, and the sexual reputation of a woman are chief excuses for those accused of sexual assault. When placed in comparison, Jones’s actions and his defense of his conduct imply that the dialogue and conversations about sexual violence have undergone little change in two centuries.

Catherinian Russia provided Katerina Stepanova a means of redress against Jones because Catherine provided an alternative to the patriarchal Enlightenment and its aftershocks. The preexisting structures surrounding sexual crimes, strengthened by the autocrat’s reading of Enlightened thought gave Katerina Stepanova an opportunity to speak up and have the hope to bring her rapist to justice. Western proclivity to assume the superiority of the expressions of its institutions and causes often casts Russia as a negative “other,” a backwards nation caught in the confines of misogyny and repression. Yet, Catherine’s Russia represented a tangible, eighteenth-century space where women could exercise intellectual freedom and autonomy, as well as a place where they could be heard.

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225 John Paul Jones to Prince Grigori Potemkin, April 13, 1789. From the French, “j’aime les femmes je l’avoue et les plaisirs que l’on me qu’outre qu’auprès, de ce râpe, mais des jouirons qu’il faut droit leur arracher me font horreurs” and “je vous donne ma Parole de Soldat et d’honnête homme.”

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