

The Letters of Catherine the Great and the Rhetoric of Enlightenment

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SHORT ABSTRACT

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This thesis offers the first reading of the letters of Catherine the Great as a unified epistolary corpus with literary merit as well as historical value. It explores how the empress employed a key eighteenth-century literary form—the letter—not only to make tactical interventions in political and cultural life, but also to shape her persona. The often contrastive style of her letters balances a charming epistolary voice, suited to the letter as a practice of sociability, with exhibitions of the empress’s power and stature as a great individual on the historical stage. The interplay between these two facets, sociability and grandeur, defines her unique approach to the letter form as well as the image of the enlightened monarch as she created it. She displayed her mastery, both literary and political, by creatively manipulating all aspects of the letter, from language choice through etiquette and materiality. Both her lively and seductive personal style and her regal character as an Enlightenment great man derived from and reappropriated available literary models. Seeking to ensure that this image reached receptive audiences, Catherine also carefully controlled the circulation of her letters: in keeping with the semi-privacy of the eighteenth-century letter, she wrote first and foremost to win a reputation with cultural and social elites who exchanged letters out of print. At the same time, she manipulated indirectly through her correspondents the image received by a broader public of her contemporaries and of future generations. The French Revolution challenged all her values, troubling also her elite mode of sociable

correspondence and her eighteenth-century version of glory. Yet, to the end of her days Catherine employed her dual style as the best means of writing herself into history.

LONG ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the letters of Catherine the Great as a unified epistolary corpus worthy of literary attention in its own right. Empress of Russia from 1762 until 1796, Catherine was a powerful ruler who expanded her empire, made it a looming presence in Europe, and demonstratively undertook to reform an only recently modernising nation in accordance with ideas current in Enlightenment Europe. She was also a prolific writer in many genres, such as theatre, journalism, history, and children's literature. Yet, as this study aims to reveal, her letters were her true literary masterpieces.

Scholars have never before undertaken to assess Catherine's letters, in all domains of her activity and to the full range of her addressees, as a single corpus. Her letters to Western, especially French, *philosophes* were taken to be her only literary letters. These letters have been read primarily within the rather limiting binary of the 'mirage russe': scholars have wanted to know the degree to which her letters reflected genuine adherence to the ideals of her enlightened correspondents, or, on the contrary, how she tried to present herself as enlightened in order to cover up real problems at home. Additionally, her correspondence has been mined to a certain extent for historical information: for example, her letters to her former lover and most trusted deputy, Grigory Potemkin, have been read for behind-the-scenes information on the Russo-Turkish War of 1787-1791. The difficulties of reading Catherine's letters as a

unified whole are exacerbated by the state of the corpus: although the majority of her letters have been printed in mostly reliable publications, they have yet to be edited in a single edition in accordance with modern standards. Nonetheless, the complete lack of detailed scholarship on Catherine's letter writing means that an attentive literary reading of the available materials habitually used by historians is timely and promises to make a significant contribution to our understanding of Catherine and of eighteenth-century monarchs' letters more broadly.

The methodology used throughout this study is close reading in context. The primary aim is always to uncover the literary features inherent in Catherine's letters rather than to apply an external framework, such as a presumed checklist of 'enlightened' features or theories about gender performance derived from other sources. Numerous contexts for the letters have been taken into account. First, each letter is placed in relation to Catherine's other letters. Letters to Voltaire are analysed alongside letters to provincial governors in Russia; notes to lovers are juxtaposed with instructions to diplomats. Secondly, Catherine's letters are read as literary constructs in dialogue with other literary texts and discourses available and current in the eighteenth century. Most previous scholars have tried to connect other people's texts with Catherine's policies, looking for how Catherine did or did not implement other writers' texts in governance. Attention here is focused on Catherine's own letters: how did her creative skill and her mastery of contemporary epistolary and literary culture contribute to her multiple ambitions as ruler, lover, and cultural entrepreneur? Thirdly, while this thesis does not claim to establish new facts about unfolding historical events, the political and personal context in which a letter arose is always essential to its correct interpretation. Consideration has been given to the momentary tactical ends that any given letter seeks

to attain, even as emphasis is placed on the more lasting and holistic image that Catherine designed across the full range of her letters. The study is historicist in a different sense: it seeks to understand Catherine's letters as a uniquely eighteenth-century phenomenon, as texts that existed in an epistolary and literary culture characteristic of a particular time and place. A monarch writing letters that participate in a pan-European culture of elite sociability and, at the same time, paint their author as a great individual worthy of present and future admiration: this was possible only in the world of the Enlightenment.

This thesis has been made possible and necessary by a great deal of scholarship produced in recent decades. Several high-quality biographies of Catherine are now available amidst the enduring flood of (sometimes lurid) interest in her person, and more and more attention is being paid to specific aspects of her reign, her image, and indeed to her correspondence. New editions of some of the key Western exchanges have recently appeared and others are eagerly expected. Moreover, in Western European languages if not in Russian, important studies have been carried out on eighteenth-century sociability, publicity, and letter writing. Idealised notions of salon culture and the public sphere have been replaced with more subtle and historically accurate accounts of practices of sociability, intermingling elites, and splintered or multilayered publics. Studies of epistolarity have experienced a veritable boom, and we now have a far better understanding of the eighteenth-century letter as a ubiquitous and versatile form. Neither public nor private, but often circulating amongst multiple writers and readers in carefully specified patterns, eighteenth-century letters were written against a background of an extensive literature of epistolary manuals prescribing the etiquette, style, and even contents of letters. Neither before nor after were letters as

crucial and omnipresent as a social and literary practice. Catherine's letters deserve to be read through these prisms as multifaceted literary texts, circulating in often complicated and socially determined ways.

Personal letters provide far better insights into Catherine's image-formation than any other genre. Official image-making, whether iconography or manifestos, might be suspected of saying as much about the state apparatus as about the empress's own aims. Even the empress's extensive memoirs, although apparently the most intimate form of life writing, offer only a static vision of her life. By contrast, her letters are always dynamic interventions in a current situation, while at the same time her persona is always implicitly, if not explicitly, projected in the text. Although an epistolary corpus is always inherently fragmentary, reading across a single individual's correspondences allows the implied and enacted persona to surface more clearly than in almost any other genre. Letters are not windows into the soul that offer the true image of the individual, but, in Catherine's case especially, they are exceptionally revealing records of the persona that the writer adopted in order to persuade her readers. In fact, the first message of which readers were to be persuaded was the reality of Catherine's projected character. Catherine's epistolary rhetoric and her image are built on the contrast and interplay between two styles or discourses that she borrowed and adapted from Enlightenment literature: sociability and grandeur. Only the combination of these two facets produced the full image of the enlightened monarch and the charming interlocutor whom Catherine wanted her contemporaries and future generations to admire.

Chapter One analyses Catherine's personal style, characterised by wit, variety, and irony, as a felicitous meeting between her personality and a lively literary

discourse. Its stylistic features originate in the gallant letter writing culture of seventeenth-century French salons, which the eighteenth century considered to have been surpassed and perfected in the letters of Madame de Sévigné. Catherine found material that reinforced and fed this taste in authors such as Voltaire, Crébillon *fils*, and Laurence Sterne, and she used them to create her own unique, and uniquely alluring, epistolary voice. This style was particularly suited to the letter as a practice of sociability: it suited the leisured elite's taste for entertainment and generated a sense of connivance and fun between correspondents. Yet, Catherine's brilliance lay in her ability to use this style in all kinds of correspondence: it seduced her lovers and her subordinates while convincing Western writers and monarchs that she shared their cultural ideals. It lent itself both to vivacious literary play in the correspondence with Friedrich Melchior Grimm and to sometimes stinging irony even in official correspondence. This literary-inspired tone was the foundation of Catherine's persona and of many of her epistolary stratagems.

Chapter Two relates Catherine's practices to the prescriptions of epistolary manuals: Catherine showed particular skill in exercising and displaying her authority in her letters, even as she appeared to cast aside her power in favour of informality. Her mastery of all three of her languages (French, Russian, and German), as well as her authorship of her own letters, have long been debated. Although her language undoubtedly has its quirks and contains occasional solecisms, she wrote fluently and effectively in all three of her languages. She is indisputably the author of the vast majority of her correspondence: secretaries and favourites frequently read over her letters and suggested corrections, but the empress always took the initiative in drafting the letters and had ultimate discretion over their final form. The most creative passages

in the letters are inevitably her own. Even her linguistic oddities can often be explained as a more or less intentional style of negligence and a display of her ‘natural’ and personal writing habits. Her use of etiquette is always polite but often playful and affection-seeking; here too Catherine often found space to send strategic messages about relationships, charming or stinging her addressees under cover of civility. The material aspects of her letters similarly reveal both polite attention and elegant negligence, as well as much acumen.

Chapter Three explores the other side of Catherine’s epistolary persona: Enlightenment grandeur. She tailored her image as that of the *grand homme* presented in eighteenth-century texts like Voltaire’s histories and the *Encyclopédie*: she counterbalanced military heroism with civilising impulses; displayed her ability to recognise merit in others and to exercise magnificent patronage; legislated for an empire; and exhibited the Stoic ethic that eighteenth-century discourse demanded of the prospective great man. Yet even amidst this display of grandeur, Catherine did not relinquish her playful literary skill: the use of both comic and serious modes helped her to present her grandeur as a natural trait and to brag without seeming to do so.

Chapter Four then discusses how Catherine marketed the composite image defined in the first three chapters. The work of historian Antoine Lilti offers a framework for analysing Catherine’s pursuit of different kinds of publicity before different readerships: he distinguishes reputation obtained within a select group from print-mediated celebrity amongst a broader public and from the glory bestowed by posterity. She wrote primarily for the semi-publicity of elite social and cultural circles: her letters were not written for print and therefore cannot be assimilated to modern propaganda. Rather, she sought a reputation amongst European elites, expecting her

letters to be discussed, sometimes read aloud, and occasionally copied in manuscript: her persona was particularly suited to elite tastes, both in its style of sociability and in its proffered exclusive contact with literary-inspired greatness. Yet she also expected her correspondents to help her manage the celebrity that her status and her dramatic accession to the throne necessarily generated. Crucially, she expected the opinion of Europe's *honnêtes gens* to dovetail nicely with the judgment of posterity: in catering to their tastes, she also aimed to prepare monuments to her pleasant yet grand historical persona.

Chapter Five, finally, considers the effects of the French Revolution on Catherine's epistolary production. Catherine's latter years are typically portrayed as a time of decline and reaction against all the ideals with which she had flirted in previous decades. Yet her letters from the years 1788-1796 show that Catherine remained in control of her correspondence and intellectually engaged to the very end, even if her epistolary output diminished notably after the traumatic events of Potemkin's death in 1791 and especially Louis XVI's execution in 1793. Her epistolary techniques remained constant: careful management of her letters' circulation; a lively style suited to claiming a victory over the ideological and discursive changes that threatened to destroy her practices of sociability; and her exploration and exhibition of the role of the historically great individual. The Revolution forced Catherine to render explicit the social and political assumptions inherent in elite epistolary sociability, and it tore asunder the interweaving of literature and politics that had characterized both that sphere and Catherine's letters. Yet even as Catherine distanced herself from authors who had become tainted in her mind by association with Revolutionary ravages, she continued to present herself in her letters as the heroic defender of true culture over

barbarism and of an alliance between the elite and the monarch, both of which had been implicit in her practice of epistolarity all along.

This thesis thus sketches out the rhetoric of Catherine the Great's letters: her style, her use of the epistolary form, her persona, and her means of establishing relationships with the publics who would judge her persona. It is a rhetoric of Enlightenment in its specific interplay of sociability and greatness and in its participation in the discourses of eighteenth-century literary culture. Even when Revolutionary tumult changed the political and social connotations of Catherine's epistolary practice, the discursive environment of elite literary and epistolary play remained the context in which Catherine elaborated her image, her literary creativity, and her enduring legacy.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite all the fascination that Catherine the Great has exerted on her contemporaries and on future generations, her large and remarkable corpus of letters has been remarkably little studied. Born a minor German princess, Sophie Friederike Auguste of Anhalt-Zerbst, in 1729 and brought to Russia at the age of 14 to marry the heir to the imperial throne, Catherine whiled away almost twenty years of an unhappy marriage and official exclusion from political activity, cultivating her mind with extensive reading and honing her interpersonal skills amidst the pitfalls of Empress Elizabeth's intrigue-ridden court. On 28 June/9 July 1762, six months after ascending the throne with her husband Peter III, she staged a coup d'état and claimed power for herself, contravening the desires of some of her supporters that she reign as regent for her son Paul. The violent death of her husband eight days later, as well as Catherine's complete lack of a legitimate blood claim to the Romanov throne, left her with a difficult challenge to keep her hold on power. Catherine nonetheless held the throne for 34 years until her death of a stroke on 6/17 November 1796. She carried out extensive legislative reforms, beginning with her *Nakaz*, or *Instruction to the Commission for the Confection of a New Law Code* (1767), which borrowed often verbatim from the works of Montesquieu, Beccaria, and other contemporary political theorists. The *Nakaz* provided the guidelines and principles to be discussed at a Legislative Commission in Moscow with elected representatives from across Russia and from every social class but the serfs. This famous undertaking was followed in later years by a reform of provincial government (1775), a police ordinance (1782), the first permission for private printing presses in Russia (1783), and charters to the towns and the nobility (1785). In

international relations, Catherine led Russia in two successful wars against the Ottoman Empire (1768-1774, 1787-1792) and in the three partitions of Poland (1772, 1793, 1795), which greatly expanded the territory of her empire. She firmly established Russia's presence on the diplomatic scene of Europe, arbitrating the Peace of Teschen (1779) and successfully promoting the policy of Armed Neutrality during the American Revolutionary War. Moreover, she oversaw and to a great extent encouraged the blossoming of intellectual life in Russia, founding the Russian Academy (1783) and sponsoring the translation of large quantities of foreign literature into Russian. In addition to her assiduous attention to state affairs, Catherine was a prolific writer, composing over two dozen plays and short operas, a history of Russia, fairytales, a comparative dictionary, lengthy pamphlets, satirical journalism, and much more. Her letters, however, were her masterpiece.

They have not been recognised as such for two primary reasons: the problem of corpus and the preconceptions that have framed interpretations of Catherine's life and accomplishments. The majority of Catherine's letters were published in mid-nineteenth-century journals by scholars like Ya. K. Grot and P. I. Bartenev. These editions attempt to modernise and correct Catherine's spelling, but on the whole reproduce the letters with sufficient accuracy to be used by historians and literary scholars. The more famous correspondences, such as those with Voltaire, Catherine's favourite Grigory Potemkin, and the Belgian aristocrat, the prince de Ligne, have benefited from recent scholarly editions, and a new full edition of Catherine's twenty-two-year exchange with her cultural agent and most trusted correspondent Friedrich Melchior Grimm is eagerly awaited. Yet her letters have never been collected in a single edition or studied as a unified corpus. The dispersion of the corpus has been

reinforced by the presumed division between Catherine ‘the woman’ (corresponding with lovers like Grigory Potemkin) and Catherine ‘the ruler’ (writing overtly propagandistic letters to *philosophes* like Voltaire or official communications to subordinates or fellow monarchs). As a result, while there have been studies of single correspondences in isolation (especially of the correspondences with Voltaire and Potemkin), no study has attempted to bring together Catherine’s letters to the full range of her many and diverse addressees: subordinates, foreign heads of state, writers, doctors, noblemen and noblewomen, diplomats, courtiers, secretaries, children, grandchildren, lovers, and many others. The letters have been mined for historical information to a certain extent, but even Catherine’s biographers have not always managed to integrate the vast range of information available in these scattered sources. The research for this thesis entailed reading several thousand letters and notes to approximately 115 significant addressees, published in some 70 editions. The editions were supplemented by archival work primarily in Germany. The text of the correspondences with Johann Georg Zimmermann, Frederick II of Prussia, and Elisa von der Recke was verified against the original: the published text of Catherine’s letters is overall quite accurate, except for some misguided attempts to correct Catherine’s language and a few transcription errors. In addition, over 100 unpublished official letters were studied in Stuttgart and Wolfenbüttel and the material aspects of the letters examined in more detail than previous studies have offered.

Another difficulty in establishing the size and unity of Catherine’s corpus lies in defining what is and is not a ‘letter’. As empress, Catherine produced, often in collaboration with her secretaries, enormous numbers of documents in epistolary or pseudo-epistolary form. Some are clearly not letters, such as personal decrees (*ukazy*)

and slightly less official rescripts, both of which were addressed to a particular individual and bore the empress's signature, but were often not written in her hand. However, extant drafts show that Catherine often devised the wording for these official documents just as she would a personal letter. Formal letters, like awards of chivalric orders or official communications with other monarchs, might bear her signature or even be written completely in her hand, but might be drafted entirely by government officials. There are moreover countless working documents and scribbled notes to secretaries, officials, courtiers, and favourites, sometimes amounting to no more than a line. Catherine's letters or notes could be sent by courier or by post across great distances, or they could be delivered to someone a few rooms away by a palace page. In this mass of semi-epistolary material, it can often be difficult to determine what constitutes a letter 'by' Catherine the Great. This thesis remains quite broad in its definition of the letter: it considers any text addressed personally to one or multiple individuals and written in Catherine's hand, therefore bearing marks of her personal intervention in its production.

Studies of Catherine's correspondence have also been constrained by the problem of 'enlightened despotism'. Alongside Frederick II of Prussia and Joseph II of Austria, Catherine is one of the most noted members of this exclusive club, even if her status as enlightened has been more aggressively challenged than either of those two monarchs'. A simplistic explanation of what it meant to be 'enlightened' translated into scholarly attention on Catherine's letters to Voltaire and the other French *philosophes* only; studies concentrated on the nature of her patronage, her docility (or lack thereof) in adopting the *philosophes*' perspectives, and the ways in which she did or did not pull

the wool over their eyes for the purposes of propaganda.¹ Yet, although historians have largely sought to define enlightened despotism or enlightened absolutism by scrutinising eighteenth-century monarchs' reform programmes and the extent to which they realised the ideals of eighteenth-century writers, there is also now a scholarly consensus that enlightened rule was as much about style as it was about actual reforms.² The author of the definitive scholarly biography of Catherine, Isabel de Madariaga, has argued convincingly that Catherine deserves to be counted amongst those whose style was enlightened: 'in what she attempted to do, and in her style of government, she belongs clearly in the tradition of those who governed in what they believed to be the interests of the people and who go by the name of enlightened despots.' Madariaga has drawn attention to the 'rhetoric' of Catherine's policies as reflecting 'the values of the Enlightenment' even as they enacted the belief 'that it was desirable to maximise and hold on to state power in order to achieve reforms necessary for the welfare of the people.'³ The word 'style' is key: enlightened monarchy resided not only in values, but also in the style, language, and means of exercising power. This insight about the

¹ There is a substantial literature on the topic of Catherine and the *philosophes*. Extended treatments include Yakov Grot's essay 'Ekaterina II v svoei literaturnoi perepiske', in *Trudy Ya. K. Grot*, ed. by K. Ya. Grot, 5 vols (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya Ministerstva Putei Soobshcheniya, 1898-1903), IV: *Iz russkoi istorii* (1901) pp. 343-57, and his publication of the correspondence with Grimm in the *Sbornik imperatorskago russkago istoricheskago obshchestva* [henceforth *SIRIO*], 136 vols (St. Petersburg: Imp. Akademiya Nauk, 1874-1916), XXIII (1878) and XLIV (1885); Albert Lortholary, *Le Mirage russe en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Boivin, 1951); Inna Gorbato, *Catherine the Great and the French Philosophers of the Enlightenment* (Bethesda, MD: Academic Press, 2006); Isabel de Madariaga, 'Catherine and the Philosophes', in *Russia and the West in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by A.G. Cross (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1983), pp. 30-52. There are also many more specific studies, particularly on the correspondence with Voltaire, listed in the bibliography.

² According to H. M. Scott, 'the essence of enlightened absolutism [...] was as much a matter of aims and style, of attitudes and intentions, as of policies and actual reforms' ('Introduction: The Problem of Enlightened Absolutism', in *Enlightened Absolutism: Reform and Reformers in Later Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. by H. M. Scott (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 1-35 (p. 20)). On Catherine the Great as an enlightened monarch, see especially Isabel de Madariaga, 'Catherine the Great', in *Enlightened Absolutism: Reform and Reformers in Later Eighteenth-Century Europe*, pp. 289-311; Simon Dixon, 'Catherine the Great and the Enlightenment', *Leidschrift. Rusland en Europa. Westerse invloeden op Rusland*, 24, 2 (2009), 34-43; and O. A. Omelchenko, 'Zakonnaya monarkhiya' Ekateriny Vtoroi: *prosveshchenniy absolutizm v Rossii* (Moscow: Yurist, 1993).

³ Madariaga, 'Catherine the Great', pp. 304-11.

importance of style to enlightened rule must now be brought to bear on Catherine's letters: a new framework is required to unfold Catherine's epistolary corpus as a whole and to understand it within the stylistic possibilities of its time.

This thesis seeks to fill this gap by offering a literary reading of Catherine's letters. The Enlightenment coincided with an extraordinary flowering of letter writing and the adoption of the epistolary form as a vehicle for every kind of discourse.⁴ In addition to earning the label of an enlightened monarch, Catherine could just as well be tagged as the last of the great letter-writing monarchs. Although both she and Frederick the Great produced voluminous, rich, and literarily skilful correspondences, after the eighteenth century no other monarch (nor president, prime minister, or other head of state) has equalled them in their use of the letter as an instrument of rule as well as a literary and sociable diversion and a space for projecting an image for a variety of audiences. A literary examination of Catherine's full epistolary corpus turns attention away from the old problem of the supposed 'mirage russe' and conclusively demonstrates her intellectual stature. Catherine's letters reward attention to her style, her use of the epistolary form, her projected persona, and her careful attention to the publics that her letters were to reach. In all these regards, she creatively drew on eighteenth-century literary models, discourses, and practices both to achieve tactical aims and to create in her letters the image of herself that she wanted her contemporaries and posterity to perceive and admire.

A literary reading of Catherine's letters immediately brings to the fore a curious duality in her manner of writing. Her style is lively, playful, and sociable, derived from the conversational aesthetic of salon culture, but, even in her chattiest letters, she also

⁴ Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 2; John W. Howland, *The Letter Form and the French Enlightenment: The Epistolary Paradox* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), pp. 2-9.

projects the image of a great ruler and autocrat controlling her nation's affairs, conquering and civilising her empire and new territories, and displaying the steadfast Stoic ethic idealised in eighteenth-century literature. Her letters continually proclaim her authority and serve her efforts to attain greatness, and yet the defining marks of her personal epistolary style are good humour, affability, and playfulness.

These two sides of Catherine's persona ran through many representations of the empress, most outstandingly in Vigilius Erichsen's famous *Portrait of Catherine II in Front of a Mirror* (1762-1764). Erichsen represents Catherine in an enormous *panier* dress, gracefully holding a fan that points to her imperial regalia and her regal profile in the mirror. Victoria Ivleva sees in the portrait an attempt to reconcile Catherine's femininity with her role as ruler; Luba Golburt, meanwhile, observes in it 'the co-presence of the human and trans-human in the sovereign [which] is, after all, the enabling premise of enlightened monarchy.'⁵ Catherine's letters ask us to reread the portrait in terms of twin styles, those of sociability and grandeur. The living Catherine in the foreground is ready to entertain guests, engage in elegant and witty conversation, or attend a court ball; the reflected Catherine in the mirror is the great and powerful ruler. These are not so much two genders as they are two styles that both had their attractions for Catherine and her addressees.

To understand this combination, its sources, and its unique elaboration in Catherine's letters is to return to the problem of the enlightened monarch. It is certain that Catherine encountered the term 'enlightened despot' in an article about the physiocrats that appeared in the *livraison* of Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire* of

⁵ Victoria Ivleva, 'Catherine II as Female Ruler: The Power of Enlightened Womanhood', *Vivliofika: E-Journal of Eighteenth-Century Russian Studies*, 3 (2015), 20-46 (pp. 20-24); Luba Golburt, *The First Epoch: The Eighteenth Century and the Russian Cultural Imagination* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), p. 59-62.

1 October 1767 (NS): ‘On a dit que le gouvernement d’un despote éclairé, actif, vigilant, sage et ferme, était de tous les gouvernements le plus désirable et le plus parfait, et l’on a dit une vérité; mais il ne fallait pas l’outrer. Moi aussi, j’aime de tels despotes à la passion.’⁶ The sheer quantity, the energetic tone, and the often detailed, technical content of Catherine’s letters show her to be just that: an active, engaged, but absolute ruler. Yet the paradigmatic model of the ‘philosopher king’ or ‘enlightened despot’ was inherently multifaceted: not only Grimm, but also the *Encyclopédie* article ‘Philosophe’ held up the conqueror, knowledgeable administrator, Stoic philosopher, and writer Marcus Aurelius as the figure to be emulated. The article ‘Philosophe’, moreover, prescribed the combination of greatness and sociability as essential to the perfect ruler: ‘Le *philosophe* est donc un honnête homme qui agit en tout par raison, & qui joint à un esprit de réflexion & de justesse les moeurs & les qualités sociables. Entez un souverain sur un *philosophe* d’une telle trempe, & vous aurez un parfait souverain.’⁷ This version of the eighteenth-century philosopher monarch was not just a

⁶ Grimm specially ensured that this article reached Catherine: this *livraison* got lost on its way to St. Petersburg, but Grimm resent the article on the physiocrats as the lead article in Catherine’s *livraison* of 15 January 1768 (NS). Such a resending was, according to the modern indexers of the *Correspondance littéraire*, ‘tout à fait unique’ (Ulla Kölvig and Jeanne Carriat, *Inventaire de la Correspondance littéraire de Grimm et Meister*, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 225-227 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1984), I, p. 209 (article no. 67:268)); *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique, par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister, Etc.*, ed. by Maurice Tourneux, 16 vols (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1877-1882; reprint Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1968), VII, p. 435. Historians have called attention to the article as one of the first ever appearances of the term ‘enlightened despot’: Derek Beales, ‘Philosophical Kingship and Enlightened Despotism’, in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. by Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 495-524 (p. 518), and Hamish Scott, ‘Enlightened Despotism’, in *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, ed. by Alan Charles Kors, 4 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), I, pp. 415-18 (pp. 415-16).

⁷ *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, ed. by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert, 17 vols (Paris: Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1751-72), XII, p. 510. Despite this article’s convoluted history, Derek Beales nonetheless cites it as ‘a standard definition of the new philosopher’ and a helpful indication of what a philosopher king might have meant for the *philosophes* (Beales, ‘Philosophical Kingship and Enlightened Despotism’, pp. 499-500). The observation about the ‘perfect sovereign’ appears in neither Dumarsais’s original text, nor in Voltaire’s redaction included in the first edition of his *Loix de Minos*: ‘Le Philosophe’, *Nouvelles libertés de penser* (Amsterdam: [Piget], 1743), pp. 173-204 (p. 200); Voltaire, *Les Loix de Minos, tragédie. Avec les notes de Mr. de Morza, et plusieurs pieces curieuses détachées* ([Geneva]: [Cramer], 1773), pp. 265-74. The

rational ruler, but also an affable conversationalist: this was the role that Catherine played in her letters. Eighteenth-century writers complimented Catherine personally on her ability to unite these qualities: one might readily cite Voltaire's line in some verses that he probably sent to Catherine in 1763, 'Plaire et régner, c'est là votre talent', or Diderot's preferred epithets, 'C'est l'âme de César, avec toutes les séductions de Cléopâtre'.⁸ By juxtaposing a charming style with a regal persona in her letters, Catherine projected an image that met with accolades to which she was far from indifferent.

This duality between grandeur and sociability has been identified in scholarship as a defining stylistic feature of Enlightenment writing. Elena Russo has argued that a curious combination of aesthetics and politics and of greatness and frivolity lay at the very heart of Enlightenment culture. On the one hand, the late Enlightenment *philosophes* endeavored to impose 'le grand goût', a stern, masculine neoclassicism that would revive the eloquence and heroism of the Greek and Roman republics. But, on the other hand, the most successful works of Enlightenment greats like Voltaire and Diderot in fact adopt the other style of Enlightenment, which they continually decried and castigated: 'le goût moderne', the dissonant, self-referential, ironic, comic, often mock-heroic, supposedly frivolous and effeminate taste manifest in Marivaux, Fontenelle, and Crébillon *fils*; in the abrupt style of Montesquieu's *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*; and, as Russo mentions at the very end of

addition suggests an ongoing reflection about enlightened monarchy, which grew out of the famous statement, 'Que les Peuples seront heureux quand les Rois seront Philosophes, ou quand les Philosophes seront Rois', misattributed by Dumarsais and the *Encyclopédie* to Marcus Aurelius (Dumarsais, 'Le Philosophe', p. 198; *Encyclopédie*, XII, p. 510).

⁸ Voltaire, 'A l'impératrice de Russie, qui l'invitait à faire ce voyage', in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. by Theodore Besterman and others (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968-), LVIIa: *Writings of 1763-1764* (2014), pp. 324-327 (p. 325). Diderot gave variations on the same theme in letters to different correspondents: Diderot to Madame Necker, 6 September 1774 (NS); to Princess Dashkova, 24 December 1773 (OS?); to the Vollands, 30 March 1774 (NS); Denis Diderot, *Correspondance*, ed. by Georges Roth and Jean Varloot, 16 vols (Paris: Minuit, 1955-1970), XIV, p. 74; XIII, pp. 135, 209.

her book, in Voltaire and Diderot's remarkable epistolary legacies.⁹ Peter France has described a similar discord in what he calls 'the rhetoric of Enlightenment': pulled in opposing directions by eighteenth-century culture, writers like Montesquieu and d'Alembert had to balance the need for scholarly clarity and technical exactitude with the embellishments and conversational style necessary to cater to a non-specialist, mostly elite public.¹⁰ Could not the enlightened monarch partake of the same opposition, combining a serious striving for heroic, reforming leadership with participation in sociable practices and literary play? The comments made in the *Correspondance littéraire* and the *Encyclopédie*, both known to be among Catherine's favourite reading materials in the early years of her reign, suggest that this duality did in fact govern the presentation of the perfect monarch. The entire notion of the enlightened monarch can be examined as an aesthetic as much as a political entity. After all, the practical, good, active monarch was a long-standing ideal: what was new was the Enlightenment's restyling of the monarch in its own image.

Literature, and more specifically many of the key texts cited by Russo and France, played an important part in Catherine's thought and in the private and public persona she created for herself as empress. On the one hand, Catherine shared Voltaire's passion for great rulers like Henri IV and Louis XIV; she translated Plutarch and wrote her own histories and plays about Russia's medieval rulers. On the other hand, her preferred literary references were above all to mock-heroic novels: *Don Quixote*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Joseph Andrews*, Moritz August von Thümmel's *Wilhelmine*, and Friedrich Nicolai's *Sebaldus Nothanker*. While she expressed support

⁹ Elena Russo, *Styles of Enlightenment: Taste, Politics, and Authorship in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 261.

¹⁰ Peter France, *Rhetoric and Truth in France: Descartes to Diderot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 68-81.

for Voltaire's views on toleration and happily used them for her own aims, she characterised him primarily as the 'dieu de l'agrément'; her own writings included satirical journals, comedies, and various forms of comic society literature; and Molière and Crébillon *fils* offered favourite comparisons for characterising herself and others. Texts were sources for Catherine's style and image-formation: history and fiction provided her with models for emulation, shared reference points, and amusement. Catherine also produced texts in order to rule: writing, and especially writing letters, was an amusement, a means of building relationships, and an instrument of government. Of the many works that Catherine penned throughout her life and reign, her letters are the most numerous, the most stylistically interesting, and the most implicated in every aspect of her activity as a ruler and as a human being. Catherine accomplished various tasks through the rhetorical possibilities of the letter, and in so doing she framed her unique epistolary persona in a fashion consonant with the Enlightenment's aesthetic preferences.

Rhetoric, rather than theatricality, offers the more helpful analogy for understanding Catherine's letters as a literary constructs. The theatrical metaphor has dominated scholarship on eighteenth-century Russia for decades, following Yuri M. Lotman's highly influential argument that 'the Russian noble was unique in exporting the ritual quality of court life to his estate in the provinces and transforming his daily life into an "improvised performance."' ¹¹ It would seem particularly suited to studying an empress: Richard Wortman, in his magisterial study of the Russian monarchy, defines the imperial court as 'an ongoing theater of power' and 'a play performed principally for the participants'; his work traces the 'scenarios of power', or 'individual

¹¹ Michelle Lamarche Marrese, "'The Poetics of Everyday Behavior' Revisited: Lotman, Gender, and the Evolution of Russian Noble Identity', *Kritika*, n.s., 11, 4, (Fall 2010), 701-39 (pp. 703-704).

modes of performance of the imperial myth' adopted by each ruler.¹² Moreover, Christiane Mervaud's work on Voltaire's correspondence with Frederick the Great has shown how fruitful the notions of 'role-play' and 'dramaturgy' can be in analysing the intricacies of an enlightened monarch's correspondence.¹³ Elena Russo points to theatricality as 'the distinctive character of the *goût moderne*'.¹⁴ It might very well suit an analysis of Catherine's letters as texts that exploit the resources of contemporary taste, but the fact that it lands unambiguously on one side of the stylistic divide already shows the danger of adopting the theatrical as an overarching concept. Arguments in favour of theatricality abound even within Catherine's own *œuvre*: she composed more than two dozen plays in Russian and French and insisted that her courtiers and privileged correspondents like Princess Ekaterina Dashkova and Friedrich Melchior Grimm follow her example.¹⁵ In her letters, she frequently quotes from or alludes to plays, ranging from Molière and Racine to eighteenth-century masterpieces by Beaumarchais and Voltaire, as well as works less known today, like Philippe Néricault Destouches' *Le Tambour nocturne*, a particular favourite in the correspondence with Grimm. She and her correspondents portray contemporary events in the language of theatre: she compares her military struggles and the repression of the Pugachev Rebellion to Italian farces in letters not only to Voltaire and Grimm, but also to

¹² Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995-2000), 1: *From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I* (1995), pp. 4-6.

¹³ Christiane Mervaud, *Voltaire et Frédéric II: une dramaturgie des lumières 1736-1778*, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 234 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1985).

¹⁴ Russo, *Styles of Enlightenment*, p. 15.

¹⁵ In her memoirs, Dashkova recounts how she was 'obliged' to write *Mr. Toisiokov*: concerned by Dashkova's talk of suicide and suffering, Catherine pressed her to write a comedy because she 'savait par expérience combien cela amusait et occupait l'auteur' (Princesse Dashkova, *Mon histoire: mémoires d'une femme de lettres russe à l'époque des lumières*, ed. by Alexandre Woronzoff-Dashkoff, Catherine Le Gouis, and Catherine Woronzoff-Dashkoff (Paris, Montréal: L'Harmattan, 1999), pp. 185-86). Catherine playfully refused to send Grimm a copy of the *Recueil des pièces de l'Hermitage* (4 vols, St. Petersburg, 1788-89), the collection of plays composed by Catherine and her courtiers, unless Grimm himself contributed a play: 'envoyez-moi une comédie ou proverbe faite par vous ou sous votre nom, bien gaie, bien folle, ou bien vous n'aurez rien, et cela sans rémission', *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 468.

Frederick the Great.¹⁶ She incontestably adopts various roles vis-à-vis her correspondents, playing out scenes in a genre that is perennially likened to a dialogue at a distance.

Yet the theatrical metaphor fails to capture all the functions and effects of Catherine's epistolary activity. The analogy of the theatre shifts Catherine's letters into the realm of fiction from the outset, whereas rhetoric has always been a medium of social and political life since its beginnings in ancient Greece and Rome. While the letter writer always distorts reality more or less intentionally, Catherine wrote her letters not as fictions, but as effectual interventions in the real world. Her letters did not just play out scenes before an audience, although they might do that as well. They established relationships, performed actions, and called on others to act in the real world. Moreover, as a form associated with private interpersonal exchange, letters conceal more than they display their theatricality: rather, they give the reader the sense of an intimate, undisguised view of the writer's character. Rhetoric does not assume a passive audience of spectators watching unreal characters: the orator or writer seeks to convince the audience of the reality of his or her character, while drawing attention to the real-world relationships between writer and addressees. These relationships are all-important in interpreting Catherine's letters and in understanding her epistolary

¹⁶ 'Je ne sais comment Moustapha pense sur l'article de la Comédie, mais il y a quelques années qu'il done au monde le spectacle de ses défaites sans pouvoir ce résoudre à changer de rôle. [...] N'ayés pas peur Monsieur, Vos parisiens qui sont à Cracovie ne me feront pas grand mal, ils jouent un mauvaïse farce qui finira come les Comédie Italiènes' (to Voltaire, 3 April 1772 (OS), D17694); 'il y a toute aparence que m^r le marquis Pougatchef est sur le point de finir son rôle' (to Voltaire, c. 25 September 1774, D19128); 'A quelques jours d'ici la farce du marquis Pougatchef sera finie' (to Grimm, 21 December 1774 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 11); 'cette troupe de brigands qui S'est élevé contre moi, beaucoup plus mechante et meprisable quelle n'est dangereuse, et dont il y a apparence que les complots mal conçu, mal digeré, auquels les desordres, la licence et l'inhumanité Servent de regles finiront comme les farces Italiènes, par des punitions inflictives' (to Frederick II, 3 March 1774 (OS), Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, I. HA Rep 96, Nr. 110 P Bd. 2, [n.p.]; *SIRIO*, xx, pp. 340-41). Letters to and from Voltaire are cited by D-number as provided in Voltaire, *Correspondence and related documents*, ed. by Theodore Besterman, 2nd edn, 51 vols (Geneva, Banbury, Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968-77), in *Electronic Enlightenment* <<http://www.e-enlightenment.com/index.html>>.

strategies. Her letters intervened in public and private life in the way that an orator uses spoken or written language to arouse the sympathies or aversions of his or her audience and to persuade them to respond as he or she desires. Michael Hawcroft has analysed how seventeenth-century dramatists, and in particular Racine, enlisted the tools of rhetoric to engross spectators in their tragedies. Dramatic speech, they held, should be ‘verbal action’: ‘Verbal action seems most often to be a persuasive action, that is to say a sequence of speeches delivered by characters who have particular interests, or motives, or compelling passions, and who wish to make their interests prevail over those of other characters by engaging in acts of persuasion and dissuasion (like Cinna and Maxime), and in acts of accusation and defence (like Chimène and Don Diègue)’.¹⁷ Catherine had Corneille’s tragedies in her portable library, and she noted on the brief catalogue of the library that she sent to the grand ducal family: ‘Les tragédies de *Corneille*: elles élèvent l’âme et la fortifient: surtout “Cinna”’.¹⁸ She was extremely unlikely to model her behaviour on that of an actress, but she absorbed and promoted the heroic examples offered by Corneille’s characters, both as a means of persuasion and as one of the facets of her epistolary persona.

Furthermore, the letter was the early-modern substitute for classical oratory. The extant classical rhetorical manuals do not deal with letter writing, but comments made by writers like Cicero suggest that some elements of epistolary theory were already circulating among rhetoricians.¹⁹ Only Demetrius in *On Style*, probably written in the second century B.C.E., dealt briefly with the letter, but he did not consider the

¹⁷ Michael Hawcroft, *Word as Action: Racine, Rhetoric, and Theatrical Language* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 24.

¹⁸ ‘Imperatritsa Ekaterina II. Istoricheskie materialy, khranyashchiesya v Biblioteke dvortsa goroda Pavlovska’, *Russkaya starina*, 9 (1874), 37-56 (p. 48).

¹⁹ Peter White, *Cicero in Letters: Epistolary Relations of the Late Republic* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 21-23.

letter part of ‘rhetoric’, which he restricted to political oratory.²⁰ But, according to Alain Boureau, by the 13th century, the epistolary art had assumed the mantle previously worn by political oratory: ‘la lettre doit tenir le rôle de la rhétorique délibérative dans l’Antiquité; elle doit servir de véhicule à la décision politique.’²¹ One of the letter-writing masters of this time, Boncompagno, described the epistolary art quite aptly, if one has the letters of an empress in mind: it is ‘la médiatrice universelle, par la grâce de Dieu, de la chose publique, la maîtresse générale des conseils, des orateurs, des juges, c’est l’impératrice des arts libéraux’.²² As Boureau underlines, this line of epistolary rhetorical manuals grew not so much out of classical rhetoric as out of earlier collections of model letters for use in papal and royal chancelleries.²³ Modern epistolary rhetoric, then, evolved from the development of government institutions at the dawn of the early-modern period, replacing and drawing on oratorical structures, but not copying them verbatim. Gary Schneider points to the use of the familiar letter, including its languages of love and intimacy, in the Humanist transformation of political negotiation in England, encouraged by Queen Elizabeth I. During the reign of Elizabeth’s father Henry VIII, moreover, modern diplomacy, intelligence-gathering, and administration developed in conjunction with the informal letter.²⁴ Catherine in a sense represented the culmination of a centuries-long process by which, as Marc Fumaroli put it, the epistolary art became ‘l’héritier écrit de l’éloquence orale des Anciens.’²⁵ By the

²⁰ Demetrius, *On Style*, ed. and trans. by Doreen C. Innes, based on the translation by W. Rhys Roberts, in Aristotle, *Poetics* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 309-525 (pp. 481-87).

²¹ Alain Boureau, ‘La norme épistolaire, une invention médiévale’, in *La Correspondance: les usages de la lettre au XIX^e siècle*, ed. by Roger Chartier (Paris: Fayard, 1991), pp. 127-57 (p. 146)

²² Boureau, ‘La norme épistolaire’, pp. 146-47.

²³ Boureau, ‘La norme épistolaire’, p. 137.

²⁴ Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), pp. 40-42.

²⁵ Marc Fumaroli, ‘À l’origine d’un art français: la correspondance familière’, in *La Diplomatie de l’esprit: De Montaigne à La Fontaine* (Paris: Hermann, 1994), pp. 163-81 (p. 163).

eighteenth-century, the letter had long since replaced the oratory of the ancient republics as the medium of government activity and as the early-modern form of eloquence.

It may be objected that Catherine lacked the formal education, much less the training in rhetoric, that a Jesuit-educated man like Voltaire received, and so she could not possibly exercise a rhetoric of any sort in her letters. However, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century absolutist monarch was often represented as possessing natural eloquence and a near-divine capacity for using language, regardless of education. The panegyrics of Louis XIV, pronounced at the Académie Française during his reign, repeatedly praised ‘l’Eloquence naturelle de LOUIS, l’heureuse facilité qu’il a à s’exprimer, le choix & la pureté des termes dont il se sert, & le charme inexplicable qu’il répand dans toutes les choses qu’il dit’.²⁶ Louis had no need of education to exemplify the best language use in the nation. One panegyric in particular called attention to one of Louis’s letters as the pinnacle of his glory (‘cette Lettre glorieuse qui en quelque jour contribuera plus à son Eloge, que le gain de quatre Batailles’) and as a historic example to be emulated by all rulers (‘O paroles dignes du fils aîné de l’Eglise, Paroles qui doivent estre éternellement proposées en exemple à tous les Princes!’).²⁷ The letter could thus be a showcase for a monarch’s eloquence and a document by which the monarch could inscribe himself or herself in history. Catherine too was praised for her beguiling and persuasive natural eloquence: Princess Dashkova, for example, wrote in her memoirs: ‘Tous ceux qui ont eu l’honneur d’approcher Sa Majesté savent qu’elle possédait toute l’éloquence, la grâce et la finesse qu’il faut pour

²⁶ ‘Panégyrique du Roy, prononcé le 25. Aoust 1673, par Monsieur l’abbé Tallemant le Jeune’, in *Les Panégyriques du roi, prononcés dans l’Académie Française*, ed. by Pierre Zoberman (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1991), pp. 105-25 (p. 123).

²⁷ ‘Panégyrique du Roy sur la paix, prononcé le 24 juillet 1679, par Monsieur Charpentier’, in *Les Panégyriques du roi*, pp. 149-61 (pp. 159-60).

gagner et persuader son monde.²⁸ The empress's letters fit comfortably within a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discourse that counted eloquence and rhetorical force amongst the inherent attributes of the exemplary monarch.

Catherine was in fact quite well read, and letter writing and letter reading occupied an important place in her education. From her early days she studied French language, manners, and seventeenth-century literature with her governess Elisabeth Cardel, alongside religious training in German under the supervision of a Pietist pastor. A notebook from 1742 shows the thirteen-year-old Sophie Auguste copying out letters from the correspondence of Madame de Sévigné's cousin, Bussy-Rabutin.²⁹ A year later she was already engaging in polite correspondence touching on literary and philosophical themes: two letters dated 1743 survive from a three-way correspondence between Sophie, her mother Johanna Elisabeth, and the Swedish Count Henning Adolf Gyllenborg. In them, Sophie reflects on 'l'esclavage des Femmes', which she denies, and comments on a quotation from Voltaire in Gyllenborg's unfortunately lost letter, but in a manner that suggests she may have already been familiar with the *Lettres philosophiques* (1734).³⁰ A few years later, Madame de Sévigné's letters played an essential role in Grand Duchess Catherine's self-education. She cites them in her

²⁸ Dachkova, *Mon histoire*, pp. 156-57.

²⁹ Moscow, Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv rossiiskoi federatsii, F. 728, op. 1, d. 117 (Pismennye uprazhneniya v kalligrafii i frantsuzskom yazyke printsessy Angalt-Tserbskoi (vposledstvii imperatritsy Ekateriny II)). I have not been able to consult the exercise book in person, but a photograph can be found here: <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Catherine_II's_child_calligraphy_exercises_\(1742\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Catherine_II's_child_calligraphy_exercises_(1742).jpg)> [accessed 22 August 2015]. The image shows a copy, recognisably in the young Catherine's hand, of letter to Bussy from the Comtesse de Fiesque, which was printed in *Nouvelles lettres de messire Roger de Rabutin, comte de Bussy [...]*, 3 vols (Paris: Florentin Delaulne, 1709), I, pp. 31-33. Another image from the notebook was posted at the following site <<http://romanovy.rusarchives.ru/ekaterina-2/pismennye-uprazhneniya-printsessy-sofii-avgusty-frederiki-angalt-tserbstskoi.html>> [accessed September 2014], but it has since been removed. It showed a different page from the notebook, containing another letter from S.A.R. Mademoiselle to Bussy, printed in *Nouvelles lettres de messire Roger de Rabutin*, I, p. 2.

³⁰ 'je trouve que vous employées les parolles de Voltaire, que Vous cité dans vôtre Lettres mieux que l'Auteur, lequel s'en sert quand il parle de la Religion à un de ses amis' (Erik Amburger, 'Katharina II. und Graf Gyllenborg. Zwei Jugendbriefe der Prinzessin Sophie von Zerbst', *Zeitschrift für Osteuropäische Geschichte*, 7 (1933), 87-98 (pp. 96-98)).

memoirs as the stepping stone from novels, the proverbial form of frivolous reading in the eighteenth century, to the more solid Enlightenment fare of Voltaire's works: 'le goût des romans me passoit; par hazard les lettres de mad. de Sévigné me tombèrent entre les mains, elles m'amuserent beaucoup; après les avoir dévoré, je me mis à lire les oeuvres de Voltaire, je ne pouvois pas les quitter.'³¹ Sévigné's letters, incidentally, appear in eighteenth-century European and Russian rhetorical manuals: in reading Sévigné's epistles, Catherine was also learning a form of rhetoric.³² Catherine's enjoyment of Voltaire initiated her into a lifelong course of reading the latest literary, historical, legal, and economic productions of her age, including standard works of the Enlightenment like those of Bayle and Montesquieu. Sévigné's letters, meanwhile, remained alongside the works of those authors in Catherine's portable library. The letter was an essential medium in the education of this young enlightened monarch: the sociable yet literary correspondence of the worldly woman led Catherine on to more serious reading matter. The striving for greatness began with letters and the enjoyment of literature.

In addition, Catherine's classical learning should not be underestimated. It is true that she knew neither Latin nor Greek, but her letters show, for example, that she read Homer in Russian and herself translated Plutarch into Russian in the company of her favourite, Platon Zubov.³³ Of the thirty-four books listed in the catalogue of her portable library, three are Latin authors, presumably in French translation: Tacitus,

³¹ *Sochineniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II: na osnovanii podlinnykh rukopisei*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, 12 vols (St. Petersburg: Tip. Imp. Akademii nauk, 1901-1908), XII, p. 105.

³² M. N. Muravev, *Institutiones Rhetoricæ: A Treatise of Russian Sentimentalist*, ed. by Andrew Kahn (Oxford: Willem A. Meeuws, 1995), pp. 3, 95-96.

³³ To Voltaire, 8 February 1777 (OS), D20574; to Grimm, 14 September 1790 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 496.

Vegetius, and Aulus Gellius.³⁴ Two more books on the list provide accounts of the Roman world: Montesquieu's *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1734) and Conyers Middleton's *History of the Life of M. Tullius Cicero* (1741), which she designates by the title of the French translation by the abbé Prévost, *Histoire de Cicéron* (1743). Catherine incontestably saw in these latter two books models for her own conduct. In her memoirs, she recounts how her former correspondent Count Gyllenborg met her again in St. Petersburg in the months between her betrothal and marriage. Finding her absorbed in frivolities, he sought to recover the intelligent young letter writer he once knew. In a standard eighteenth-century argument, he sought to inspire her to emulate classical examples of greatness: telling her that 'votre génie est né pour les grandes actions', he recommended that she read Plutarch's *Lives*, the life of Cicero, and Montesquieu's *Considérations*. These recommendations did not immediately make an impression: Catherine obtained a life of Cicero in German, probably Johann Adolph Hofmann's *Das Leben des ehemaligen römischen Bürgermeisters Marcus Tullius Cicero*, but it bored her, as did Montesquieu; she read Plutarch for the first time two years later.³⁵ But the later evidence cited above shows that Gyllenborg's recommendations eventually took effect as Catherine educated herself and began to take action in pursuit of greatness. At the same time, Gyllenborg's three recommendations converge on an essential figure for understanding Catherine's epistolary rhetoric of Enlightenment greatness: Cicero.

³⁴ 'Imperatrítsa Ekaterína II. Istoricheskie materialy, khranyashchiesya v Biblioteke dvortsa goroda Pavlovska', *Russkaya starina*, 9 (1874), 37-56 (pp. 47-50).

³⁵ *Sochineniya imperatrítsy Ekateríny II*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, xii, pp. 60-61. Hofmann's biography of Cicero was published at the end of a German translation of *De Officiis*: M. T. Cicero, *Drey Bücher von der Menschlichen Pflicht aus dem Lateinischen übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen wie auch mit des Cicero Leben erläutert von Johann Adolph Hofmann*, ed. by Johann Christoph Gottsched (Hamburg: sel. Felginers Wittwe und J. C. Bohn, 1742).

Petrarch and Erasmus's rediscovery and renovation of the Ciceronian model catalysed the birth of modern epistolary writing and gave rise to what Alain Viala has called 'l'éloquence épistolaire' or 'lettres des hommes illustres', a kind of letter writing that sought to prove points, in the tradition of judicial oratory, to a scholarly public beyond a missive's ostensible addressee.³⁶ If this type of epistolary writing for 'hommes illustres' had long since passed by Catherine's time, Cicero was still the eighteenth century's paragon of how a great man ought to write letters. Cicero was the Enlightenment's 'real favourite' figure from antiquity: Voltaire, whom Catherine called her 'maître', identified with him so much that he reincarnated Cicero on the stage in private productions of his own play, *Rome sauvée*.³⁷ The age of Enlightenment, though, created its own Ciceronian epistolary ideal, with which Catherine's reading would have familiarised her. Specifically, Enlightenment letter writers found in him a model for how to write missives that combined historical greatness with familiarity and charm.

According to Elena Russo, late Enlightenment thinkers for the first time proclaimed in their theoretical writings an incompatibility between Cicero's *sermo facetus* (jovial conversation) and *contentio orationis* (public oratory).³⁸ But in letters they continued to look to him for guidance on reconciling the two. Geneviève Haroche-Bouzinac has argued that, if Voltaire's letters owe little stylistically to Cicero, he remained 'fidèle à l'esprit du modèle cicéronien' in his familiar correspondence: 'la relation entre l'homme public et l'homme privé reste fortement ordonnée. Même dans les échanges intimes, le moi social confère à la lettre sa dignité en imposant silence au

³⁶ Alain Viala, 'La Genèse des formes épistolaires en français et leurs sources latines et européennes: essai de chronologie distinctive (XVI^e-XVII^e s.)', *Revue de littérature comparée*, 55, 2 (April 1981), 168-83 (pp. 169-73).

³⁷ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 2 vols (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1967-70), 1: *The Rise of Modern Paganism*, p. 105; Douglas A. Day, 'Voltaire and Cicero', *Revue de littérature comparée*, 39, 1 (January 1965), 31-43 (p. 33).

³⁸ Russo, *Styles of Enlightenment*, pp. 17-18. These terms come from Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans. by Walter Miller (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1913), p. 217 (2.14.48).

moi plus secret.’³⁹ Catherine resembled her ‘maître’ in her letters: even in her most intimate letters, her imperial persona never entirely disappears. Like Cicero in the extant corpus of his letters, Catherine is driven by public concerns throughout her correspondence: both she and Cicero used their letters to cultivate relationships and manage the political jockeying and political crises of their day. But Haroche has also asserted that Cicero’s letters participated in the rehabilitation of familiarity as an epistolary value in the second half of the eighteenth century: she describes a ‘nouvelle rhétorique des mœurs’ that passed ‘d’une pratique épistolaire d’ordre et de protocole à la constitution d’un espace amical plus libre dans lequel les correspondants pourront écrire de façon “noble et populaire” et trouver les moyens d’affirmer leur présence individuelle.’⁴⁰ Catherine consistently adopted this new rhetoric of friendship and individuality. The apparent contradiction both in her letters and in the legacy of Cicero between the ever-present public persona and the rhetoric of friendly candour urges us to revisit our assumptions about eighteenth-century epistolarity. Catherine cannot fit into any narrative about genuine intimacy and free expression across the century, since her intimacy is never complete or without public import.⁴¹ Nor can Catherine, one of the most powerful people of her age, fit into the standard feminist analyses of women’s letters in terms of a struggle against constraints on female power and self-expression.⁴² Rather, her letters ask us to reassess our understanding not just of enlightened monarchy, but also of eighteenth-century letter writing: her successful integration of the

³⁹ Geneviève Haroche-Bouzinac, *Voltaire dans ses lettres de jeunesse, 1711-1733: la formation d’un épistolier au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1992), p. 150.

⁴⁰ Geneviève Haroche, “Familier comme une épître de Cicéron”. Familiarité dans la lettre au tournant du XVII^e et XVIII^e siècle’, in *La Lettre à la croisée de l’individuel et du social*, ed. by Mireille Bossis (Paris: Kimé, 1994), pp. 17-24 (p. 23).

⁴¹ Marie-Claire Grassi, *L’Art de la lettre au temps de La Nouvelle Héloïse et du Romantisme* (Genève: Slatkine, 1994), p. 101.

⁴² Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, ‘Introduction’, in *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth C. Goldsmith (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), pp. vii-xiii (p. xii).

sermo facetus into the pursuit of public aims points us back, via Cicero, to the continual balancing act of Enlightenment epistolary taste.

There is no evidence, unfortunately, whether she read Cicero's letters separately or intensively, even though several French translations were available and, in the 1780s and 1790s, excerpts from Cicero's correspondence began to appear in Russian translation and enter Russian epistolary manuals.⁴³ Middleton's *Life of Cicero*, in any case, gives substantial excerpts from the correspondence, so Catherine would have certainly have been familiar with them through Middleton. Additionally, Catherine cannot have missed the important analysis of Cicero's letters that appeared in both Middleton's biography of Cicero and the *Encyclopédie*. The Chevalier de Jaucourt's article on 'Lettres des Sciences, (*Littérat.*)' in the *Encyclopédie* posits Cicero's letters as the only good letters in existence: 'Nous n'avons de vraiment bonnes *lettres* que celles de ce même Cicéron & d'autres grands hommes de son tems, qu'on a recueillies avec les siennes & les *lettres* de Pline; [...] les premières sur-tout sont admirables & même uniques'.⁴⁴ The rest of the article is devoted to praising Cicero's letters: the text is lifted directly, if slightly abridged, from Middleton's discussion of the letters towards the end of his biography.⁴⁵ The analysis in the *Encyclopédie*, via Middleton, states the three requirements that the best Enlightenment letter writer must somehow balance: illustrious involvement in grand historical events; simplicity, friendliness, and joviality

⁴³ *Odinnatsat pisem raznago sodержaniya, a osoblyvo uteshitelnykh, Iz družeskikh Tsitseronovykh pisem vybrannyya*, trans. by Kondraty Orlov (Moscow: Universitetskaya tipografiya, u N. Novikova, 1784); P. I. Bogdanovich, *Novyi i polnyi pismovnik [...] S prisovokupleniem perechnya mnogikh pisem znamenitykh novykh i drevnikh inostrannykh pisatelei, kak to: [...] iz drevnikh: Pliniya, Seneki, Tsitserona i prochikh naiproslavivshikhsya muzhei* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Bogdanovicha, 1791). For more on the Russian reception of the Latin cultural heritage, including parallels between Catherine and a variety of classical homologues, see Andrew Kahn, 'Readings of Imperial Rome from Lomonosov to Pushkin', *Slavic Review*, 52, 4 (Winter 1993), 745-68.

⁴⁴ *Encyclopédie*, IX, pp. 411-12 (p. 411).

⁴⁵ Conyers Middleton, *The History of the Life of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (London: W. Innys and R. Manby, 1741), III, pp. 311-317.

of style; and an apparent refusal of publicity that prepares the letters' success when they finally reach a broader public after the writer's death.

The first two requirements reproduce the two-sided aesthetic of greatness and light-hearted socialising. Cicero's letters had historical value because their author was a perspicacious man at the heart of affairs: the letters 'contiennent les matériaux les plus authentiques de l'histoire de son siècle, & dévoilent les motifs de tous les grands événemens qui s'y passerent, & dans lesquels il joua lui-même un si beau rôle.' In his letters, Cicero takes part in real events as they unfold: 'Il frappe toujours au but, prévoit le danger, & annonce les événemens'. But the letters also conform to the Enlightenment desire for naturalness, simplicity, and joviality in conversation: 'Dans ses *lettres* familières, il ne court point après l'élégance ou le choix des termes, il prend le premier qui se présente, & qui est d'usage dans la conversation; son enjouement est aisé, naturel, & coule du sujet'.⁴⁶ Eighteenth-century readers thus valued the stylistic simplicity and light tone of Cicero's letters, in contrast to the carefully worked language of his speeches.⁴⁷ The duality of Catherine's style returns: how can one be both historically great and joyously conversational at once? Catherine's contemporaries praised her for finding just such a point of equilibrium in her epistolary style: in his 'Portrait de feu Sa Majesté Imp. de toutes les Russies' (1797), the prince de Ligne summed up her letters in precisely these terms: 'Toutes les lettres que j'ai d'elle, sont remplies de grandes idées, fortes, prodigieusement lumineuses, critiques quelquefois

⁴⁶ *Encyclopédie*, IX, p. 411.

⁴⁷ Some modern commentators on eighteenth-century epistolary style do not seem to make the same distinction, as in Geneviève Haroche-Bouzinac's analysis of Voltaire and his Jesuit teachers' rejection of the Ciceronian stylistic model, 'le style redondant, digne et lié de Cicéron', in favour of Seneca's (Haroche-Bouzinac, *Voltaire dans ses lettres de jeunesse*, p. 147). It is not clear that the distinction corresponds to that between rhythmic and non-rhythmic prose: Cicero restricts the latter usually to his letters to his household and to his friend and brother-in-law Atticus, and Middleton and Jaucourt praise the gaiety exemplified by a letter to Antony.

avec du trait, surtout lorsque quelque chose en Europe l'indignait; et puis de la gaîté, et de la bonhomie.'⁴⁸

Middleton/Jaucourt added a precondition for the other two features of good letters: the best letters reveal the most information in the 'natural' style because they were, supposedly, written only for their addressees, not for a wider public: 'Mais ce qui rend les *lettres* de Cicéron très-précieuses, c'est qu'il ne les destina jamais à être publiques [...] Ainsi nous y trouvons l'homme au naturel, sans déguisement & sans affectation'.⁴⁹ For Middleton/Jaucourt, Cicero's letters are models because his temporary refusal of publicity enhanced the style and content of the letters, preparing their later glory. It was probably true that Cicero did not intend his letters to be published: as a recent scholar of Cicero's letters put it, 'the publication of letters was still unusual enough in his day that he probably did not hold that possibility constantly in view as he wrote—surely less so than a British aristocrat of the eighteenth century, when epistolary collections had become a fashion.'⁵⁰ Catherine too refused publication during her lifetime, but, like many of her contemporaries, Catherine sought to do consciously what the ancients did as a matter of course: she almost always wrote as though privately, but she very frequently had in mind posterity as a possible reader. Moreover, the evasion of publication, which she shared, did not imply absolute secrecy: as typical of early-modern and eighteenth-century letters in general, Catherine often counted on various forms of intermediate publicity such as discussion, collective reading, and occasionally manuscript circulation of her letters. Middleton/Jaucourt highlight a discourse idealising privacy that, in eighteenth-century practice, went hand-

⁴⁸ Prince Charles-Joseph de Ligne, *Correspondances russes*, ed. by Alexandre Stroeve and Jerom Vercruysse, 2 vols (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), I, pp. 114-15.

⁴⁹ *Encyclopédie*, IX, p. 411.

⁵⁰ White, *Cicero in Letters*, p. 91.

in-hand with writing purposefully good letters for intermediate forms of circulation or eventual public aims. The peculiarly eighteenth-century play of publicity, by which one might seek different kinds of admiration from various audiences in the present and in future centuries, is a third axis on which to examine Catherine's letters.

This thesis examines Catherine's letters as unique corpus within this specific eighteenth-century rhetorical and epistolary framework. Rhetoric as a notion has always been associated with stylistic embellishments, on the one hand, and the persona of the orator, on the other.⁵¹ It moreover demands the establishment of a particular relationship between speaker and addressee. Catherine used her style, her persona, and careful monitoring of her relations with her audiences to attain strategic ends and, more importantly, to generate an image of herself in her letters. In her personal, sociable style and creative use of the epistolary form, in her projected image of grandeur, and in her careful control of the circulation of her letters, Catherine wrote to win over her contemporaries and future generations. In her curious juxtapositions of charming chatter with serious exertions of power, she sought to persuade her readers not only that they should do what she wanted at a given moment, but also that her letters offered insights into an all-around likeable and admirable character, deserving of adherence in the present and admiration in the future.

Chapters One through Three offer a rhetoric of Catherine's letters, describing the stylistic devices she used and the ways in which she inscribed in her epistolary texts a coherent and attractive image of herself. Chapter One explores Catherine's personal style, its sources in seventeenth-century gallant salon culture and in eighteenth-century comic literature, and its deployment as a literary style, a practice of sociability, and a

⁵¹ Aristotle designates the speaker's projection of a moral character as the first and 'most effective means of proof' in a persuasive speech (*The 'Art' of Rhetoric*, ed. and trans. by John Henry Freese (London and Cambridge, MA: William Heinemann and Harvard University Press, 1959), pp. 17, 169-73 (I. 2. 4; II. 1)).

means of charming her readers. Chapter Two looks in-depth at Catherine's skill with the epistolary form and her masterful use of every part of the letter to balance assertions of her authority with affability. Chapter Three lays out how Catherine wrote her letters to present herself as a 'great man' in the taste of the Enlightenment. Chapter Four then explores how Catherine ensured that this combined epistolary image of charm and grandeur reached relevant publics. She navigated between public and private as she worked in a genre well suited for maintaining relationships with narrow circles, rather than for publication. Her epistolary style and image helped her to seek a reputation amongst the European elite, while thereby managing her renown as a public celebrity; in so doing, she also laid the foundations for the glory she hoped to receive from posterity when her letters and deeds were examined and evaluated in historical context. Finally, Chapter Five addresses the problem of the final years of Catherine's reign. It is typically assumed that Catherine grew intellectually weak and reactionary in her later years, responding harshly to the French Revolution and falling under the pernicious influence of weak minds like Platon Zubov. Catherine's letters, however, show a different picture. In the face of a Revolutionary ideology that threatened both the social preconditions of her elite correspondences and the role of greatness that she had sought to enact in her letters, Catherine's letter-writing practices remained quite constant even as she reinterpreted their significance in light of the changing European cultural and political situation. To the very end of her life, Catherine practiced sociable correspondence as a literary entertainment and a display of her affiliation with the cultivated elite of Europe, while at the same time she used her letters with great strategic acumen to assert her persona as an outstanding individual of her age.

CHAPTER ONE

CATHERINE'S PERSONAL STYLE:

SOCIABILITY, HUMOUR, AND IRONY IN THE CORRESPONDENCE

Catherine the Great's personal style poses acutely a perennial problem of reading letters: to what extent do epistolary texts pertain to literature, or to what extent are they reflections of the letter writers' personalities or instruments of their social practices? Scholarship in the past few decades has demonstrated that these multiple facets of the letter are inextricably linked. Discussing correspondences as a 'literature of the self', Bernard Bray has highlighted how only the literary aspects of correspondence, such as composition, vocabulary, and humour, give it lasting value as an *œuvre* rather than passing interest as a source of historical trivia. Moreover, he emphasises how documentary and literary value are not opposed to one another: rather, good writing and useful historical information go hand-in-hand, both existing within a particular socio-cultural framework.¹ Focusing instead on the expression of self in letters, Bernard Beugnot has explored how the letter neither permits free expression of a pre-existing personality nor demands complete subjection to conventional codes: rather, letter writers reinvent themselves by adopting often theatrical personae and postures.² Each letter writer creates his or her own personality by inventing a unique 'epistolary

¹ Bernard Bray, 'Les correspondances: une littérature du moi entre modes, modèles et mentalités', in *Épistoliers de l'âge classique: l'art de la correspondance chez Madame de Sévigné et quelques prédécesseurs, contemporains et héritiers* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2007), pp. 21-35 (pp. 25-26).

² Bernard Beugnot, 'De l'invention épistolaire: à la manière de soi', *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur*, Beiheft 18: *L'Épistolarité à travers les siècles: geste de communication et/ou d'écriture*, ed. by Mireille Bossis and Charles A. Porter (1990), 27-38.

system', as Bray has called it, within a particular culture's social and literary practices of correspondence.³

Perhaps the single defining feature of Catherine's personal style is a cheerful tone, conveying sociable, witty, often teasing good humour. It distinguishes her personal interventions from the dull routine of official letters to subordinates, personalising such letters and charming her readers. Almost any letter that breaks with pure formality can furnish an example. When her subordinate, Jakob Sievers, complained of being overwhelmed and neglected by the empress in his work as governor of Tver, Catherine encouraged him with gently mocking baby-talk: 'j'ai vu par Vos lettres et Vos extraits de journaux [sic] que Vous n'aviés pas besoin d'être soutenu sous les bras pour marcher et que Vous êtes joli et grand garçon [sic] par Vous même.'⁴ Her friendly, cheerful voice also appears in her letters to other monarchs, to famous French writers and other Western correspondents, and to lovers. Her teasing familiarity and witty play with convention surfaces even in letters where she had no apparent need to show off, such as in those to her son and daughter-in-law: she closed a note home from Finland in 1783, 'Je Vous embrasse tous les deux; ma chère fille appliquera de ma part un baiser sur le teint blanc de sa belle-soeur, la place je la laisse à son choix.'⁵ Good cheer and irony would therefore seem to be nothing but peculiarities of Catherine's character. In many letters Catherine herself identified cheerfulness as a distinctive and dominant feature of her natural character: she told Voltaire in 1772, 'le fond de mon caractère est extrêmement guay'; Friedrich Melchior Grimm in 1778, 'De

³ Bernard Bray, 'Quelques aspects du système épistolaire de M^{me} de Sévigné', *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 3-4 (May-August 1969), 491-505.

⁴ 10 February 1776 (OS), Karl Ludwig Blum, *Des Grafen Jakob Johann Sievers Denkwürdigkeiten zur Geschichte Rußlands*, 4 vols (Leipzig and Heidelberg: C.S. Winter, 1857-58), II, p. 548.

⁵ 18 June 1783 (OS), *Sbornik imperatorskago russkago istoricheskago obshchestva* [henceforth *SIRIO*], 136 vols (St. Petersburg: Imp. Akademiya Nauk, 1874-1916), xv, p. 4.

la gaîte! C'est mon fort'; and Sénac de Meilhan in 1791: 'Mon naturel est gai et franc'.⁶ Yet these self-descriptions ought to put the reader on guard: classical aesthetics required that the height of art be presented as mere nature. Furthermore, the epistolary writer always has a choice of how to present him- or herself. Catherine was legendary as a consummate actress: analysing Catherine's self-presentation in her memoirs, Monika Greenleaf writes of her 'two most distinctive features, her famous combination of masculine intellect and feminine charm, and her princely talent for strategic dissembling and theatricality'.⁷ Her letters to a wide range of correspondents through the decades show that, in keeping with those defining personality traits, she selected a charmingly light but sharply witty tone to characterise her distinctive epistolary persona.

Catherine's letters and memoirs hint at the effort by which she honed this inborn inclination as a desirable and useful social skill. She explained to the German noblewoman Johanna Bielke, for example, that laughter had helped her to overcome the many difficulties she had faced as grand duchess: 'il faut être gaie, il n'y a que cela qui fait qu'on surmonte et supporte tout'.⁸ In her memoirs, Catherine explained how she discovered the power of gaiety to disarm potential enemies at court. Her good humour won over the initially hostile entourage assigned to her by the Empress Elizabeth: 'En tout ceci mon humeur gaie me servoit beaucoup, car tous ces Argus souvent étoient amusés des propos que je leur tenois, et se déridaient peu à peu malgré eux'.⁹ Similarly, in the tense political atmosphere of the Seven Years' War, when Catherine's political

⁶ Catherine to Voltaire, 17 October 1772 (OS), Voltaire, *Correspondence and related documents*, ed. by Theodore Besterman, 2nd edn, 51 vols (Geneva, Banbury, Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968-77), in *Electronic Enlightenment* <<http://www.e-enlightenment.com/index.html>>, D17983; Catherine to Grimm, 8 June 1778 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 91; Catherine to Meilhan, [May 1791], *Sochineniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II: na osnovanii podlinnykh rukopisei*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, 12 vols (St. Petersburg: Tip. Imp. Akademii nauk, 1901-1908), XI, p. 543.

⁷ Monika Greenleaf, 'Performing Autobiography: The Multiple Memoirs of Catherine the Great (1756-96)', *Russian Review*, 63, 3 (July 2004), 407-26 (pp. 422-23).

⁸ 26 August 1766 (OS), *SIRIO*, X, p. 103.

⁹ *Sochineniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, XII, p. 271.

sympathies were viewed with suspicion and her relations with her husband were deteriorating, she threw a lavish party for her husband, Grand Duke Peter, at Oranienbaum. By her account, the guests were suitably beguiled, exclaiming ‘elle [la Grande Duchesse] prenoit plaisir à nous faire danser, manger, promener; [...] elle étoit gaie’. She states explicitly the tactics behind her gaiety: ‘enfin on m’avoit découvert ce jour-là des qualités qu’on ne m’avoit pas connu, et je désarmois mes ennemis. C’étoit là mon but’.¹⁰ Catherine’s personal epistolary style, then, was one expression of a larger strategy to exert social and political charm through a light, cheery tone.

Catherine’s personal tone of good cheer might therefore be read as a product of a particular social environment: her letters extended the sociable practices of her court, situating the empress and her capital on the map of Europe as a centre of elite, fashionable amusements. Her ‘small Hermitage’, a term applied both to her favourite retreat in the Winter Palace built in 1764-1775 and to the ostentatiously informal gatherings held there, best exemplifies Catherine’s institution of cultivated, salon-style entertainments in keeping with her public image and her private taste.¹¹ Catherine composed rules for behaviour at these gatherings and hung them in the gallery leading from her personal apartments to the Small Hermitage: they therefore epitomised the link between her personality and her practice of sociability. They clearly showed her intent to import the rules of politeness derived from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French culture: ranks could be laid aside within this elite circle, where people were courteous but skilled in tasteful mockery and other ‘innocent entertainments’. The rules

¹⁰ *Sochineniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, XII, p. 395.

¹¹ On the history of the Small Hermitage, see *Ermitazh: istoriya stroitelstva i arkhitektura zdaniy*, ed. by B. B. Piotrovsky (Leningrad: Stroiizdat. Leningradskoe otd-nie, 1989), pp. 313-48 (for the location of the rules, p. 322); on this ‘forme de sociabilité par en haut’ in the context of Russia high society, see Wladimir Berelowitch, ‘La vie mondaine sous Catherine II’, in *Catherine II et l’Europe*, ed. by Anita Davidenkoff (Paris: Institut d’études slaves, 1997), pp. 99-106 (pp. 104-106).

exemplified Catherine's constant striving to polish the manners of her nobility and thereby to police, in the eighteenth-century sense, her society and her state. The third rule demanded from visitors the sociable gaiety characteristic of Catherine's usual humorous style: 'Быть веселым, однако ничего не портить, и не ломать, и ничего не грызть.'¹² As late as the 1790s, foreign diplomats remarked that, for instance, comedies were the only genre allowed to be performed at the Hermitage, 'the empress being unable to endure the emotions of a tragedian', and that the empress offered special tours of her collections as 'at the country estate of a private individual'.¹³ Participants thus read the style of Catherine's Hermitage gatherings both as a manifestation of her personality, which shunned the tragic and favoured the comic, and as an imitation of non-courtly sociability.

In her letters, Catherine's style sustained the diplomacy of charm that she undertook regularly at the Hermitage. Evocations of the Small Hermitage and its style maintained the sociable ties that also facilitated the practice of foreign affairs in the eighteenth century. In 1771, as the Prussians and Russians were preparing the first partition of Poland, Catherine politely suggested that Prince Henry of Prussia had been the soul of the Hermitage and its mock academy the previous winter: 'Le souvenir de la même saison que le séjour de V.A.R. vivifiait l'année passée, nous a rendu la comparaison de celle de la présente année insupportable. L'hermitage est vide, l'académie annéantie, à peine les membres sourient-t-ils, et cela encore rarement.'¹⁴

¹² The rules appear in original Russian and in English translation in *The Treasures of Catherine the Great*, ed. by Mikhail B. Piotrovski (London, New York: Thames & Hudson, Harry N. Abrams, 2000), p. 17. On the practice of 'Enlightened Sociability' into which Catherine was tapping, see Peter France, 'Polish, Police, *Polis*', in *Politeness and Its Discontents: Problems in French Classical Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 53-73 (pp. 61-62).

¹³ The Swedish ambassador, Baron Stedingk, and that of Louis XVI, Count Esterhazy, are quoted in Simon Dixon, *Catherine the Great* (London: Profile, 2009), pp. 295, 302.

¹⁴ Catherine to Henry of Prussia, 16 December 1771 (OS), *Briefwechsel zwischen Heinrich Prinz von Preußen und Katharina II. von Rußland*, ed. by R. Krauel (Berlin: Alexander Duncker, 1903), p. 80.

The Polish partition soon showed that such shared sociability, prolonged through epistolary politeness, could have significant diplomatic effect. Invocations of the Hermitage also appeared in Catherine's most personal letters: she not infrequently wrote letters there, indicating the location to her knowing correspondents and thus giving them the sense of entering into her intimate space. For example, she sent loving greetings to Potemkin 'из Эрмитажа, где нет камер-пажа' in 1774, and, after the death of her beloved Aleksandr Lanskoy in 1784, Catherine began using a 'cabinet de dix toises' in the Hermitage as her study. Although it was initially a place of refuge from grief, she developed 'un grand tendre' for the place and later returned to it to write subsequent letters to Grimm.¹⁵ The practice of correspondence thus sometimes took place in the very same space as Catherine's practice of court sociability: her tone similarly reflected the inextricability of the two practices as extensions of one another. Catherine's letters, like her Hermitage, mingled the personal, the sociable, and the political in ever shifting proportions and combinations.

Yet the epistolary expression of Catherine's personality and the fashionable shape that she gave to her sociability derived first and foremost from literature. Catherine's literary tastes were the determining factor in the creation of her style, the origins of which can be traced most clearly to the 'lettres galantes' described and idealised in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century epistolary theory. Not only were 'gallant letters' the most literary, they were also meant for semi-public consumption within precisely the kinds of circles whose approval Catherine sought: courtly and

¹⁵ Catherine to Potemkin, [10 April 1774 (OS)], *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin: Lichnaya perepiska 1769-1791*, ed. by V. S. Lopatin (Moscow: Nauka, 1997), p. 22; Catherine to Grimm, 25 April and 20 August 1785, 26 November 1787 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, pp. 337, 361, 426.

aristocratic circles, salons and groups of cultivated *honnêtes gens*.¹⁶ One late seventeenth-century theoretician, La Fèvrerie, identified the Enlightenment's classical epistolary hero, Cicero, and Madame de Sévigné's favourite letter writer, Voiture, as the two inventors of these most agreeable letters, 'remplies de sel Attique' and possessing 'toute la douceur & l'élégance de Térence, & l'enjouement de Lucien.'¹⁷ An outstanding proponent of 'galanterie', Madeleine de Scudéry, concurred that wit and gentle mockery best suited this kind of letter: 'C'est proprement en celles-là où l'esprit doit avoir toute son étendue; [...] le jugement ne paraît pas si sévère qu'on ne puisse quelquefois mêler d'agréables folies parmi des choses plus sérieuses: on y peut donc railler ingénieusement'.¹⁸ Epistolary manuals and theoreticians listed 'lettres galantes' as a type of letter alongside business letters, love letters, letters of condolence, and so forth. Manuals like that of Grimarest instructed letter writers in the lively but refined wit that suited such letters: 'Les Lettres galantes ont un caractere particulier. Ce sont celles où, par nos expressions, nous ajoûtons l'enjouement aux endroits qui en sont susceptibles.'¹⁹ But Catherine did not claim to be writing 'lettres galantes', nor did she follow its precepts unfailingly: even the term 'galant' appears quite rarely under her pen. Catherine probably did not study the recommendations or classifications offered in the manuals. Rather, she absorbed this tradition from numerous works by her literary predecessors and contemporaries, reassembling and customising their techniques playfully, artfully, and often to great effect.

¹⁶ Bernard Bray, 'Le style épistolaire: la leçon de Madame de Sévigné', in *Épistoliers de l'âge classique*, pp. 317-30 (p. 318); Delphine Denis, 'Notice' to Madeleine de Scudéry, 'De la manière d'écrire des lettres', in *De l'air galant et autres conversations: Pour une étude de l'archive galante*, ed. by Delphine Denis (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1998), pp. 139-58 (p. 145).

¹⁷ La Fèvrerie, 'Du stile epistolaire', *Extraordinaire du Mercure galant*, 23 (July 1683), 3-67 (pp. 28-29).

¹⁸ Scudéry, 'De la manière d'écrire des lettres', p. 154.

¹⁹ Jean-Léonor Le Gallois de Grimarest, *Traité sur la maniere d'ecrire des lettres, et sur le ceremonial: Avec un discours sur ce qu'on appelle Usage, dans la Langue Françoisse* (La Haye: Adrian Moetjens, 1709), p. 46.

In keeping with eighteenth-century elite taste, her list of sources began with the gallant letter writers of the seventeenth century. As already discussed in the Introduction, the young Sophie Auguste's education at home involved copying out letters from the correspondence of Madame de Sévigné's cousin, Bussy-Rabutin. The young Grand Duchess Catherine's first readings were novels, presumably including the gallant novels of Madame de Lafayette and others. Madame de Sévigné and Voltaire came next and led her on to more substantial and serious fare, although Catherine never lost her taste for novels, especially comic ones.²⁰ Her letters show that she appropriated and adapted the stylistic features of Madame de Sévigné's letters, which were already appreciated in the eighteenth century as surpassing those of her gallant predecessors. In her choice of a cheerful, witty, and sociable personal style derived from Sévigné, Catherine followed the most obvious model of epistolary writing consecrated by her age. Further sources allowed Catherine to elaborate on features already present in this style: the influence of Voltaire gave an Enlightenment twist to the irony and satirical gaze already hinted at in Sévigné's letters, despite the contrary admonitions of theoreticians of gallant letter writing. Catherine's ongoing reading fueled her epistolary play throughout her life. From 1777 onwards, the letters to Grimm show her enthusiasm for Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, which she preferred in the German rather than the French translation.²¹ It led her to German comic texts that consciously imitated Sterne's style, such as Friedrich Nicolai's *Das Leben und die Meinungen des Herrn Magister Sebaldus Nothanker* [*The Life and Opinions of Master Sebaldus Nothanker*, 1773-1776].²² Catherine's Parisian correspondents encouraged this taste: she received Diderot's Shandean text, *Jacques le Fataliste*, not just as a feuilleton in the

²⁰ *Sochineniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, XII, p. 105.

²¹ 14 December 1777, 8 May 1779 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 72, 138.

²² Catherine to Grimm, 23 June 1781 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 208.

Correspondance littéraire, but also with autograph additions made by the author himself specially for her.²³ The influence of Sterne and his imitators developed in Catherine's letters Sévigné's predisposition toward enumerations, digressions, and abrupt transitions. Catherine thus modernised and reappropriated her literary sources to form her own style: the present chapter analyses her techniques, their sources, and their importance in Catherine's creation of a charming, even seductive epistolary persona. These techniques marked Catherine's personal intervention in a wide range of correspondences, serving to distinguish her voice from the dull language of official letters. But they also reflected her personality and her desire to charm: it is therefore in her love letters that this voice is heard at its most intensely personal and in its most explicitly seductive mode. The primary rhetorical devices that compose Catherine's personal and personable epistolary style fall into three categories: wit, variety, and irony.

Wit

A ubiquitous and polysemic term in the eighteenth century, wit ('esprit') as a stylistic effect was something to be striven for but not exaggerated. Then as now, it was defined in Voltaire's *Encyclopédie* article on the subject as the use of 'une métaphore, une figure dont le sens soit clair & l'expression énergique', or simply 'un tour nouveau; c'est en laissant deviner sans peine une partie de sa pensée'.²⁴ As seen above in the words of Madeleine de Scudéry, wit found a particular home in the 'lettre galante'; Grimarest's instructions on how to write a gallant letter might as well be a definition of

²³ Jean Varloot, "Jacques le Fataliste" et la "Correspondance littéraire", *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 4 (October-December 1965), 629-36 (pp. 632-33).

²⁴ Voltaire, 'Esprit, (*Philos. & Belles-Lettres*)', in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, ed. by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, 17 vols (Paris: Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1751-72), V, p. 974.

wit as the art of clever inversions: ‘J’ai remarqué que l’on y réussissoit, en substituant, à la place des termes propres, des expressions empruntées.’ Exalted, serious concepts should be conveyed ‘avec enjouement par des expressions communes & figurées’, while less noble ideas should be articulated in more elevated language, ‘car la principale fin de la galanterie est de plaire.’²⁵ Like so many of her contemporaries whose cultural values derived from those of seventeenth-century ‘galanterie’, Catherine adopted wit as a sort of second nature.²⁶ Her intimates and correspondents alike recognised her constant pursuit of wit: when Madame Geoffrin commented in a letter to Stanislas Poniatowski that ‘Je crains que son esprit et l’amour du bel esprit ne l’emportent quelquefois’, Catherine’s former lover replied, ‘On a beaucoup d’esprit là-bas, là-bas [their code-name for Catherine]. Mais on court un peu trop après l’esprit. Cela est vrai.’²⁷ Yet Catherine’s motivations in seeking to be witty were not limited to vanity, as Geoffrin suggests, or even to the desire to please, which Grimarest identifies as the aim of *galanterie* and which was indeed a primary motive for Catherine. She sought to prove that the nation that she led, like its ruler, possessed wit and cultivation. Russian writers under Catherine explored and debated in literature and conduct manuals the need to attain cultural refinement without falling into the ridiculous excesses of gallomania; the Francophone culture emanating from the court therefore attracted a number of more or less veiled satirical barbs. In this context, Catherine consistently presented herself as a model of European, cultivated wit and politeness, while she nonetheless respected and promoted Russian language and history. Her letters, her

²⁵ Grimarest, *Traité sur la manière d’écrire des lettres*, p. 47.

²⁶ Describing the ongoing process by which the wit of a ‘galant homme’ was to be perfected, Alain Viala writes: ‘En termes conceptuels modernes, ce qui est décrit là, c’est la formation d’un *habitus*: les valeurs se sont incorporées en une seconde nature’ (*La France galante: essai historique sur une catégorie culturelle, de ses origines jusqu’à la Révolution* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), p. 137).

²⁷ 9 November and 22 December 1764 (NS), *Correspondance inédite du roi Stanislas-Auguste Poniatowski et de Madame Geoffrin (1764-1777)*, ed. by Charles De Mouÿ (Paris: E. Plon, 1975), pp. 123, 136.

Russian-language comedies and other published writings, and her overall image and behaviour called on her elite to follow her example. She accordingly exercised her wit as a matter of policy as well as tactics, yet she also clearly enjoyed the intellectual and literary game for its own sake. Just as the goals of Catherine's wittiness were multiple, so were its stylistic manifestations.

Among the rhetorical tropes that she employed casually and frequently, simple antiphrasis offers the most basic manner of swapping terms in a striking and humorous way. Often she used basic substitutions to enliven tedious government correspondence: she wrote to Nikita Panin, for example, 'Je vous envoie un gros paquet de relations et de perustration pour vous amuser pendant le chemin.'²⁸ Even such an offhand comment encapsulates the interconnection between the personal, the sociable, and the political in Catherine's correspondence: she could afford to be ironic about business because Panin was a long-standing acquaintance and an unavoidable presence in social life at court, as well as her most prominent minister and her son's tutor. Other equally simple examples show more clearly the proximity between the verbal habits of seventeenth-century gallant literature and Catherine's epistolary efforts to maintain her court as a centre of sociability. Scudéry offered a model gallant *billet*, or short note without epistolary formalities, in her conversation, 'De la manière d'écrire des lettres'; the *billet* included a designation of love by antiphrasis, a technique characteristic of the *précieuse*: 'quand on ne se hait pas'.²⁹ In a letter to a former denizen of the Hermitage, the prince de Ligne, Catherine's description of the newcomers to her gatherings exhibits a seventeenth-century aristocratic emphasis on 'qualité' and 'mérite' and adopts this coquettish mode of designating her new and very young lover Platon Zubov: 'il y a des

²⁸ 11 February 1768 (OS), *Pisma i zapiski imperatritsy Ekateriny Vtoroi k grafu Nikite Ivanovichu Paninu* (Moscow: V Universitetskoi tipografii, 1863), p. 39.

²⁹ 'Clélie au généreux Aronce', in Scudéry, 'De la manière d'écrire des lettres', p. 146.

nouveaux venus[,] des nouveaux nés, qui ne manquent ni de qualité ni de mérite.’³⁰

Love and sociability were best expressed with casual epistolary wit.

In her pursuit of amusing and witty figures of speech, Catherine shared with Madame de Sévigné a propensity for personification. It met Grimarest’s recommendation of swapping the noble and the common: primarily associated with the allegories of epic, panegyric, and other noble genres, personification under Catherine and Sévigné’s pens became a form of witty badinage when deployed in an unexpectedly disrespectful manner or applied to unusual or less-than-noble objects.³¹ A striking example of deflated noble allegory appears in Catherine’s correspondence with Frederick the Great. Dodging Frederick’s insistence on ending her Ottoman war immediately and giving up her territorial gains in the south, Catherine blamed the failure of peace negotiations on Austrian mistrust of Russia: she herself wished for peace, but ‘Cette fille du Ciel est longtems a descendre, la coulisse S’étant accroché a la prevoyance de la Cour de Viene’.³² By portraying the negotiations as an operatic debacle, Catherine implied that only Vienna’s reticence prevented the three courts from performing a glorious spectacle in partitioning Poland; such an event would undoubtedly have been celebrated with such allegorical finery. As for the personification of ignoble objects, Catherine shared with many pet owners, then as now, a tendency to talk about her dogs as real people. In her letters to Grimm, she transformed her dogs into the participants of her sociable circle. Catherine probably did not know Madame de Sévigné’s letter to Pomponne of 1 August 1667, in which the

³⁰ 5 November 1789 (OS), Prince Charles-Joseph de Ligne, *Correspondances russes*, ed. by Alexandre Stroeve and Jeroom Vercruysse, 2 vols (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), I, p. 163.

³¹ Fritz Nies, *Les Lettres de Madame de Sévigné: Conventions du genre et sociologie des publics*, trans. by Michèle Creff (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001), pp. 130-32.

³² 21 August/2 September 1771, Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, I. HA Rep. 96, Nr. 110 P Bd. 2, [n.p.]. Catherine placed a bar over the ‘n’ to indicate a double ‘n’: this was her typical practice and will not be indicated in future quotations from her letters. Printed text in *SIRIO*, XX, p. 310.

marquise described her company at Fresnes, including Madame de Caderousse and Mademoiselle de Sévigné ‘sur le tout, allant et venant par le cabinet comme de petits frelons’, but Catherine certainly knew the letters in which members of Sévigné’s circle added postscripts to her letters to her daughter.³³ Catherine frequently described her dogs as though they were friends and family members animating the space in which she wrote, and she even passed on their respects to her correspondent as though they were human: ‘M. Thomas, sa fille chérie et monsieur fils de Thomas âgé de quatre mois, plus gai, plus fou, plus capricieux et plus impertinent que toute la famille et plus aimable aussi peut-être, vous présentent leurs respects; les voilà autour de moi ronflant à leur aise’.³⁴ Catherine also engaged in the reverse trope, turning humans into dogs and integrating them into her society of anthropomorphised dogs. She used it, for example, to show her sociable connections to subordinates like the diplomat Otto Magnus von Stakelberg, who represented her in Warsaw: ‘Que le Ciel Vous benisse Monsieur le Baron que cette benediction S’etende meme jusque Sur la Meute de Madame Votre épouse, puissiés Vous voir et carresser autant de rejettons de Ses favoris que j’ai le plaisir d’en voir de l’Ami Tom’.³⁵ Both humorous and touching, personification was thus another form of wit that allowed Catherine to charm her correspondents with surprising depictions of common social experiences, from opera to the birth of children.

Catherine made her own image one of the primary targets for witty inversions, a fact which underscores the importance of both her persona and her wit in the correspondence. By feigning modesty and describing herself in apparently common

³³ Madame de Sévigné, *Correspondance*, ed. by Roger Duchêne, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1972-78), I, p. 87. Such ‘apostilles’ or additions from Sévigné’s intimates like M. de Coulanges appear in early editions of her correspondence, such as *Lettres de Madame Rabutin-Chantal, marquise de Sevigné à Madame la Comtesse de Grignan, sa fille*, 2 vols (La Haye: P. Gosse, J. Neaulme & Comp., 1726), I, p. 308.

³⁴ Catherine to Grimm, 3 December 1774 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 11.

³⁵ Catherine to Stackelberg, 5 August 1774 (OS), ‘Pisma Ekateriny II k gr. Stakelbergu 1773-1784 gg.’, *Russkaya starina*, 3, 3 (March 1871), 310-25 (pp. 314-15).

and unflattering terms, Catherine could display a likeable sense of humour about herself even as she proclaimed her greatness and even begged compliments. Many of her self-denigrating poses denied her wit and cultivation even as they revealed those qualities. For instance, she classed herself among the ‘pédants, fouilleurs de chroniques’ to show off her erudition as she worked on her history of Russia: the pedant was the antithesis of the *galant*, the *honnête homme*, and the true *homme de lettres*, but Catherine was confident enough that she embodied those ideals that she could jokingly assume the opposite role.³⁶

Meanwhile her similar role of the ‘ignorante’ epitomises the way in which her epistolary poses were embedded in literature, sociability, and the exercise of power all at once. In her society games at the Hermitage, Catherine drew up her ‘Titres d’ignorant’ (1787), in which she enumerated her claims to ignorance—a form of ironic wit by which she asserted her true intellectual authority. She adopted the persona of no less than Socrates: ‘La profonde preuve de mon ignorance se réduit dans un petit extrait qui n’a que quatre mots précieux; ce Palladium des ignorants consiste à dire en toute humilité là où je manque d’instruction: *Je n’en sais rien*.’³⁷ She did not really think herself ignorant: rather, her feigned humility improved on cleverness and knowledge by making it sociable. The pose derived from the widespread eighteenth-century fashion for mock academies, most famously epitomised in the ‘Sublime Ordre des Lanturelus’ presided over by Madame Geoffrin’s daughter, Madame de La Ferté-Imbault. Although Grimm put Catherine in contact with the Lanturelus, Catherine did not imitate de La Ferté-Imbault’s unsuccessful attempt to give her parodic society an anti-philosophical

³⁶ Catherine to Grimm, 29 August 1794 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 609.

³⁷ *Correspondances russes*, I, p. 99.

ideological bent.³⁸ Rather, Catherine's modest pose can also be traced to works of the *philosophes* themselves, like Voltaire's *Philosophe ignorant* or his 'gens de lettres' who, in the *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*, 'ne proposent ici que des questions'.³⁹ Although it remained unpublished in Catherine's lifetime, Voltaire's 'Déclaration des amateurs, questionneurs, et douteurs', attached to the *Questions*, perfectly matches Catherine's stance: 'Nous déclarons aux savants qu'étant prodigieusement ignorants sur les premiers principes de toutes les choses [...]'.⁴⁰ The Voltairean reference would not have been lost on her audience: it reinforced their sense of cultural superiority expressed in a lighthearted, aristocratically nonchalant way. As in her 'gloutonnerie' for carved gems and other visual arts, Catherine's pose in her letters and in her society literature was akin to that of the Enlightenment amateur or dilettant, who ostentatiously integrated non-professional intellectual pursuits into a practice of sociability.⁴¹ She sought to model such a fashionable attitude to learning in her published journalism like the 'Obshchestva Neznayushchikh, ezhednevnyaya zapiska' ['Daily Record of the Society of the Ignorant'], which appeared in 1783 in the Russian Academy's *Sobesednik lyubitelei rossiiskago slova* [*Interlocutor of Lovers of the Russian Word*]. In both this satirical article and in a letter to Grimm of 1785, Catherine borrowed the label of 'Ignoranti Bambinelli' ['Ignorant Little Children'] from her favourite comic opera, Giovanni

³⁸ *Correspondances russes*, I, pp. 36-37; Maurice Hamon, *Madame de La Ferté-Imbault: Philosophe et femme d'affaires à la cour de Louis XV* (Versailles: Perrin, 2011), pp. 66-74.

³⁹ Voltaire, 'Introduction', in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. by Theodore Besterman and others (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968-), XXXVIII: *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie (II): A-Aristée* (2007), p. 3.

⁴⁰ Voltaire, 'Déclaration des amateurs, questionneurs, et douteurs, qui se sont amusées à faire aux savants les questions ci-dessus en neuf volumes', ed. by Nicholas Cronk, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, XLIII: *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie (VIII): Privilèges-Zoroastre* (2013), pp. 535-43 (p. 541).

⁴¹ According to Bruce Redford, 'throughout eighteenth-century Europe, "dilettante" and its cognate "amateur" defined a cultural ideal' (*Dilettanti: The Antic and the Antique in Eighteenth-Century England* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum; Getty Research Institute, 2008), p. 1).

Paisiello's *I filosofi immaginari* [*The Imaginary Philosophers*].⁴² The opera, the article, and the letter all denounced false, pedantic knowledge; instead, Catherine claimed intellectual authority precisely as an elegant, cultivated amateur who could converse and write about everything from comic opera to etymology in a pleasingly light style. In the letter to Grimm, Catherine congratulated herself on her own comparative dictionary that she produced alongside the Academy's official Russian dictionary: 'ils sont obligés de régler leur dictionnaire russe d'après l'avis des ignorants, nous avons rassemblé le vocabulaire en Dieu sait combien de langues, et cet ouvrage est l'ouvrage des ignorantissimi bambinelli.'⁴³ The inversion that replaced her true literary striving with the pose of ignorance exemplified the enlightened, sociable wit that Catherine sought to embody and promote in many of her writings, including her letters.

Variety

Variety is another of the guiding principles of Catherine's personal style. In the precepts of the 'lettre galante' and in the epistolary practice of Madame de Sévigné, the ideal of variety comes from the association of letter writing with conversation. For Madeleine de Scudéry, conversation 'doit être libre et diversifiée selon les temps, les lieux et les personnes', but good cheer should prevail: 'Je veux qu'il y ait un certain air de joie qui y règne'.⁴⁴ Letter writing in general has always been considered a form of conversation at a distance, but for Scudéry only the 'lettre galante' is truly so: 'ces sortes de lettres étant à proprement parler une conversation de personnes absentes [...]'.⁴⁵

⁴² 'Obshchestva neznyayushchikh, ezhdnevnyaya zapiska', *Sobesednik lyubitelei rossiiskago slova*, 8 (1783), 39-62. The Society's first decision is to write in large letters on the wall: 'Ignoranti Bambinelli' (p. 40). The phrase comes from the aria 'A voi darla', sung by Petronio, a pedant who does not want to see generations of 'ignorant children' born of his daughter (*I filosofi immaginari: dramma per musica* (Naples: [n. pub.], 1784), p. 10).

⁴³ 2 November 1785 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 367.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Viala, *La France galante*, pp. 120-21.

If treated in an appropriately natural and noble manner, ‘il n’est presque rien qu’on ne puisse faire entrer à propos dans les lettres de cette nature, et [...] depuis le proverbe le plus populaire, jusques aux vers de la Sibylle, tout peut servir à un esprit adroit.’⁴⁵

Madame de Sévigné too appreciated diversity in both conversation and letters.

Catherine would have read in Sévigné’s letters to her daughter comments such as, ‘Je crois aussi qu’il n’y a rien qu’il faille entièrement bannir de la conversation’; in another letter to Madame Guitaut, which Catherine probably did not know, Sévigné asserted that diversity of style can palliate the tediousness of business correspondence.⁴⁶ The letters in which Catherine most obviously imitates Sévigné and exploits the possibilities of her light style of ‘badinage’ are also the most self-consciously conversational. If Sévigné preferred the verb ‘causer’, Catherine’s term was ‘jaser’: she told Madame Geoffrin, ‘Madame assayé Vous, jasons a notre aise’, and repeated to Grimm, ‘je vous ai dit mille fois que je ne vous écris point, je jase avec vous’.⁴⁷ Catherine followed Sévigné’s lead in striving for diversity in vocabulary, content, and structure.

Far from a sign of incompetence, Catherine’s colourful vocabulary was an integral part of her epistolary style: surprising lexical choices highlighted the personal attention that the empress had deigned to devote to her correspondent, and such variation lent the letters an aesthetic as well as personal charm. She again emulated Madame de Sévigné in her ubiquitous play with diverse vocabularies. Fritz Nies has

⁴⁵ Scudéry, ‘De la manière d’écrire des lettres’, p. 154. On the centrality of this analogy between conversation and letter writing in early modern France, see the essay collection *Art de la lettre, art de la conversation à l’époque classique en France*, ed. by Bernard Bray and Christoph Strosetzki (Paris: Klincksieck, 1995).

⁴⁶ Madame de Sévigné to Madame de Grignan, 22 July 1671, and to Madame de Guitaut, 28 December 1692, *Correspondance*, I, p. 302, and III, p. 1000. See also Bernard Bray, ‘Causerie et conversation dans les lettres de Madame de Sévigné’, in *Épistoliers de l’âge classique*, pp. 269-82 (p. 171), and Nies, *Les Lettres de Madame de Sévigné*, pp. 101-102. Nies observes that at Sévigné’s time letters were particularly associated with diversity thanks to titles of collections like ‘lettres diverses’ or ‘lettres meslées’.

⁴⁷ Catherine to Geoffrin, 6 November 1764, *SIRIO*, I, p. 260; Catherine to Grimm, 24 August 1778 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 100.

observed that Sévigné took great advantage of the permissive and flexible epistolary genre, in which ‘négligence’ was the key to a ‘natural’ style: she went far beyond even what was permitted by contemporary epistolary manuals in her use of the ‘vulgar’ language of the common people.⁴⁸ Catherine did not frequently use such language in her showy correspondences with literary Westerners: writing to a linguistic purist like Voltaire, especially in letters guaranteed to become public in one way or another, required more restraint. Rather, she personalised her Russian letters to subordinates with ‘base’ language, often with a clear sense of its literary and expressive potential. She showed her trust in her governor-general of Moscow, the rather uncouth military man P. S. Saltykov, by selecting folksy Russian terminology: just as she likened Stakelberg’s children to her dogs, she chose Russian folkloric animals for Saltykov’s family, imagining him ‘с моими соколами’ [‘with my falcons’].⁴⁹ Where salon culture would not do, Catherine found other kinds of shared sociability: she altered the date on one letter to refer to the common Russian experience of Orthodox rituals, ‘В Понедельник в Чистой. Поздравляю заговевшись на хрен и на редьку и на белую капусту.’⁵⁰ To Saltykov’s successor, M. N. Volkonsky, Catherine cast her regrets about the destruction caused by the Pugachev Uprising in similarly folksy language: ‘Богу благодарю, что угрожаемая Нижнему-Новугороду от злодея опасность поминовалась, [...] Уф тяжело, горько было да позабычливо! Теперь крушится меня народное в трех губерниях разорение.’⁵¹ This time, the language of the common people set the tone for the whole letter and sent an important message:

⁴⁸ Nies, *Les Lettres de Madame de Sévigné*, pp. 58-62.

⁴⁹ ‘Pisma imperatritsy Ekateriny Velikoi, k feldmarshalu grafu Petru Semenovichu Saltykovu, 1762-1771’, ed. Petr Bartenev, *Russkii arkhiv*, 9 (1886), 5-105 (p. 16).

⁵⁰ Catherine to Saltykov, [1767], ‘Pisma imperatritsy Ekateriny Velikoi, k feldmarshalu grafu Petru Semenovichu Saltykovu’, p. 56.

⁵¹ Catherine to Volkonsky, 2 August 1774 (OS), ‘Pisma gosudaryni imperatritsy Ekateriny II-i k knyazyu Mikhailu Nikitichu Volkonskomu’, in *Osmnadsatyi vek. Istoricheskii sbornik*, ed. by Petr Bartenev, 2nd printing, 4 vols (Moscow: Tip. Gracheva i komp., 1869), I, pp. 79-184 (p. 141).

Volkonsky and the Russian capital should remain loyal to her and valiantly resist Pugachev's onslaught because she, not Pugachev, genuinely represented the Russian people, sympathised with their plight, and considered their welfare inseparable from her own. Her use of the language of the Russian 'народ' ['people'] was playful, but it also allowed her to adopt the voice of a true Russian and thereby to project her legitimate authority in her letters to her subordinates.

Yet Catherine could translate this device into German as well. Writing to Reinhold Wilhelm von Pohlmann, the former steward of Tsarskoe Selo to whom she had entrusted the unhappy Princess Augusta of Württemberg (née Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel), Catherine showed through playfully folksy language how much she cared about his assignment of looking after the abused 'Zelmire'. She especially wanted to avoid a scandal in order to protect Zelmire's reputation and to maintain her own space for manoeuvring in her negotiations with Zelmire's parents: 'Verderben sie mir nur nichts durch unnütze Geschwätze von den Weibern und Leuten im Hause. Je weniger Geschnack, je besser.'⁵² It was thus not just in jocular exchanges with Grimm that Catherine used her dialectical and uneducated German to her advantage: here she gave a delicate order in a friendly manner that suited its addressee and subject matter, at the same time as she lent her command the force of her personal attention. This uneducated language was not her natural voice, but rather it reflected her ability to vary and select her vocabulary to match her subject—or to flout that requirement of good epistolary writing for greater literary effect. This stylistic effect marked out her letters as personal and therefore as bearing important messages, whether in content or in the relationship established with the addressee.

⁵² 26 February 1787 (OS), 'Pisma imperatitsy Ekateriny Velikoi k Reingoldu Vilgelmu von Polmanu', *Russkii arkhiv*, 1 (1888), 1-16 (p. 1).

Yet sometimes Catherine clearly took advantage of the permissiveness of the letter form to indulge her personal tastes. Even the earliest epistolary theorists gave proverbs a place in letters: despite his strict limitation of epistolary writing to a combination of the elegant and simple styles, Demetrius allowed for proverbs as the letter's 'only permitted philosophy, permitted since the proverb is ordinary, popular wisdom'.⁵³ Ever the exemplar for Catherine and her contemporaries, Sévigné too used proverbs particularly extensively.⁵⁴ The ubiquity of proverbs in Catherine's personal style thus suited both the epistolary genre and her own character. She indubitably loved proverbs: she oversaw the publication of *Выборные российские пословицы* [*Selected Russian Proverbs*, 1783, second edition 1790] and orchestrated the composition and performance of proverb plays at her Hermitage. Sometimes she used proverbs pointedly in her letters to her subordinates: while these proverbs were casual turns of phrase, they also lent a memorable piquancy to her political critiques, reinforcing the tone of connivance she sought between herself and her servitors. She warned the governor of Novgorod, Jakob Sievers, to be wary of the swindling habits of provincial landowners, 'il y a un proverbe Russe qui dit que у древа казны все родня'.⁵⁵ Similarly, in an instruction to Count Keyserling amidst the jockeying for the succession to the Polish throne in 1763, she critiqued the imperious tone of a letter from the elector of Saxony, who expected to inherit: 'cela s'appelle compter sans son hôte'.⁵⁶ At other times her proverbs are not one-off, apt comments, but rather favourite phrases that crop up everywhere. 'La montagne a accouché d'une souris' appears, for instance, in letters

⁵³ Demetrius, *On Style*, ed. and trans. by Doreen C. Innes, based on the translation by W. Rhys Roberts, in Aristotle, *Poetics* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 309-525 (pp. 309-525) (p. 485, para. 232).

⁵⁴ Nies, *Les Lettres de Madame de Sévigné*, p. 63.

⁵⁵ Catherine to Sievers, 5 March 1765 (OS), *Des Grafen Jakob Johann Sievers Denkwürdigkeiten zur Geschichte Rußlands*, I, p. 437.

⁵⁶ Catherine to Keyserling, 23 October 1763 (OS), *SIRIO*, LI, p. 53.

to Frederick the Great and to Voltaire about her inoculation, in a note to Potemkin about a supposed assassination plot, in modest comments to Henry of Prussia about her answers to Diderot's questions, and, in a non-epistolary context, in one of her outlines for her memoirs.⁵⁷ Yet this favourite expression, while proverbial, also illustrates the constant literary background to Catherine's letters: it alludes to Jean de La Fontaine's fable, 'La Montagne qui accouche'. Catherine loved light literature like fables as much as she loved proverbs: with her personal epistolary style, Catherine sought to entertain herself and her correspondents through the variety and allusiveness of her writing, effectively uniting popular language with the French literature of Sévigné's time.

Catherine exploited the principle of diversity not only in her vocabulary, but also in the mixture of emotional tonalities and subjects that appeared in her letters. Although Catherine in fact experienced guilt, shock, and emotional exhaustion after the death of Paul's first wife Natalya Alekseevna, she was at the time accused of allowing the grand duchess to die; since then, her somewhat blithe comments and speedy recovery in her correspondence have been cited as evidence of her calm indifference at the death.⁵⁸ Yet Catherine's letters, for example to Grimm and to Johanna Bielke, remain completely within the stylistic dictates of Madame de Sévigné's letters, for instance. Following the principle of variety, Sévigné did not dwell on painful events like deaths, but rather jumped quickly to other topics in a manner that might seem hardhearted to modern

⁵⁷ Catherine to Frederick, 5 December 1768 (OS), Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, I. HA Rep. 96, Nr. 110 P Bd. 2, [n.p.], printed in *SIRIO*, XX, p. 247; Catherine to Voltaire, c. 27 December 1768 (OS), D15396; Catherine to Potemkin, [22 May 1774 (OS)], *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, p. 29; Catherine to Henry, 22 August 1774 (OS), *Briefwechsel zwischen Heinrich Prinz von Preußen und Katharina II. von Rußland*, p. 134; *Sochineniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, XII, p. 437.

⁵⁸ John T. Alexander, *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 228-30; Dixon, *Catherine the Great*, pp. 244-45; Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (London: Phoenix, 2002), p. 346.

readers.⁵⁹ Describing to Grimm the five days of agonising and fruitless labour that Natalya suffered before dying in childbirth, Catherine intermingled her own emotional sufferings with an in-joke about Grimm's health problems: 'votre boyau fêlé n'aurait pas résisté à cette aventure [...] Il y avait des moments où il me semblait que je sentais des déchirements d'entrailles de tout ce que je voyais souffrir'. The next paragraph already perks up with a complete non-sequitur: 'A propos de votre cavalcade d'ânes, [...]'.⁶⁰ Yet Catherine's style and ability to rebound from grief conveys not emotional indifference, but rather emotional force. She explained to Grimm that she, as empress, had to offer a model of the great individual's stoical resistance to sorrow: 'je me disais: "Si tu pleureras, les autres sangloteront [...] tout le monde perdra et tête et tramontane, und alles das wird unverantwortlich werden."' As part of her emotional self-control, Catherine sought to maintain her stylistic mastery and to avoid overburdening her correspondent with excessive, self-absorbed lamentations.

Moreover, the epistolary style exemplified by Madame de Sévigné, derived from 'lettres galantes', and reappropriated by Catherine, was one manifestation of an aristocratic gaiety and an art of insouciance which Fritz Nies has described as 'cette attitude face à la vie, devenue légendaire, d'une grâce toute de gaieté folâtre qu'un siècle plus tard les aristocrates garderont encore souvent jusque devant la guillotine.'⁶¹ As discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, Catherine courted in particular the elite publics of France and sought to integrate her own aristocracy into that world: her personal epistolary style reflects that ambition. Yet it also follows Madame de Sévigné's lead in exaggerating the gaiety of *galanterie* recommended by Scudéry and others: Sévigné was renowned and sometimes blamed for the 'gaieté de son esprit'. For

⁵⁹ Nies, *Les Lettres de Madame de Sévigné*, pp. 102-103.

⁶⁰ 18 April 1776 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, pp. 45-46.

⁶¹ Nies, *Les Lettres de Madame de Sévigné*, p. 118.

this reason, Voltaire compared her letters favourably to those of Madame de Maintenon (today recognised as fictional) in his ‘Catalogue des écrivains’ in the *Siècle de Louis XIV*: ‘Le cœur et l’imagination ont dicté celles de Mme de Sévigné; elles ont plus de gaieté, plus de liberté.’⁶² Reflecting this aristocratic culture of badinage, Sévigné’s letters contain the first attested usages of phrases such as ‘rire aux larmes’, ‘pâmer de rire’, and ‘mourir de rire’.⁶³ Especially in her most Sévigné-esque correspondence with Grimm, Catherine too showed great affection for phrases like ‘mourir de rire’, ‘crêver de rire’, ‘rire à se tenir les côtés’, and related physiological phrases like ‘épancher/épanouir la rate’.⁶⁴ Catherine included laughter as an important part of her epistolary self-portraits.⁶⁵ Despite the Enlightenment’s ambiguous attitude toward laughter, Catherine’s correspondents like Voltaire and his admirer de Ligne reinforced this aspect of her epistolary persona with their approval: ‘les majestés rient rarement, quoiqu’elles aient besoin de rire’; ‘J’ai vu moi-même rire la divinité. Celles d’autrefois savaient à peine sourire.’⁶⁶ Laughter belonged to the humanised image of the modern, enlightened ruler who preferred gentle approaches to correcting her subjects, such as satirical comedy, to harsh punishments and fanatical persecutions.⁶⁷ Thus, while

⁶² Nies, *Les Lettres de Madame de Sévigné*, pp. 153-54; Voltaire, *Œuvres historiques*, ed. by René Pomeau (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 1183.

⁶³ Nies, *Les Lettres de Madame de Sévigné*, p. 120.

⁶⁴ Catherine to Grimm, 25 April 1774, 19 June 1774, 25 November 1777, 16 May 1778, 26 January 1782, 19 December 1783, 10 May 1784, 18 March 1785, 1 June 1785, 20 June 1785, 22 July 1785, 3 May 1787 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, pp. 2, 3, 71, 87, 227, 291, 311, 328, 342-43, 347, 409.

⁶⁵ For example, Catherine to Voltaire, 17 October 1772 (OS), D17983: ‘Vous dirai peut être après l’avoir luë, qu’il est plus aisée de me faire rire que les autres Majestée [sic], et Vous aurés raison’.

⁶⁶ Voltaire to Catherine, 29 September 1772 (NS), D17942; de Ligne to Catherine, 12 February [1782] (NS), *Correspondances russes*, I, p. 130. On Enlightenment ambivalence about laughter, see Christophe Cave, ‘Le Rire des anti-philosophes’, *Dix-huitième siècle*, 32 (2000), 227-39; Lise Andries, ‘Etat des recherches: présentation’, *Dix-huitième siècle*, 32 (2000), 7-18 (a special issue on ‘le rire’); Jean Goldzink, *Comique et comédie au siècle des Lumières* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2000), pp. 11-96, where he provides a ‘Portrait du comique en mal du siècle’; and Anne Richardot, *Le Rire des Lumières* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002), who asserts in her introduction, ‘Si le XVIII^e siècle est à bien des égards celui du rire, ce serait ainsi avant tout par l’attention renouvelée et anxieuse qu’il lui prête’ (p. 10).

⁶⁷ Jaucourt’s *Encyclopédie* article ‘RIS ou RIRE, (*Physiolog.*)’, while most obviously a powerful statement of materialist philosophy, also demanded good humour from the Enlightened ruler: ‘Lycurge,

diversity was valued for its own sake, political, social, personal, and literary considerations all pushed Catherine's style toward lightness as a distinguishing feature. In an empress's letters, levity was inherently a form of variety: it broke with the stiff formulae and solemn dignity of official communications, and it gave the empress a human face and a unique voice. Her light personal style, while reflecting her personality, also played to her aristocratic audience, suited her enlightened image, and demonstrated her literature-inspired *bon ton* and her skill in the art of writing good, sociable letters.

Catherine's most extreme form of jovial stylistic variation affected the vocabulary, tone, and structure of her letters all at once: Catherine designates this kind of discourse as 'galimatias'. It appears particularly in the correspondence with Grimm, the most personal and most sociable of her exchanges, but also in her letters to de Ligne, for example. A pejorative term in standard French usage, Catherine used it ironically to label passages, most frequently containing politically or diplomatically sensitive material, that used coded language, jumped from topic to topic, sometimes mixed French and German, and counterfeited the elliptic manner of conversation. The opening segment of Catherine's letter to Grimm of 7 September 1780 (OS) best illustrates the full range of literary references that contributed to this style. Here, Catherine contrasted the future Friedrich Wilhelm II, whom she disliked and who was at that time visiting St. Petersburg, with her own beloved grandson Alexander; she switched back and forth between French and German and employed the code-names and allusive language that she and Grimm had developed for exchanging political news. Then she meditated facetiously on her own style in the passage:

en législateur éclairé, consacra des statues du *Ris* dans toutes les salles des Spartiates; pour leur donner à entendre qu'ils devoient faire regner dans leurs repas & dans leurs assemblées, la satisfaction & les sentimens de la joie honnête [...] (*Encyclopédie*, XIV, p. 300).

Je suis persuadée que plus vous y rêverez, et plus vous y trouverez un grand sens und eine große Einbildung mit eine gewirkte Confusions-Kraft die denen Lackenkrämern ungewohnt ist, denen Post-Commissairen aber sehr wunderlich vorkommen wird, weil sie den Schah Baham nicht gelesen noch gehört haben, dieser sich aber unvergleichlich selbst verstand, den Andern aber dunkel schien. Tout cela n'est pas monosyllabe, mais jaserie toute pure sur le passé, le présent et le futur, mais j'oublie que je vous parle pour répondre à trois de vos lettres, que ce galimatias pindarique, physico-politico-philosophico, est là commencé sur ma table depuis dix jours [...].⁶⁸

The reference to 'Post-Commissairen', a mixed Franco-German word, hinted at the most obvious use of 'galimatias': it veiled Catherine's meaning from any indiscreet eyes that might read the letter along the way through the post. And yet this letter did not in fact travel by post: Catherine in the end decided to send it by courier, a practice which at this point in the correspondence was becoming the norm.⁶⁹ Moreover, although the use of an exclusive, code-like language concealed the nuances of Catherine's meaning from outsiders, the gist was evident: anyone who knew the present circumstances in Russia would have understood her disparagement of Friedrich Wilhelm and exaltation of her grandson. 'Galimatias' had a much greater literary significance in Catherine's letters.

Jokes about 'post-inspectors' and about the obscurity of Catherine's allusive utterances, frequent in the Grimm correspondence, often come with mentions of Schah Baham, one of Catherine's favourite comic avatars. Comparing herself to the idle and ignorant sultan of Crébillon *films*'s *Le Sopha* was another of Catherine's witty inversions of her own image. Although he did allow religious toleration, Schah Baham was otherwise everything that Catherine claimed not to be: quick to anger, he took no interest in government affairs, read nothing but fairytales, wallowed in boredom, failed to recognise merit and promoted people only if they knew how to sew, and lived under

⁶⁸ *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 184-85.

⁶⁹ Addition to the same letter of 23 September 1780 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 189.

the thumb of his much cleverer wife. Catherine singled out in her letters Schah Baham's most characteristic statement: his stubborn and solipsistic refusal to think or speak clearly, falling back on his position of power as the only necessary justification and exclaiming, 'je m'entends bien!'⁷⁰ He appeared in many of Catherine's letters as late as 1794: by antiphrasis, he stood for Catherine's cultivated persona and her active, enlightened approach to governing Russia.⁷¹ Yet, like Catherine and Grimm's coded language, Schah Baham signaled connivance more than solipsism. Catherine only pretended that her letters in this style would fail to communicate: rather, just as Grimm recognised the Schah as a character from their shared literary culture, he would also understand her 'galimatias' and enjoy the game of decoding it. 'Galimatias' was part of a literary amusement that allowed Catherine to make her readers feel special and distinguished because they could comprehend her and take part in her elite circle.

The second sentence of Catherine's above-cited description of her style contains in a nutshell the full literary richness of her 'galimatias': her elliptic and digressive passages followed a number of illustrious examples. Elliptic writing reproduced the indirect, mercurial flow of conversation: 'galimatias' thus took the desirable analogy between dialogue and letter writing to the extreme, maximally but facetiously fulfilling the stylistic guidelines that both Catherine and her correspondents knew well. The phrase 'jaserie toute pure' highlights this technique. It too can be traced to Madame de Sévigné, who quickly changed topics and indulged in digressions to ensure variety,

⁷⁰ [Claude Prosper Jolyot de Cr billon], *Le Sopha, conte moral*, 2 vols ([Paris]: [n. pub.], 1742), I, p. 15.

⁷¹ See Catherine to Grimm, 16 August 1775, 2 February 1780, 3 October 1788, 21 April 1794 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 31, 173, 465, 603; Catherine to Geoffrin, 15 January and 6 April 1766, *SIRIO*, I, pp. 280, 286; Catherine to Gustav, 12 October 1777 (OS), *Catherine II et Gustave III: une correspondance retrouv e*, ed. by Gunnar von Proschwitz (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1998), p. 95; Catherine to Stakelberg, 27 May 1791 (OS), 'Pisma Ekateriny II k grafu Stakelbergu. 1773-1796', *Russkaya starina*, 3, 5 (May 1871), pp. 605-27 (p. 615); Catherine to de Ligne, December 1791, *Correspondances russes*, I, p. 210.

entertain her correspondents, and mimic the flow of conversation.⁷² The words ‘galimatias pindarique’, meanwhile, are another literary allusion that Grimm could not have missed: coined by Malherbe, the phrase was well known to Catherine and her admirers from Voltaire’s *Galimatias pindarique sur un carrousel donné par l’impératrice de Russie* of 1766. Catherine’s taste for indirect flattery in a humorous, lightly satirical or parodic mode remained constant throughout her reign and across languages: her appreciation of G. R. Derzhavin’s ‘Felitsa’ (1782) is the most legendary example in the Russian context.⁷³ This was not the only letter in which she consciously adopted a mock-Pindaric style. In another missive, she comically apostrophised her pen, congratulating it on linking a literary allusion to Beaumarchais with swipes at other monarchs, and she exhorted it to continue: ‘ne cédez pas, même en fait de galimatias, le pas aux odes Pindariennes que le pr. Potemkine se faisait traduire à Moscou et dont il raffolait, parce que M. Pindare traitait avec une facilité étonnante dix matières à la fois.’⁷⁴ Catherine clearly possessed the necessary literary knowledge to recognise and reproduce the features for which Pindar’s style was known: convolutedness and, especially, digressions. Jumping between topics in her letters in ‘galimatias’, Catherine flaunted before her enlightened correspondent how well she understood a whole tradition of literary predecessors who wrote in this digressive style, from Pindar to *Tristram Shandy*. Moreover, in the literary culture surrounding Catherine, the mock Pindaric mode exemplified by Voltaire’s poem immediately invoked her Greek project, which aimed to make Russia the true heir to Greek classical culture and, preferably, to

⁷² Nies, *Les Lettres de Madame de Sévigné*, pp. 70-72.

⁷³ Tatiana Smoliarova, ‘Voltaire et la parodie de l’ode pindarique au XVIII^e siècle’, in *Séries parodiques au siècle des Lumières*, ed. by Sylvain Menant and Dominique Quérou (Paris: Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2005), 239-60 (pp. 241, 250-51); see also the ‘amusing style’ discussed by Vera Proskurina, *Creating the Empress: Politics and Poetry in the Age of Catherine II* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2011), pp. 182-229.

⁷⁴ Catherine to Grimm, 2 February 1780 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 172.

Greek territories as well. As many allusions in the letters to Grimm suggest, these thoughts of cultural and geopolitical dominance were not far from the surface in her practice of epistolary ‘galimatias’, and their common repertoire of literary knowledge allowed her to veil those ambitions in light literary play. Once again, the literary, the personal, and the political were intertwined in Catherine’s invention of her distinctive style.

Digressiveness was not the only feature that Catherine borrowed from Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* to energise her exuberant epistolary style. In her letters to Grimm, Catherine explicitly praised, quoted, and pastiched *Shandy*, and she alluded to the book in other correspondences too: she quoted it in a letter to Gustav III, and, in a letter to Zimmermann, she referred to her comparative dictionary as a ‘Steken Pferdgen’ [‘hobby-horse’].⁷⁵ It has also been argued that the novel influenced the structure of her memoirs.⁷⁶ Catherine particularly relished the enumerations, accumulations, lists, and free-associations, which can be found in the mock erudition of Rubenius or the curse of Ernulphus in *Tristram Shandy*.⁷⁷ On 16 April 1779 (OS), for example, she asked Grimm to help her find two new Italian architects, ‘car tous les miens sont devenus ou trop vieux, ou trop aveugles, ou trop lents, ou trop paresseux, ou trop jeunes, ou trop fainéants, ou trop grands

⁷⁵ Catherine to Grimm, 14 December 1777; 11 April, 16 April, 17 May, 18 July, 23 August 1779; 24 September 1780; 15 February, 1 April 1782 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, pp. 72, 131, 135-38, 138, 155-57, 191, 228, 232; Catherine to Gustav, 2 November 1778 (OS), *Catherine II et Gustave III*, p. 134; Catherine to Zimmermann, 9 May 1785 (OS), Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, 3 recto. In *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne allows the greatest historical figures their ‘hobby-horses’: ‘Nay, if you come to that, Sir, have not the wisest of men in all ages, not excepting *Solomon* himself,—have they not had their HOBBY-HORSES’ (Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, ed. by Howard Anderson (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1980), p. 8 (I. 7). It is appropriate that she would use the German word for ‘hobby-horse’, since she preferred the German translation of *Shandy* to the French one.

⁷⁶ Angelina Vacheva, “Zhizn i mneniya Tristrama Shendi, dzhentlmena” L. Sterna i “Zapiski” Ekateriny II’, *Zhudozhestvennyi perevod i sravnitelnoe izuchenie kultur (Pamyati Yu. D. Levina)*, ed. by V. E. Vagno and N. D. Kochetkova (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2010), pp. 198-212.

⁷⁷ Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, pp. 122-34 and 309-11 (III. 11-12 and VI. 19).

seigneurs, ou trop riches, ou trop solides, ou trop éventés.... [...] Ah, monsieur! jamais style ne fut plus ressemblant que celui de Tristram Shandy à celui de cette lettre'.⁷⁸

Arguably, though, this Shandy-esque letter even more clearly imitated the 'querelle interminable sur les femmes' between Jacques and his master in Denis Diderot's Shandy-esque *Jacques le fataliste*, which Catherine would have recently read in the January 1779 *livraison* of the *Correspondance littéraire*.⁷⁹ Yet Catherine was right to indicate in her letter to Grimm that this style had existed before Shandy, although she exaggerated her own originality when she asserted that 'je n'ai jamais copié personne [...] je trouve une grande analogie entre sa tête et la mienne'. She assuredly had encountered such an accumulation of adjectives in Madame de Sévigné's celebrated letter to M. de Coulanges on the marriage of the Grande Mademoiselle, which had been in print since 1726: 'Je m'en vais vous mander la chose la plus étonnante, la plus surprenante, la plus merveilleuse, [...] la plus grande, la plus petite, la plus rare, la plus commune [...]'.⁸⁰ In creating what Catherine herself identified as her own original, 'natural' style, she blended a variety of literary texts that shared the light and entertaining style appropriate to the sociable epistles she wanted to write. She knew quite well that her correspondents would recognise the literary sources: her personal style created an enduring epistolary image of a cultivated, personable, sociable empress, whose letters would one day perhaps be worthy of entering the canon alongside her predecessors. In the meantime, Catherine used this style to charm her correspondents

⁷⁸ *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 135-36.

⁷⁹ Denis Diderot, 'Jacques le fataliste et son maître', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Herbert Dieckmann and others, 25 vols (Paris: Hermann, 1975-), XXIII, pp. 3-291 (p. 42): 'Et les voilà embarqués dans une querelle interminable sur les femmes; l'un prétendant qu'elles étaient bonnes, l'autre méchantes: et ils avaient tous deux raison; l'un sottes, l'autre pleines d'esprit [...]'.
⁸⁰ 15 December 1670, Sévigné, *Correspondance*, I, pp. 139-40, and notes pp. 971-73. It was printed in *Lettres de Marie Rabutin-Chantal marquise de Sévigné, à madame la comtesse de Grignan sa fille*, 2 vols ([Rouen]: [n. pub.], 1726), I, pp. 15-18, and in subsequent eighteenth-century editions of Sévigné's letters. 'Je m'en vais' is one of Catherine's favourite constructions in her personal style.

into appreciating and heeding the political and personal demand for allegiance that an exchange with the Russian empress implied.

Irony

Irony was central to Catherine's personal style, and there is no doubt that she learned it from her 'master' Voltaire. As Haydn Mason has explained, Voltaire's mature practice of irony matched his definition of wit as the art of saying only part of what one thinks, leaving the rest to be discerned by the reader. It implied a narrow audience of those in the know, possessors of the perspicuity and background knowledge necessary to grasp the full meaning of a text. It was also an act of conquest by mockery and gaiety, a strategy for disarming one's targets: as Voltaire wrote to his correspondent d'Argental in 1772, 'Point d'injure; beaucoup d'ironie et de gaieté. Les injures révoltent; l'ironie fait rentrer les gens en eux-mêmes, la gaieté désarme'.⁸¹ Catherine mastered Voltaire's disarming but cutting irony, but diverted it for her own purposes in a range of correspondences, contexts, and manoeuvres.

Catherine was indeed a good student of Voltaire: when writing to the *philosophes*, she could perfectly emulate their irony, both in form and subject matter. It was an obvious strategy to convince them that she was the enlightened monarch they sought, a like-minded reader and writer capable not only of comprehending, but also of reproducing their discourse. This skill produced the passages of her letters that Voltaire eagerly published, such as the postscript of 22 August 1765 (OS) that appeared in the article 'Puissance, les deux puissances' of the *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*: 'Voilà donc Abraham Chaumeix en Russie qui devient raisonnable, il s'oppose à la persécution.

⁸¹ Haydn Mason, 'L'ironie voltairienne', *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises*, 38 (1986), 51-62 (pp. 53, 55-56).

S'il prenoit de l'esprit il feroit croire les miracles aux plus incrédules'.⁸² Adopting the *philosophes'* ironic style also allowed Catherine to take side-swipes at the French government, just as they did in their many published works. In one letter to d'Alembert, for example, Catherine feigned naïve astonishment that her first letter to him was entered into the Registers of the Académie Française: 'il me semble que votre Académie a fait par là une injure aux souverains du dix-huitième siècle, en perpétuant comme un modèle ou une chose unique ce que j'avais écrit à un des plus grands génies de mon temps, à un philosophe, pour lui confier l'éducation de mon fils; penserait-on autrement dans d'autres pays?'⁸³ In these cases, the stylistic match between Catherine and her correspondents was the *sine qua non* for their mutual game of admiration and their political and propagandistic connivance.

Yet some of Catherine's most biting irony appeared in her letters to other sovereigns: she could count on their ability to perceive Voltairean irony and therefore to appreciate it or to feel its sting. In one letter to Frederick II, for example, she again took aim at the French ministry: she sarcastically congratulated Frederick's envoy to Paris on his ability to get dispatches through to his home government, 'J'en augure qu'il est moins en credit aupres du Duc de Choiseuil que mon chargé d'affaire, du moins Ses depeches Sont elle moins Soignées par ce Duc, ce n'est Sans doute qu'a une attention particuliere de ce Ministre que je Suis redevable d'un tres long Silence dans une correspondance aussi curieuse qu'importante.'⁸⁴ Catherine went on far longer than necessary on the subject, apparently relishing this chance to exercise her ironic verve

⁸² D12865; Voltaire, 'Puissance, les deux puissances', in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, XLIII: *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie, par des amateurs (VIII): Privilèges-Zoroastre* (2013), pp. 46-56 (p. 50).

⁸³ Catherine to d'Alembert, 7/18 April 1763, 'Correspondance avec Catherine II', in *Œuvres et correspondances inédites de d'Alembert*, ed. by Charles Henry (Paris: Perrin, 1887), pp. 193-261 (pp. 215-16).

⁸⁴ Catherine to Frederick, 11 March 1769 (OS), Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, I. HA Rep. 96, Nr. 110 P Bd. 2, [n.p.]; *SIRIO*, XX, p. 259.

before an addressee who would understand. While in this letter to Frederick the target of her irony was a third party, in other letters she took aim at her addressee. She was exceedingly displeased with Gustav III's coup d'état of August 1772 that restored absolute power to the monarch and deprived Russia of its ability to hamstring the Swedish government by buying off members of the Diet. When Gustav sent a non-autograph letter that presented the event as a contribution to the 'bonne intelligence' and peace between the two nations, Catherine replied with a similarly non-autograph letter that cited Gustav's letter and ironically turned his pseudo-enlightened rhetoric back against him: 'Il n'est sans doute point de plus solide gloire que celle de maintenir la paix, [...] rien ne serait conséquemment plus désirable, que de rendre inutiles tant de ressorts multipliés, qui, ainsi qu'il ne peut échapper aux lumières de Votre Majesté sont mis si souvent en action pour détourner de ce principe.'⁸⁵ Gustav was one of Catherine's favourite targets for irony: sometimes it was nothing more than a private joke for herself. In a letter of 5 January 1775 (OS), for example, Catherine informed Gustav that she could not receive his visit to St. Petersburg that year: 'Je me trouve dans la dure nécessité par mon voyage de Mosco, devenu indispensable, de rendre à Votre Majesté la parole qu'Elle a bien voulu me donner'.⁸⁶ Gustav had assured her in July 1774 that 'rien au monde ne puisse empêcher l'année prochaine cette entrevue [...] dont je vous donne ma parole d'honneur'.⁸⁷ He could not have known that she had then remarked ironically to Henry of Prussia, 'ce prince m'a fait une lettre dans laquelle il me donne sa parole d'honneur (que je ne lui ai point demandée) de venir l'année qui vient', nor that already at that time, more than four months before her letter to Gustav, she had already planned to be 'dans le cas de me trouver obligée de la lui rendre; mes

⁸⁵ 4 September 1772 (OS), *Catherine II et Gustave III*, pp. 37-38.

⁸⁶ *Catherine II et Gustave III*, p. 57.

⁸⁷ 7 July 1774 (NS), *Catherine II et Gustave III*, pp. 52-53.

affaires m'appellent à Moscou'.⁸⁸ The time lapse and the juxtaposition between the two correspondences must have given Catherine alone a secret pleasure at keeping Gustav in the dark and mocking him without his knowledge. Irony was a habit of mind too delicious for the Voltaire-trained letter writer to pass up, whether it was designed to bemuse, affront, or completely bypass her addressee.

The correspondence with Grimm, though, best attests to the versatility and importance of irony in Catherine's personal style. Her attention inevitably centred on political matters, and here too Gustav remained a regular target. Her comments on his provocation of a war between Russia and Sweden in 1788 were typically blunt: 'Il est donc aussi faux que fou et menteur. Voilà des qualités vraiment héroïques'.⁸⁹ Yet in writing to Grimm, Catherine also followed in the footsteps of Madame de Sévigné, who, while not humble, nonetheless did not spare herself the barbs of her own irony.⁹⁰ Catherine's irony about her own epistolary style was entirely benign: like Sévigné before her, Catherine mocked the great length of her own 'très petites missives'.⁹¹ Since the law of epistolary brevity could be abrogated only when the two correspondents appreciated one another's epistles, and since a long letter from an empress was a rarity to which few people could aspire, Catherine's apparent self-denigration actually flattered her correspondent and encouraged his outpourings of antiphrastic and direct gratitude for the flow of text from St. Petersburg. As with many of her apparently negative self-characterisations, Catherine's irony about her epistolary style in fact expressed satisfaction with praise received: 'Je ne m'attendais pas à voir

⁸⁸ 22 August 1774 (OS), *Briefwechsel zwischen Heinrich Prinz von Preußen und Katharina II. von Rußland*, pp. 134-35.

⁸⁹ Catherine to Grimm, 5 July 1788 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 454.

⁹⁰ Nies, *Les Lettres de Madame de Sévigné*, pp. 141-42.

⁹¹ Catherine to Grimm, 2 March 1786 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 375; also, for example, 2, 3, and 4 March 1778, 15 September 1781, and 19 April 1783 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 85, 220, 273.

taxer ma lettre à l'historien de la nature de chef d'oeuvre.'⁹² But at other points in this correspondence, Catherine produced some of her most sophisticated and ambiguous moments of irony. On 5 August 1793 (OS), Catherine wrote of her work on the genealogies of Russian monarchs: 'Or, moi je trouve dans cette généalogie tout ce qui a rapport à l'histoire, tout comme Vestris lisait le bonheur présent de la France dans le menuet de M. le dauphin d'alors.'⁹³ Of course, the 'bonheur' of the French monarchy was such that Louis XVI had been executed only months before Catherine wrote this letter. This event had shaken her deeply, and during the Revolutionary years Catherine became ever more attached to the aristocratic ethos and insistent on the need for legitimate, dynastic monarchy. Yet, even at so late a date, Catherine did not exclude even so sensitive a subject from ironic treatment. Irony in fact remained a frequent mode in her treatment of the French Revolution. It allowed her to present her increasingly doctrinaire aristocratism as a reasoned and reasonable conclusion, not a blind prejudice: if she could maintain such a distance from it, she tacitly asserted, enlightened thought had gone into her conclusions. The dearer the subject to her, the more she employed the ironic mode to impress her messages and her own enlightened image upon her readers.

Catherine's Personal Voice in Her Love Letters

Despite her remarkable accomplishments as a ruler and, as argued in this thesis, as a writer, Catherine is most remembered by posterity for her purported sexual excesses. From such a perspective, the style of her love letters might come as a surprise. Catherine's love letters do not contain long, sentimental outpourings about the

⁹² Catherine to Grimm, 29 June 1782 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 244.

⁹³ *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 586.

sufferings of the heart, nor are her letters particularly ribald. Rather, the love letters are typically short, Russian-language notes in a humorous, colourful and variegated, yet affectionate style. Even in this intimate context, Catherine remained true to the witty, varied, and ironic style she learned from her early favourite readings. Her love letters are simply the most intense and concentrated examples of her vivacious personal voice, employed to charm and seduce her readers.

Catherine had not yet acquired her personal voice in her first amorous correspondence, a true *galanterie* with the courtier and future general Zakhar Chernyshev during her time as grand duchess. Rather, this exchange demonstrates once more her ability to imitate literary discourses and gradually to find her own voice within them. She describes in her memoirs how, in 1751-52, Chernyshev initiated her into a ‘correspondance régulière toute sentimentale’: they at first exchanged pre-printed messages inside ‘devises’, trinkets made to resemble a variety of meaningful objects, which had to be broken to find the verses hidden inside. Chernyshev soon substituted his own *billet* for the printed message, nicely prefiguring the evolution from printed amorous cliché to a personal voice that Catherine effectuated in her love letters. Published anonymously in 1881 and preserved in an early nineteenth-century manuscript copy in St. Petersburg, the surviving letters suggest that Catherine and Chernyshev did, in fact, arrange clandestine meetings, contrary to her assertion in her memoirs.⁹⁴ Regardless, the letters themselves explicitly and implicitly confirm that it was first and foremost a literary, sociable entertainment. Of all Catherine’s amorous correspondence, this is the only exchange carried out entirely in French: the choice of

⁹⁴ *Sochineniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, XII, pp. 308-309; ‘Lyubovnyya zapisochki vysokoi osoby XVIII veka’, ed. by Petr Bartenev, *Russkii arkhiv*, 6 (1881), 390-403; St. Petersburg, Institut russkoi literatury Rossiiskoi Akademii nauk, Rukopisnyi otdel [henceforth IRLI], F. 424, N. 57, Arkhiv S. N. Kaznakova.

language set the stage for literary play-acting rather than genuine sentiment. In one of the first *billets* of the exchange, Catherine toyed with a standard problem of the ‘billet galant’, namely whether the exercise of wit gave the lie to sentiments professed: ‘n’est ce pas plutôt Votre esprit que Votre Cœur qui m’écrit, mais non, j’aime à croire que tant de Sensibilité ne Saurait s’exprimer sans qu’on la Sente.’⁹⁵ Yet, despite such an apparent affirmation of sentiment, Catherine immediately proposed an even more literary, artificial mode of exchange: ‘ferons-nous un jargon. Tout ce qui Se dira de bon à la Comedie nous la prendrons comme si nous le nous disions, par ce moyen nous nous entendrons.’⁹⁶ Further on in the exchange, she wrote of reading their *billets* as equivalent to reading their hearts, implying that perhaps their sentiments were felt only on paper or only in the process of improving their gallant epistolary skill. She promised to read with him ‘les replis de Votre Cœur’, for which purpose she asked him to bring back to her the letter that she had sent to him the previous day: ‘il faut que j’en fasse lecture avec Vous j’en Saurais mieux ce qui Vous plait. Dans quelle intention croyez-Vous? dans celle de m’appliquer à le faire.’⁹⁷ In keeping with this explicit literariness of the correspondence, Catherine employed a range of clichés about her desire to be ‘préférée à tout ce qu’il y a de plus aimable’ at court, about her gaze wandering to find him, or about her heart as an ‘advocate’ for him.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, Catherine’s play-acting can be considered an early stage of her personal voice: she was developing the sociable mode of wit and variety in which the writer and the reader relish their ability to understand the literary background to their playful discourse.

⁹⁵ IRLI, F. 424, N. 57, 2 recto; ‘Lyubovnyya zapisochki vysokoi osoby XVIII veka’, p. 390. Compare with Amilcar’s comment to Clélie in Scudéry’s conversation: ‘Ha Madame, lui dit-il, vous me faites un grand plaisir de demander pardon à Aronce, d’avoir mis trop d’esprit dans votre billet. Il est certain qu’il n’en faut point trop avoir en billets, ni en lettres d’amour’ (‘De la manière d’écrire des lettres’, p. 147).

⁹⁶ IRLI, F. 424, N. 57, 2 recto; ‘Lyubovnyya zapisochki vysokoi osoby XVIII veka’, p. 390.

⁹⁷ IRLI, F. 424, N. 57, 5 verso; ‘Lyubovnyya zapisochki vysokoi osoby XVIII veka’, p. 395.

⁹⁸ IRLI, F. 424, N. 57, 3 recto, 7 recto; ‘Lyubovnyya zapisochki vysokoi osoby XVIII veka’, pp. 392, 397.

In fact, despite the obvious artificiality of the Chernyshev exchange, several devices of Catherine's later love letters can be traced back to it. Although not yet approaching her later ebullience in Russian diminutives and nicknames, she already began to slip in Russian terms of endearment, calling Chernyshev 'милые наши' ['our darlings'].⁹⁹ Her ironic tone in stock epistolary situations like the letter of complaint about a missed rendez-vous, as well as her use of jargon like the mock-religious terminology of confession and absolution, anticipate famous letters from the Potemkin correspondence. The snappy sarcasm of her later note to Potemkin, 'Благодарствую за посещение. Я не понимаю, что Вас удержало', as well as her account of her nocturnal wanderings in hopes of a visit, are already sketched out in her ironic address to Chernyshev: 'Me serait il permis de demander à Votre Excellence la Cause de Sa bouderie d'hier, [...] Je ne crois pas qu'après ces deux traits singuliers Vous pretendiez une lettre fort tendre de ma part'. In the same letter, the vocabulary of religion, with which she required a 'Confession exacte & vraie' in return for 'l'absoute', would later be inverted in her 'Чистосердечная исповедь' ['Sincere Confession'], in which she asked Potemkin for 'отпущение грехов своих' ['absolution for [her] sins'].¹⁰⁰ These parallels suggest the extent to which Catherine's later style, employed even in her most amorous letters, derived from the practice of literary-inspired *galanterie*, in which she jokingly engaged as grand duchess.

The wit, variety, and irony of Catherine's personal style characterise her love letters and lend them their charm. For example, when complimenting Potemkin and hinting at their pleasures, she toyed with literary references in an unexpectedly folksy

⁹⁹ IRLI, F. 424, N. 57, 2 verso, 6 recto; 'Lyubovnyya zapisochki vysokoi osoby XVIII veka', pp. 391, 396.

¹⁰⁰ IRLI, F. 424, N. 57, 6 verso-7 recto; 'Lyubovnyya zapisochki vysokoi osoby XVIII veka', p. 397; Catherine to Potemkin, [21 and 26 February 1774 (OS)], *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, pp. 9-11.

tone: ‘Милая милюша, я встала очень весела и просвещеннее, нежели ложилась. Куда, сказывают, греки в старину какие хитрые были люди [...] но милее, умнее, красивее гораздо их тот, с кого списан точь-в-точь Артикул délicieux [of the *Encyclopédie*], то есть Гришенька мой любезный.’¹⁰¹ Even the many quarrels that punctuated their relationship did not lead to long lamentations in a sentimental style. Rather, she and Potemkin cast even their explications in the same varied and energetic language as ever: on one famous occasion, for instance, Potemkin cast his plea as a mock prayer, concluding with an ‘Аминь’ [‘Amen’] echoed in Catherine’s parallel annotations. Her pithy replies mixed the language of authority (‘Дозволяю’) with her favourite proverbs (‘Рука руку моет’) and the device of personification (‘Дай успокоиться мыслям, дабы чувства действовать свободно могли; оне нежны, сами сыщут дорогу лучшую’).¹⁰² The end of their intimacy brought with it not letters of reproach, but merely a temporary withdrawal into the language of business, without Catherine’s personal, vibrant touches. Her notes to other lovers that followed Potemkin, like P. V. Zavadovsky and I. N. Rimsky-Korsakov, show the same stylistic verve. She opposed her typical varied style—energetic colloquialisms alongside rational maxims—to Zavadovsky’s tearful sentimental outpourings: ‘оплакал ты пустяки, а обида нигде со фанарем в руках никто не отищет. Прарочество само собою исчезнет, когда основано не на предвидящая здравое рассуждение’.¹⁰³ Even though the romance with Rimsky-Korsakov lasted only a little over a year, Catherine courted him with her habitual tropes like proverbs and mock-religious language: one note read, ‘Попу на рясы, попадье на платье дано будет. Испрашиваю себе за то при первом свидании

¹⁰¹ [March-April 1774], *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, p. 20.

¹⁰² [February-March 1776], *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, p. 95.

¹⁰³ ‘Pisma imp. Ekateriny II k gr. P. V. Zavadovskomu (1775-1777)’, ed. by Ya. Barskov, *Russkii istoricheskii zhurnal*, 5 (1918), 223-57 (p. 251).

взгляду благоприязненного; теперь же иду молиться о вашем здоровье в антресоль.’¹⁰⁴ This note offers an outstanding example of the key trope by which Catherine created attractive epistolary variety in her love letters: the blending of Russian folk language and traditions with the influence of French language and sociability. It matched the manner in which she strove to educate her favourites, pushing them to read classic literature and to become patrons of the arts: she wanted to make exemplary Russian men who loved their nation but embodied Western European refinement.

Although some scholars, like Roger Duchêne, have argued that good letters, and especially good love letters, can be created only when the masks of sociability are laid aside, Catherine’s personal voice surfaced precisely when she drew aptly on the conventions of her age and of preceding generations.¹⁰⁵ Catherine knew the effectiveness of her personalised style: learned from literature and from sociable practice, it was the perfect tool for an enlightened empress in her letters of love and war. It is well known that reading, literary entertainments, and letter writing were all central to eighteenth-century elite sociability: Antoine Lilti groups these practices under the ambiguous label of ‘jeux de mots’, underscoring the lightness, playfulness, and wit of a culture that fended off boredom with the arts of the mind and the pen.¹⁰⁶ The letter was both an extension of sociability, which allowed far-flung members of the elite to keep in touch with a cultural centre (whether in Paris or in St. Petersburg), and a space of sociability in its own right, where the manifold exigencies of sociable life played out as features of epistolary style. In her letters, Catherine made the most of both these aspects

¹⁰⁴ ‘Lyubovnyya zapisochki vysokoi osoby XVIII veka’, p. 403.

¹⁰⁵ Roger Duchêne, *Madame de Sévigné et la lettre d’amour*, 2nd edn (Paris: Klincksieck, 1992), pp. 18, 25-26.

¹⁰⁶ Antoine Lilti, *Le Monde des salons: Sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), pp. 273-315.

of epistolary sociability: she used wit, variety, and irony to create a sociable image that could circulate and win her a reputation amongst European elites via letter. In appropriating this sociability for her own voice, though, Catherine expanded its literary, political, and personal potential: the gallantry of seventeenth-century Parisians became an art of governance, diplomacy, seduction, and fun all at once. Catherine accomplished this by intermingling her charming voice with another, that of the monarch who exercised her will, ambitions, and talents on a grand, imperial, historical, and even monumental scale. Her charismatic, personal style interacted in shifting and complex ways with the serious intentions of her letters: epistolary play could conceal, palliate, or enact authority.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PLAY OF AUTHORITY IN EPISTOLARY FORM

Catherine used every element of the epistolary form to her advantage. She knew the conventions well and often observed them more or less automatically. But the essence of her poetics of the letter form lay in well-calculated flouting of conventions and in striking but refined departures from routine royal correspondence practices. The classically-inspired literary aesthetic of her age most valued tasteful variations on pre-existing models: depending on context, self-conscious deviation from the norm could signify wit, intimacy, and humaneness, or it could signal the distinctive grandeur of extraordinary, even transcendent actions. The great letter writer, like the great ruler, respected the inherent dignity of her rank, but tempered it out of courtesy for her correspondents and in order to show that she did not require titles to earn admiration. She sought instead to highlight her personal, individual greatness through her unique interventions in the ordinary flow of events and correspondence.

This chapter has two aims. First of all, it gives an overview of the process by which Catherine produced her autograph letters and of the standard conventions that she applied. To my knowledge, there is as yet no scholarly literature on eighteenth-century conventions of royal correspondence. Much good work has been done on epistolary manuals and the etiquette used by ordinary people in the eighteenth century, and materials relating to Louis XIV's protocols have been published and analysed.¹ No

¹ On manuals: Roger Chartier, 'Des "secrétaires" pour le peuple? Les modèles épistolaires de l'Ancien Régime entre littérature de cour et livre de colportage', in *La Correspondance: les usages de la lettre au XIX^e siècle*, ed. by Roger Chartier (Paris: Fayard, 1991), pp. 159-207; Eve Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1680-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). On Louis XIV: Giora Sternberg, 'Epistolary Ceremonial: Corresponding Status at the Time of Louis XIV', *Past and Present*, 204 (August 2009), 33-88 (esp. pp. 45-46); [A. de Boislesle

protocols used by the secretaries of any eighteenth-century ruler have yet been published. The guidelines provided in the manuals were for nobles or even commoners: the monarch was infinitely above the ordinary tripartite distinction between superiors, equals, and inferiors, which guided the prescriptions in the manuals.² Any impression of equality had to be a second-order one, an intentional pose that, for whatever reason, veiled the real power relation: however, this reality opens up for the crowned letter writer a space to play with convention and authority for rhetorical effect.

The second goal is to examine some occasions on which Catherine bent epistolary norms to resolve the political or interpersonal problems of the moment, while at the same time offering her own solutions to the contradictions inherent in the literary and philosophical demands of her age. More specifically, she used the formalities of the letter to handle the prickly issue of hierarchy and authority in the correspondence of the enlightened monarch. Usually, scholarly inquiries into both epistolary etiquette and the philosophy of the Enlightenment seek out signs of progress toward egalitarianism, which the French Revolution forcibly installed and which advocates of Enlightenment have idealised ever since.³ In the epistolary realm, it is undoubtedly true that formalities and the expression of hierarchy were far less important as structural principles in the letter at the start of the nineteenth century than they were at the end of

and others], 'Le Président Rose et les lettres de la main', in *Mémoires de Saint-Simon*, ed. A. de Boislisle and others, 43 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1879-1928), VIII, pp. 407-20.

² 'La bienséance épistolaire hérite directement de ces règles, respect envers les supérieurs, estime ou familiarité polie envers les égaux, familiarité ou considération envers les inférieurs. C'est à partir de la hiérarchie des personnes qui dicte cérémonial et style, que s'ordonne le contenu d'une lettre' (Marie-Claire Grassi, *L'Art de la lettre au temps de La Nouvelle Héloïse et du Romantisme* (Genève: Slatkine, 1994), p. 134).

³ On the forms of egalitarian thought in the Enlightenment: Daniel Gordon, *Citizens without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670-1789* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

the seventeenth.⁴ Catherine's position as monarch complicates this simple trajectory: the letters of a monarch do not fit into a simple narrative tracing a shift toward familial intimacy, sentimental notions of selfhood, or democratic and bourgeois values.

Catherine occupied an apparently untenable position as a letter writer: enmeshed in literary and epistolary cultures that seemed to breed equality, she remained at all times an absolute monarch. In squaring this circle, Catherine resorted to artistic devices that balanced familiarity and dignity, the human persona of the letter writer and the exalted station of the monarch. It is clear that her contemporaries appreciated her ability to be personable in conversation without relinquishing a sense of her majesty: if one or the other had been lacking, the aesthetic impression would have been diminished.

Admitted daily to Catherine's private company during his two visits to St. Petersburg, Friedrich Melchior Grimm described precisely this effect in her conversation:

'*L'Impératrice*, à la vérité, ne fut jamais un seul instant absente dans ces tête-à-tête; mais elle n'y fut pas non plus jamais de trop. L'art de conserver la dignité qui lui était naturelle, au milieu de l'aisance, de la familiarité même, dont elle aimait à rencontrer les traces dans la conversation, était un de ses secrets et des charmes magiques de sa société.'⁵ Catherine achieved this conversational aesthetic in her letters too: its features can be seen nowhere better than in the parts of the letter normally marked for

manifestations of hierarchy, such as salutations, closers, and material form. Catherine

⁴ 'Dans la lettre de la noblesse, la montée du tutoiement, la mise en place de vocables nouveaux, le spectaculaire recul de l'humble et obéissante servitude, qui va de pair avec un interrogation sur le pouvoir, la présence grandissante du corps, le recul de la marque du féminin dans les formules finales, sont autant de traits fondamentaux d'une intimité en relation profonde avec le mouvement général des idées, fruit d'une individualité qui du moi au citoyen, ose maintenant s'affirmer' (Grassi, *L'Art de la lettre*, p. 217).

⁵ Friedrich Melchior Grimm, 'Mémoire historique sur l'origine et les suites de mon attachement pour l'impératrice Catherine II jusqu'au décès de Sa Majesté Impériale, par Grimm, 1797', in *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique, par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister, Etc.*, ed. by Maurice Tourneux, 16 vols (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1877-1882; reprint Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1968), I, pp. 17-63 (p. 22).

learned an important lesson from eighteenth-century taste: she had both to know and to knowingly violate the rules of epistolary etiquette, ‘ceci étant en effet’, as Marie-Claire Grassi has phrased it, ‘la marque d’une véritable honnêteté: ne faut-il connaître les règles que pour pouvoir mieux s’en affranchir?’⁶ In every epistolary situation, whether addressing mistrusted monarchs or lovers, Catherine used the important elements of epistolary rhetoric to create the right balance between the authority and affability in order to manage relationships, elicit actions, and project the image she desired.

Authority and Authorship

Authority and Linguistic Mastery

Before one can analyse Catherine’s use of epistolary form, it must first be stated that she was unquestionably the author of her letters. Allegations that she lacked the linguistic competence to write them have been surprisingly tenacious. Already in 1863, P. P. Pekarsky refuted Joseph-Marie Quérard’s accusation that ‘De toutes les lettres de Catherine II, qu’on lit dans la correspondance de Voltaire, je suis certain qu’il n’y en a pas une qui été écrite par cette princesse [...] La langue française était peu familière à Catherine’.⁷ On the contrary, Pekarsky confirmed from the manuscript drafts in the state archives that Catherine really wrote and corrected her own French-language letters, as well as her Russian-language literary works.⁸ Nonetheless, even in the second half of the twentieth century, absurdities about the authorship of her letters still

⁶ Marie-Claire Grassi, ‘L’Etiquette épistolaire au XVIII^e siècle’, in *Etiquette et politesse*, ed. by Alain Montandon (Clermont-Ferrand: Association des Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Clermont-Ferrand, 1992), pp. 139-61 (p. 153).

⁷ Quérard fails even to get Catherine’s name correct, giving her birth name as Sophie Catherine-Dorothée. Joseph-Marie Quérard, *Les Supercheries littéraires dévoilées*, 3 vols, 2nd edn (Paris: P. Daffis, 1869-70; reprint Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve & Larose, 1964), I, p. 656.

⁸ P. Pekarsky, *Materialy dlya istorii zhurnalnoi i literaturnoi deyatel'nosti Ekateriny II*, Prilozhenie k III^{mu} tomu zapisok Imp. Akademii Nauk, 6 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1863), p. 38.

circulated: M. A. Alpatov claimed in 1973 that Catherine could express herself in Russian only with great difficulty and that, in French, her draft letters to Voltaire were sent to D. A. Golitsyn in Paris, then sent back to her in St. Petersburg to be recopied by the empress before finding their way to Ferney.⁹ Far from concealing Catherine's linguistic faults, editors have on occasion made Catherine's spelling appear worse than it really was. Apparently less knowledgeable about French grammar than Catherine, the German editor of Catherine's French-language correspondence with Johann Georg Zimmermann invented a feminine agreement for the invariable past participle 'été', whereas Catherine in the original spelled the participle correctly.¹⁰ Even in 1989, N. Ya. Eidelman deformed Catherine's spelling in her letters to Potemkin: he apparently wanted to give them a 'German' flavour by replacing hard signs in her original Russian text with soft signs in his publication.¹¹ Catherine did make spelling mistakes in all three of her languages, French, Russian, and German: her agreements are often idiosyncratic and phonetic spellings slip in here and there, features common among many native writers of Russian in the period.¹² Her French shows her ease with different registers of the language: she was fond of archaisms but aware of linguistic change, as during the French Revolution when she joked indignantly about the new

⁹ M. A. Alpatov, *Russkaya istoricheskaya mysl i zapadnaya Evropa (XVIII-pervaya polovina XIX v.)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1985), p. 134.

¹⁰ For example, in the letter of 29 January 1789 (OS), 'Si j'ai été payée d'ingratitude' (*Der Briefwechsel zwischen der Kaiserin Katharina II. von Russland und Joh. Georg Zimmermann*, ed. by Eduard Bodemann (Hannover and Leipzig: Hahn, 1906), p. 88) reads in the original 'Si j'ai été payée d'ingratitude' (Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, fol. 51 recto). Catherine's version is more correct, although 'ingratitude' reflects her habit of adding an 's' unnecessarily to the ends of words.

¹¹ N. Ya. Eidelman, 'Pisma Ekateriny II G. A. Potemkinu', *Voprosy istorii*, 7 (July 1989), 111-34; O. I. Eliseeva, *Perepiska Ekateriny II i G. A. Potemkina perioda vtoroi russko-turetskoi voyny (1787-1791)* (Moscow: Vostok, 1997), pp. 18-19.

¹² O. I. Eliseeva, 'K voprosu o russkom yazyke Ekateriny II v ee perepiske s G. A. Potemkinym', in *Issledovaniya po istochnikovedeniyu istorii Rossii (do 1917 g.): sbornik statei* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 1993), pp. 109-22 (pp. 119-20).

terminology that the Revolutionaries were inventing.¹³ Occasional solecisms aside, the overwhelming impression is that Catherine wrote fluently and idiomatically in all three of her languages and creatively employed a range of registers and diverse sources of vocabulary.

Rather than censure Catherine for real or supposed linguistic faults, it will be more productive to consider the rhetoric of her language choice and usage: she selected her languages and her manner of using them in order to guide the dynamics of a given epistolary relationship. Russian was the obvious language for writing to favourites like Potemkin because it fit the two sides of the relationship: service and intimacy. Catherine knew that only Russian expressions of affection could bring her closest to her Russian lover, and so she employed the folkloric language of the peasant woman.¹⁴ At the same time, bureaucratic and military language conveyed Catherine's real desire to see Potemkin's service talents deployed fully. The linguistic choices of the Potemkin correspondence reproduced and intensified the affection and love that was meant to bind Catherine to all her subjects, in particular the nobles who served her.¹⁵ Hence expressions of service and affection mixed and became interchangeable: in 1787, Catherine could write 'я тебя и службу твою, исходящие из чистого усердия, весьма, весьма люблю, и ты сам безценный', and Potemkin reply, 'Сколь мне чувствительны оного [писания] изъяснения, то Богу известно. Ты мне паче родной матери'.¹⁶ The mixing of amorous, familial, and service vocabularies and the

¹³ On Catherine's use of Revolutionary vocabulary, see Chapter Five below.

¹⁴ The resulting 'pesenno-skazochnyi obraz' ['folksong-fairy tale image'] of herself that Catherine creates has been discussed by Olga Eliseeva in 'K voprosu o russkom yazyke Ekateriny II v ee perepiske s G. A. Potemkinym', pp. 118-19, and in 'Au, sokol moi...', *Nauka i religiya*, 3 (1994), 8-10.

¹⁵ On love as the guiding principle in Catherine's scenario of power: Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995-2000), 1: *From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I* (1995), 1, p. 111.

¹⁶ Catherine to Potemkin, 6 July 1787 (OS); Potemkin to Catherine, 17 July 1787 (OS); *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin: Lichnaya perepiska 1769-1791*, ed. by V. S. Lopatin (Moscow: Nauka, 1997), pp. 217-18.

operation of the same words on multiple levels (‘бесценный’ [‘priceless’] and ‘родная мать’ [‘own mother’] having both affectionate and service connotations) only strengthened the multiple fibres that held together the relationship: where power and affection might have been opposed, the choice of Russian vocabulary made them mutually-reinforcing.¹⁷ Whereas Russian allowed Catherine to focus inward on her affective relations with Potemkin, she switched to French when she viewed their relationship from the outside, as part of court sociability or as a joint venture in pursuit of greatness. One early note considers how she will comport herself in court circles, given the new relations between herself and Potemkin: only two lines are in French, ‘Foudra [Faudra?] t’il l’admettre [presumably N. B. Samoilov] au petit souper pour faire pendant à Елагин [Elagin]?’ and ‘mon coeur, il faut de la variation dans le style et pour cela je dit, что неласкова [‘not tender’] [...] Adieu, mon bijou’. French thus best expresses matters of sociable practice, like place settings at dinner or the aesthetic demand for stylistic variety in gallant letters. By contrast, Russian conveys a sense of physical proximity (‘Как я чаю, ты пуще хорош и чист после бани’), or, playing on the coldness and inhumanity of officialdom, jocular references to the business of state (‘Подумаю, что в Сенате сижу’).¹⁸ Another early note confirms the association of French with thoughts of her reputation amongst a European elite who blended superior sociability with authority in both intellectual and political matters. Catherine asked in Russian what Potemkin thought about the havoc that love wreaked on her mind (‘Каково-то тебе мило с таковою разстройкою ума обходиться, не ведаю’), but

¹⁷ Olga Eliseeva misses the rhetorical force of this mixing when she assumes that Potemkin would take offence at Catherine’s characterisation of their relationship as: ‘Между тобою и мною, мой друг, дело в кратких словах: ты мне служишь, а я признательна. Вот и все тут’ (Catherine to Potemkin, 27 July 1787 (OS), *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, p. 220; Eliseeva, *Perepiska Ekateriny II i G. A. Potemkina perioda vtoroi russko-turetskoi voyny*, pp. 52-53).

¹⁸ Undated [15 April 1774 (OS)], *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, pp. 23-24.

then she switched to French to consider what international elites would say about her ('O, Monsieur Potemkine, quel fichu miracle Vous avés opéré de déranger ainsi une tête, qui ci-devant dans le monde passoit pour être une des meilleures de l'Europe?').¹⁹ Language choice thus helped Catherine to reconcile affective proximity with hierarchy and convention in a relationship in which power and reputations were constantly at stake.

In the correspondence with Grimm, alternation between French and German allowed Catherine to combine power and 'bonhomie' in a uniquely playful way. French was the default language of international politics, business, and literature, so it was the expected medium for the exchange with Grimm. She used it as a matter for course with foreign correspondents, even if they were German, whether monarchs like Frederick II and Joseph II, or Germans or Baltic Germans in Russian service like Achatz Ferdinand von der Asseburg and Jacob Johann Sievers, or men of letters like Zimmermann and Grimm.²⁰ Wary of appearing too German in the eyes of her own subjects, and probably having least occasion to use German on a daily basis, Catherine wrote letters in German only when her correspondents were most comfortable with that language: these included Baltic Germans like the writer Elisa von der Recke and Reinhold Wilhelm von Pohlmann.²¹ The choice of French was in fact especially obvious for Grimm: a German who had made his name as a French man of letters, Grimm first came into contact with Catherine as a purveyor of Parisian literary news in the *Correspondance littéraire*, then in the context of court sociability in St. Petersburg in 1773-74, and finally as her

¹⁹ Undated [after 19 March 1774 (OS)], *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, p. 18.

²⁰ A French letter to Asseburg concerning the choice of a bride for Catherine's son Paul can be found in *Sbornik imperatorskago russkago istoricheskago obshchestva* [henceforth *SIRIO*], 136 vols (St. Petersburg: Imp. Akademiya Nauk, 1874-1916), XIII, pp. 64-67, for example.

²¹ V. Rakint, 'Briefe Katharinas II. und des Stanislas August an Elisa von der Recke', *Zeitschrift für Osteuropäische Geschichte*, 9 (Neue Folge 5) (1935), 222-30; the original letters, only one of which is autograph, are kept in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. germ. quart. 452; 'Pisma imperatritsy Ekateriny Velikoi k Reingoldu Vilgelmu von Polmanu', *Russkii arkhiv*, 1 (1888), 1-16.

cosmopolitan cultural agent in Europe. French suited their topics of discourse as well as the literary games they played.

However, Catherine often wrote segments of the letters to Grimm in German, to a much greater extent than in the correspondence with Zimmermann, where a few such interpolations also appear. It was clearly an important part of the personal epistolary tone that Catherine developed with particular verve in the Grimm correspondence, as well as one component in the specific set of epistolary tropes and personae that she and Grimm evolved in the course of their exchange. She chose German in her letters to Grimm particularly when commenting in a jocular, almost churlish tone on foreign affairs. Although the code-names they used for key figures and Catherine's metaphorical, allusive manner of writing often obscured her meaning, the choice of the German language could not have served any real security function in letters that had to travel through Germany anyway. Rather, these passages exemplify once more Catherine's skill in employing witty inversions to characterise herself as great without becoming overbearing: she wrote as a German *Bürgermeister* [mayor], a recurring mask in the Grimm correspondence. This figure stood for stuffy traditionalism, narrow-mindedness, and self-satisfaction with petty power: he thereby provided a foil for Catherine to display her enlightened outlook and the grand scale of her authority. The apparent diminution of her stature only highlighted her power and forward-looking dynamism: on 7 May 1779 (OS), for example, Catherine laughed, 'comment la cour d'équité de Smolensk peut-elle se mêler des affaires d'autrui sans le désir des autrui [...] kommt Zeit, kommt Rath, sagen die Bürgermeister der freien Reichs-Städte, en frappant des doigts sur leurs tabatières d'argent et affectant de rire en toussotant.'²² She

²² *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 139.

compared herself to two seemingly insignificant political entities, the Smolensk equity court and a mayor of a free imperial city, to allude to her role in negotiating and guaranteeing the Peace of Teschen. Signed on 13 May 1779 (NS), this treaty concluded the War of the Bavarian Succession and established Catherine as an arbiter of European politics.²³

In 1794 Catherine reused the same German proverb, one of her favourites, to attack the French Revolutionaries: ‘Die Ränke der Mißgunst, die sitzen wo sie sitzen; das Sprichwort sagt: kommt Zeit—kommt Rath und die Röthereyen bleiben im Rothe, so wie auch die Röther.’²⁴ The voice of the small-town *Ratsherr* [city councilman], with his base language (a ‘Röther’ is an ugly dirty dog in the Pomeranian dialect of Catherine’s native region), allowed Catherine to satirise the commoners who ruled Revolutionary France. Catherine considered linguistic mastery to be the rightful province of the ruling elite; this belief was correlated with her view that enlightened leaders had the responsibility to cultivate and promote the national language.²⁵ When Sénac de Meilhan flattered her linguistic elegance, Catherine pointed to elite sociability as the true source of literary finesse: ‘d’où vient que Charles neuf, roi de France, écrivait plus élégamment que son poète Ronsard? Eh bien, je vous le dirai: c’est que c’est la cour qui épure la langue, non les auteurs.’²⁶ Mocking stereotypically common

²³ According to Isabel de Madariaga, ‘[t]he mediation thus brought Russian influence into the centre of Europe’ (*Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (London: Phoenix, 2002), p. 381).

²⁴ 12 January 1794 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 589.

²⁵ Stéphane Viellard has pointed out that, in her treatment of Olga of Kiev in her *Notes Concerning Russian History*, Catherine established particularly close ties between the sovereign and the national language: ‘Известно, что народы и языки народов мудростию и тщанием вышних правителей умножаются и распространяются. Каков Государь благоразумен, о чести своего народа и языка прилежен, по тому и язык того народа процветет’ (‘Catherine II: de la langue aux langues’, *Histoire Epistémologie Langage*, 32, 1 (2010), 31-46 (p. 32); *Sochineniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II: na osnovanii podlinnykh rukopisei*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, 12 vols (St. Petersburg: Tip. Imp. Akademii nauk, 1901-1908), VIII, pp. 55-56).

²⁶ Catherine to Meilhan, 16 June 1791 (OS), *Sochineniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, XI, p. 580.

language exhibited and reasserted the elite's linguistic superiority and its leading role in this domain, at a time when all the prerogatives of the elite were under threat. By writing in this voice, she insinuated that she remained the arbiter of Europe: she best understood the situation, even if for the moment she remained quietly watchful in her corner. It also recalled her past exploits: one day, she implied, she might reclaim the role that she had played at Teschen. Catherine thus employed a particular register of German, full of base vocabulary and popular proverbs, so as to assume a particular rhetorical persona and make a particular point about her linguistic and diplomatic control. By speaking the *Bürgermeister's* language, Catherine played the enlightened monarch's game of ostensibly downplaying her own power in order to exercise it better and more cleverly than others.

Something analogous might be said about the supposed faults of Catherine's language: some of the liberties she took with grammar and spelling might be seen as manifestations of epistolary and political mastery. The two sides of Catherine's epistolary persona, the charming lady and the absolute monarch, both encouraged a degree of linguistic carelessness. Some epistolary manuals held that good grammar could be disregarded in the interests of the lively, personal, negligent style of the letter: one early eighteenth-century manual states that 'Les expressions cavalieres & figurées, qui employées à propos & avec ménagement, rendent une Lettre très-agréable, ne sont pas toujours sévèrement assujetties aux regles grammaticales.'²⁷ Madame de Sévigné was praised for the idiosyncrasies of her language: 'il y a pourtant chez elle des expressions & des tours, qui ne sieroient pas à d'autres; peut-être même qu'on les trouveroit hazardées dans tout autre qu'elle; & sur-tout dans un homme de lettres. Mais

²⁷ Jean-Léonor Le Gallois de Grimarest, *Traité sur la maniere d'écrire des lettres, et sur le ceremonial: Avec un discours sur ce qu'on appelle Usage, dans la Langue Française* (La Haye: Adrian Moetjens, 1709), p. 27.

elle se montre par-tout si aimable, qu'on aime tout ce qu'elle dit'.²⁸ The rules that apply to the average man of letters do not apply to the best epistolarians, especially if they are amiable ladies as well. Gender also played a role: women were expected to show a lack of instruction in intellectual activities like letter writing. While women's letters might be denigrated as 'incorrect', some women might also profit from this prejudice. According to Diderot, Catherine's accomplishments were even more impressive because she was an untrained but naturally talented woman: while men have only 'des vertus d'emprunt' learned at school, 'Une femme, quand elle est grande, l'est d'elle même. Elle ne doit rien qu'au ciel qui la forma; et quand elle agit, il y paraît bien.'²⁹ Catherine's claims to be ignorant and uneducated should therefore not be taken at face-value: like the stereotypical nobleman who knows everything without having learned, or like Diderot's naturally great woman, Catherine made known her lack of education only to set her accomplishments into greater relief.

Catherine could imitate truly poor grammar for emotional effect when she wished. She addressed, for example, a thoroughly ungrammatical love note to Potemkin, writing 'Général, m'aimés Vous? Moi aimer Général beaucoup'.³⁰ This note may have accompanied or even replaced a notification of his promotion to the rank of general-in-chief: in addition to its emotional impact as affectionate baby-talk, Catherine's denial of linguistic control signifies her genuine political control and her ability to confer power on others. Rather similarly, in her correspondence with

²⁸ Charles Batteux, *Cours de Belles Lettres ou principes de la littérature*, new edn, 4 vols (Paris: Desaint & Saillant, Durand, 1753), IV, p. 288.

²⁹ Diderot to I. I. Betskoy, undoubtedly for Catherine's eyes too, 29 November 1766 (NS), Denis Diderot, *Correspondance*, ed. by Georges Roth and Jean Varloot, 16 vols (Paris: Minuit, 1955-1970), VI, p. 356. On the presumed incorrectness of women's letters: Katharine A. Jensen, 'Male Models of Feminine Epistolarity; or, How to Write Like a Woman in Seventeenth-Century France', in *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth C. Goldsmith (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), pp. 25-45 (p. 41).

³⁰ Undated [30 May 1774], *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, p. 30 and note p. 577.

Geoffrin, Catherine not only sought to produce memorable Sévigné-like turns of phrase, as when she compared herself to a ‘tete de meduse’ for the rigidifying effect she had on her courtiers.³¹ She also exaggerated the ungrammaticality and run-on conversational structure of her sentences to charm her correspondent: in one such run-on, Catherine feigned to decline Geoffrin’s praise for her epistolary style, claiming that her French was not good enough. But by the end of the sentence Catherine had made her way to a witticism that reaffirmed the superiority of her approach to writing of all kinds: ‘j’ai recours au plus simple bon sens, [...] j’appelle cela agir mathématiquement les ressorts les plus simples étant reconnu pour les meilleurs.’ The omitted punctuation seems only to emphasise the spontaneity and naturalness of Catherine’s arrival at the best way to write. The best letters hid any effort that went into producing them, and neglect of formalities like punctuation was one way, if an unconventional one, of exhibiting the natural, uninstructed strength of Catherine’s wit.³² By hazarding unusual collocations and treating grammar cavalierly on occasion, Catherine added to her personalised epistolary style, lending it the air of genuineness that eighteenth-century epistolary theory increasingly valued.

Yet Catherine’s somewhat careless grammar had another face: it revealed the hand of the absolute monarch. The presence of a few faults in Catherine’s compositions distinguished her autograph letters from those of a secretary. A secretary would write neatly and perfectly: Catherine as empress needed to make sure that her correspondents knew of the honour that they had received in obtaining an autograph. In sixteenth-

³¹ 6 November 1764, *SIRIO*, I, p. 260. Catherine liked the image and reused it almost twenty years later in a letter to the prince de Ligne of 6-7 March 1781 (OS) (Prince Charles-Joseph de Ligne, *Correspondances russes*, ed. by Alexandre Stroeve and Jerom Vercruysse, 2 vols (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), I, p. 128).

³² ‘L’EXPRESSION dans les Lettres doit être vive, naturelle, nette & concise, sans qu’il y paroisse de travail’ (Grimarest, *Traité sur la maniere d’écrire des lettres*, p. 19).

century Europe, nobles and monarchs made their handwriting intentionally difficult to read as a mark of distinction: Rayne Allinson has observed that Elizabeth I of England's "skrating" hand was not unusual among the noble classes, who deliberately adopted idiosyncratic styles to distinguish themselves from the laborious chancery or secretary hands of those who wrote for a living. In her total disregard for legibility, Elizabeth's was the most "noble" writer of all.' Elizabeth's 'prose style' was similarly unique.³³ Traces of this habit probably remained in the minds of eighteenth-century letter readers. Catherine's autograph letters to Frederick the Great illustrate this: these letters regularly and necessarily passed through the hands of ministers and secretaries before being sent. Yet these letters too display Catherine's characteristic spellings: an unnecessary 's' at the ends of words, the omission of the grave accent on 'à', and 'de la' written as one word: 'Je veux du bien *a* cette Cour de Son retour, et je suis pleinement persuadée que par les memes Sentimens *d'humanités* et d'amour pour la tranquillité de l'Europe Votre Majesté Se trouvera disposée *a* apporter de Sa part toutes les *facilité convenables* au Succès *dela* Negoçiation qui va S'ouvrir entre Nous trois' [my italics--KBRD].³⁴ One must therefore surmise that Catherine and her subordinates intentionally left her spelling imperfect: these mistakes exhibited the monarch's personal and unfettered will, in this case to make the most of the impending negotiations for a partition of Poland. This technique was all the more important because her correspondents sometimes were deceived or wilfully deceived others on this count: Catherine's letter to Elisa von der Recke of June 1788 (OS) was published in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* [*Berlin Monthly Journal*] as an 'eigenhändiges Schreiben' ['autograph letter'], although the

³³ Rayne Allinson, *A Monarchy of Letters: Royal Correspondence and English Diplomacy in the Reign of Elizabeth I* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 21.

³⁴ 15 March 1772 (OS), Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, I. HA Rep. 96, Nr. 110 P Bd. 2, [n.p.]; *SIRIO*, xx, pp. 319-20.

original is clearly in a secretary's hand.³⁵ Thus when Catherine wrote her first autograph letter to Johann Georg Zimmermann, she made sure he could not miss the fact that he had received an autograph letter. She slipped a line of German into the French text, employed the comic literary trope of mocking doctors, and left certain irregularities of agreement in a run-on sentence: 'les comptes annuels de l'Apoticaierie pour mon personel, *pas*se rarement les trente Souls, quoique les gazettes m'*aye* dite morte, mourante, agonissante, et dans un état valetudinaire, rien de tout cela n'*a existés* jusqu'ici' [my italics—KBRD].³⁶ This extract epitomises Catherine's ability to encompass the full complexity of her enlightened epistolary persona in one sentence: she painted herself as an enlightened monarch, attentive to the press and the public sphere and careful to limit government expenditures on her own person, yet her style was delightfully jocular. Her fluent but slightly incorrect manner of expression highlighted how she wrote her own letters as part of her personal attention to all matters of state. It expressed her particularly eighteenth-century intention to rule by charm rather than by force, and the personal letter was the perfect genre in which to perform this role.

³⁵ Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. germ. quart. 452, fol. 3; *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, 7 (July 1788), 129-31 (p. 130).

³⁶ 22 February 1785 (OS), Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, fol. 1 recto and verso. Catherine also wrote in a bar over the 'n' in 'personel' to indicate the double consonant, which does not appear to have been customary for secretaries.

Authority and Writing Practices

From start to end of her reign, Catherine drafted important autograph letters herself. The most entertaining, literary, and personal letters are always those composed by the empress, not her secretaries. For example, a note written to Nikita Panin from Kazan on 27 May 1767 (OS) shows that she was responsible for the letter of the same date to Frederick II: ‘На весьма дружеское письмо Короля Прусского буду отвечать, а между тем к Вам обратно посылаю церемониальное его письмо, дабы ответ Коллегия изготовила.’³⁷ Frederick had sent parallel personal and ceremonial letters to announce the birth of his nephew’s daughter, Friederike Charlotte, the future Duchess of York and Albany. Catherine similarly answered with a ceremonial letter, written by the College of Foreign Affairs, and a personal letter in which she agreed to be the baby girl’s godmother and employed her obviously Voltaire-inspired personal style. In the personal letter, she borrowed a joke from her first letters to Voltaire, saying that she pitied her goddaughter ‘de ce qu’elle va porter un nom aussi peu harmonieux que le mien’, and she replied to Frederick’s flattery about her *Nakaz* with a gently facetious quote from the Bible. Especially messy spelling drew further attention to the personal touch of Catherine’s light style: ‘l’Evangile dit qu’un habit *rapiesseté* ne vaut rien. [...] je n’ai *dont* en tout *ceçi d’autres parts* que celle par *hazard* du bonheur de ma Situation’ [my italics—KBRD].³⁸ The flair that the enlightened monarch introduced into international diplomacy was all her own. So was the efficiency with which she replied to her colleague’s letter on the day she received it: a rapid turn-around was her custom throughout her reign. Her secretary Khrapovitsky

³⁷ *Pisma i zapiski imperatritsy Ekateriny Vtoroi k grafu Nikite Ivanovichu Paninu* (Moscow: V Universitetskoi tipografii, 1863), p. 24.

³⁸ Frederick to Catherine, 12 May 1767 (NS); Catherine to Frederick, 27 May 1767 (OS); Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, I. HA Rep. 96, Nr. 110 P Bd. 2, [n.p.]; *SIRIO*, xx, pp. 233-36.

recorded, for example, that in August 1788, during the Russo-Swedish War, Catherine ‘собственноручно писать изволила к Грейгу о шведских и финских обстоятельствах.’ She clearly composed the letter to her admiral, Samuel Greig, herself: ‘Письмо начато 22-го, после обеда, и кончено 23-го, по утру; при мне читано.’³⁹ Catherine could thus direct naval operations through letters written apparently without help and merely read aloud to her secretary when completed. Sometimes she chose to reply in her own hand to letters that were not even addressed to her personally. For instance, when her representative in Berlin, Count Nesselrode, contravened her instructions, Catherine demanded Nesselrode’s official dispatches to her secretary and chief official in foreign affairs, Aleksandr Bezborodko, and insisted on replying herself: ‘Истребовано вчерашнее письмо Нессельрода; сами ответ писать станут.’⁴⁰ Catherine thus had absolute authority over when and how she wrote letters.

She usually wrote without the assistance of model letters. In an undated note addressed in her own hand to Bezborodko, Catherine wrote: ‘Я разучилась писать, прикажите составить примерный ответ.’⁴¹ The exception proves the rule: if Catherine had to request a model reply, she must not have used them ordinarily, even though the mechanisms existed to produce them.⁴² Numerous drafts of letters to Voltaire and Johann Georg Zimmermann in Catherine’s own hand have survived.⁴³ She even wrote letters for other people, especially her favourites: when Prince Henry of

³⁹ A. V. Khrapovitsky, *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskago, 1782-1793*, ed. by Nikolay Barsukov (St. Petersburg: A. F. Bazunov, 1874), p. 136.

⁴⁰ *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskago*, p. 237.

⁴¹ *SIRIO*, XLII, p. 282.

⁴² Another note, to Zubov, was written by an official uncertain of whether to write a draft response to a letter from the king of Hungary: this was in all likelihood one of the more routine autograph letters of inter-court notification, which Catherine copied out in her own hand for form’s sake (*SIRIO*, XLII, p. 316).

⁴³ The majority of the letters to Voltaire have autograph drafts preserved in the Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Drevnikh Aktov (RGADA). Drafts of letters to Zimmermann are printed in *SIRIO*, XXVII, pp. 397-98, 461-62; XLII, pp. 138-41.

Prussia sent a painting from Frederick II's collection to Grigory Orlov, Catherine compensated for Orlov's ignorance of French by drafting his thank-you letter for him. This letter, ironically enough, included Orlov's promise to deliver the gift to Catherine, leading her to write a letter about herself in the third person: 'Oui, Monseigneur, j'exécuterai vos ordres, je le remettrai à l'Impératrice selon vos intentions.'⁴⁴ This evidence sufficiently demonstrates Catherine's usual practice of composing her autograph correspondence herself; far from regularly allowing others to draft all her letters, she sometimes provided model letters for them.

What role, then, did ministers, secretaries, and favourites play in composing Catherine's autograph letters? Their primary role was to manage the flow of incoming rather than outgoing correspondence. One of Catherine's early reforms was to institute the position of secretaries responsible for taking petitions, or 'статс-секретари' ['state secretaries'], as they came to be called.⁴⁵ Each assigned specific kinds of affairs and correspondence, the state secretaries delegated some matters to subordinate government institutions before remitting to Catherine questions requiring her personal attention. Only in extraordinary circumstances could correspondents and petitioners write 'в собственные руки' ['into her own hands'] on their sealed letter, which would then reach Catherine directly. Of course, the manner in which a state secretary presented a letter to Catherine could influence her response. Widespread awareness of this aspect of the secretaries' role can be seen in the careful instructions that the writer A. P. Sumarokov gave to his friend and state secretary G. V. Kozitsky on how and when to

⁴⁴ Grigory Orlov to Henry of Prussia, 9 December 1771, *Briefwechsel zwischen Heinrich Prinz von Preußen und Katharina II. von Rußland*, ed. by R. Krauel (Berlin: Alexander Duncker, 1903), pp. 61-62. The draft in Catherine's hand is printed in *SIRIO*, XIII, pp. 140-41.

⁴⁵ She did so by a decree of 11 June 1763, a manifesto of 14 June, and an instruction of 23 June to the first such officials, A. V. Olsufiev, G. N. Teplov, and I. P. Elagin (*Polnoe sobranie zakonov rossiikoi imperii, s 1649 goda*, 45 vols (St. Petersburg: Tipografia II Otdeleniya Sobstvennoi Ego Imperatorskago Velichestva Kantselyarii, 1830), XVI: *28 iunya 1762-1764*, pp. 293, 303-304 (No. 11858, 11867, 11868).

present his letters to Catherine: ‘Ваше благоразумие и ко мне дружба обещают вашему другу, что мое письмо подастся тогда, когда е. в. не отягощена другими делами, дабы оно яснее рассмотрено было. И прошу об ответственности [...]’.⁴⁶

Unfortunately for Catherine’s reputation, during some periods of her life she gave not only her secretaries, but also her favourites a substantial role in filtering incoming correspondence. The long-lasting tensions between Catherine and Princess Dashkova began when, just after the coup d’état of 1762, Dashkova found Grigory Orlov lounging on a sofa opening packets from the Supreme Council.⁴⁷ Much later, when Catherine sent Bezborodko to negotiate with the Turks at Iassy after the death of Potemkin in October 1791, the administration was briefly thrown into disorder when Catherine reassigned many of Bezborodko’s former filtering functions to the completely inexperienced Platon Zubov.⁴⁸ When Bezborodko complained in 1793 about Zubov’s influence, Catherine reassured him that nothing was hidden from him as a trusted secretary. But she accompanied these words with a gentle rebuff that echoed the anxiety about royal authority that was rife in the year of Louis XVI’s execution: ‘что я сама пишу, в том отчетом не обязана’.⁴⁹ She deemed control of correspondence to be an inalienable part of sovereignty. However, despite these ominous moments and the vicissitudes of changing circumstances and personalities at court, Catherine’s practices for writing her autograph letters, like her daily routine, remained remarkably regular

⁴⁶ 28 January 1770 (OS), *Pisma russkikh pisatelei XVIII veka*, ed. by G.P. Makogonenko (Leningrad: Nauka, 1980), p. 125.

⁴⁷ Princesse Dashkova, *Mon histoire: mémoires d’une femme de lettres russe à l’époque des lumières*, ed. by Alexandre Woronzoff-Dashkoff, Catherine Le Gouis, and Catherine Woronzoff-Dashkoff (Paris, Montréal: L’Harmattan, 1999), p. 57.

⁴⁸ See Khrapovitsky’s comments in his diary, including the note on 17 October (OS) that ‘Дуралеюшка Zubov удивился, услыша от Дмитрия Прокофьевича Трошинского, что секретари Ея Величества докладывают по входящим бумагам и подают указы к подписанию, и ставят на них числа’ (*Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskogo*, p. 378).

⁴⁹ Quoted in ‘Bezborodko, svetleishii knyaz Aleksandr Andreevich’, in *Russkii biograficheskii slovar*, ed. by A. A. Polovtsov and others, 28 vols (St. Petersburg: Izd. Imperatorskago russkago istoricheskago obshchestva, 1896-c.1991), pp. 634-40 (p. 638).

over the thirty-four years of her reign. She consulted affably with those whom she trusted, while she retained ultimate control over her outgoing letters.

To respond to any letter or to any other occasion requiring action, Catherine could write a letter in her own hand or dictate one. Dictation does not, however, seem to have been a habitual practice for her: her secretary Khrapovitsky found it worth noting in his diary when she dictated to him a condolence letter to Aleksey Orlov on the death of his brother Ivan, a method perhaps prompted by her grief.⁵⁰ Catherine could also issue oral or written instructions, on the basis of which her secretaries and their chancelleries drew up various kinds of documents and correspondence. Some of these she signed, others were handled entirely in the chancelleries. The sheer quantity of business necessitated this delegation of activity: the archives of her most important state secretary, Bezborodko, who served most actively from 1775 until 1792, contain no less than 14,572 documents signed by Catherine, and 9,651 letters signed by Bezborodko but conveying Catherine's orders.⁵¹ She often reviewed the secretaries' productions with pen in hand, correcting matters of phrasing as well as matters of more substance.⁵² She wrote to her minister Nikita Panin, for example, 'je Vous conseille pour ne pas casser le cou à Constantinople du pauvre Ibrahim, de faire effacer dans Votre Lettre au Vizir les mots, que j'ai soulignés'. Nonetheless, her approach was clearly collaborative and respectful of their expertise. She advised her ministers and secretaries on their correspondence, but left them a certain amount of discretion: she continued in the letter to Panin cited above, 'mais Vous savez au bout du compte mieux, que moi leur valeur,

⁵⁰ 29 November 1791 (OS), 'Спокойно писали с моей руки к Графу Алексею Григ[орьевичу] Орлову Чесменскому о приемлемом соучастии в печали по смерти брата его, Гр[афа] Ивана Гр. Орлова, случившейся 18 Ноября' (*Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskogo*, p. 384).

⁵¹ N. I. Grigorovich, *Kantsler knyaz Aleksandr Andreevich Bezborodko v svyazi s sobyitiyami ego vremeni*, 2 vols (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya V. S. Balasheva, 1879-1881), II, p. 327.

⁵² Grigorovich asserts that she did so less for Bezborodko than for other secretaries, and that consequently she was particularly active in editing her secretaries' productions in the first half and in the last few years of her reign (*Kantsler knyaz Aleksandr Andreevich Bezborodko*, II, p. 331).

et je Vous en laisse le Maitre.’⁵³ Catherine thus tempered her own authority over state correspondence by delegating less important tasks and by consulting informally with her closest advisors.

Catherine frequently asked a small number of such close associates to review her autograph letters. Sometimes, she requested purely linguistic help during the composition process: her favourite Potemkin and her secretary Khrapovitsky could be called upon to verify her Russian spelling.⁵⁴ The occasions for such checks might be surprising: Khrapovitsky reviewed, for example, her short notes of a few sentences sent to her grandchildren during the trip to the Crimea in 1787.⁵⁵ The concern for linguistic correctness here was presumably pedagogical: Catherine wanted her grandchildren to observe and practise good Russian usage and good epistolary style by exchanging letters with her during the voyage. When she was composing her more literary and sociable letters, however, she called on her associates not as correctors, but merely as an audience for her epistolary wit: on 2 December 1788 (OS), for example, Khrapovitsky noted that Catherine read out to him a letter to the Prince de Ligne: ‘Читали мне в шутливом слоге многозамыкающее в себе письмо к Принцу де Линь. Тут сказано, что le délire de Montcoeur (Hertzberg) est digne des petites maisons. Мне сие изъяснено.’⁵⁶ Khrapovitsky does not claim to have corrected her French. Moreover, her views on Hertzberg would have been well known to Khrapovitsky, so there was no

⁵³ *Pisma i zapiski imperatritsy Ekateriny vtoroi k grafu Nikite Ivanovichu Paninu*, p. 152.

⁵⁴ Catherine to Potemkin, [before 21 April 1774? (OS)]: ‘Голубчик, при сем посылаю к Вам письмо к Гр[афу] Алек[сею] Гр[игорьевичу] Орлову. Естли в ортографии есть ошибка, то прошу, поправя, где надобно, ко мне возвратить’ (*Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, p. 24).

⁵⁵ For example, 20 February 1787 (OS): ‘Смотрел письма В. К-м и К-нам [великим князьям и княжнам]’ (*Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskogo*, p. 26). Catherine’s ‘letter’ to her granddaughter Aleksandra of 19 March was only two sentences long: ‘Александра Павловна, портрет мой маленький я к вам пришлю, буде здесь подобный отыщу. Я вас мысленно целую. ЕКАТЕРИНА’ (*Imperatritsa Ekaterina II. Istoricheskie materialy, khranyashchiesya v Biblioteke dvortsa goroda Pavlovskia*, *Russkaya starina*, 9 (1874), 277-300 (p. 291)).

⁵⁶ *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskogo*, p. 206.

need to read the letter for information. Instead, she read the letter aloud to witness with her own eyes her readers' appreciation for her portrayal of affairs of state as literary entertainments: the jocular style of the letter matched the suggestion it contained that a proverb play be composed about Hertzberg.⁵⁷ She was not asking for Khrapovitsky's help, but rather showing off her skill as an enlightened ruler who conducted state business with the flair of literary sociability: de Ligne, after all, was Joseph II's representative, and political declarations to him were hardly secret or neutral. At other times, secretaries made and retained copies before sending the letters (the need to take copies implies, of course, that Catherine rather than the secretaries wrote the letters). For example, on 5 November 1789 (OS), she read out a letter from de Ligne and her own answer, which Khrapovitsky then copied 'для отпуски' ['for the record'].⁵⁸ Khrapovitsky similarly reproduced letters to Zimmermann for the archives. These copies were most frequently made when Catherine aimed to send political messages to an audience beyond the ostensible addressee: the letter to Zimmermann written and copied on 6 June 1791 (OS), for example, was 'отправлено по почте через Берлин' ['sent by post via Berlin'] to tell the Prussian court that Catherine knew about but did not fear English intrigues against her.⁵⁹ Catherine was again testing the effect of her epistolary act on readers at home; epistolary initiative and enlightened style in these letters were all her own.

Besides acting as spell-checkers, copyists, and handy audiences, Catherine's entourage also advised her on substance, but these consultations on autograph letters

⁵⁷ Catherine to de Ligne, 2 December 1788 (OS): 'Le délire Montcoeur (traduisez, s'il Vous plaît ce mot en allemand) est tel qu'il ressemble pleinement à celui des petites-maisons; on pourrait aisément le mettre en proverbe et l'intituler: *Le loup dans la bergerie*; ou bien aussi *Rira bien qui rira le dernier*' (de Ligne, *Correspondances russes*, I, p. 154).

⁵⁸ *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskogo*, p. 316.

⁵⁹ *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskogo*, p. 364.

tended to occur at the moment of sending. In keeping with Catherine's practices as a whole, this procedure left maximal authority to Catherine in drafting the letter. She regularly handed on her letters to Panin and Bezborodko, asking them to copy them for the records and then dispatch them if they found the letters satisfactory, or, if not, to return them and tell her why: notes to Panin read 'При сем к Вам посылаю письмо к Графу Горну [presumably the Swedish Count Adam Horn of Ekebyholm]; естли оное Вам не нравится, то извольте сказать, в чем', or 'Si vous êtes content de cette lettre, après en avoir tiré copie, vous n'avez qu'à l'expédier'; or, to Bezborodko, 'Буде найдете приложенное ответное письмо достаточным и поправления не требующим, то отошлите, куда надлежит, списав копии.'⁶⁰ Catherine referred to this procedure as 'conditional' sending: she wrote to Panin about the above-cited letter to Frederick on the birth of his grand-niece, 'Вы более похвалы письму моему к Королю Прусскому даете, нежели я ожидала, сочиня оное, и для того кондиционально к Вам послала.'⁶¹ This comment makes one suspect that sometimes an element of literary coquetry mingled with diplomatic concerns in Catherine's request that her ministers read and approve her letters. Sometimes, of course, ministers could prompt Catherine to include niceties in her letters out of purely diplomatic considerations: a note from Bezborodko contains a recommendation, in appropriately humble terms, that 'Не угодно ли будет Вашему Императорскому Величеству в письме вашем к Императору включить засвидетельствование благодарности и признания Вашего за сообщения, в крайней доверенности по повелению его графом Кобенцелем учиненныя.' Catherine returned Bezborodko's note along with her finished letter, again asking for his advice: 'Буде не найдешь, чего прибавить, то

⁶⁰ *Pisma i zapiski imperatritsy Ekateriny vtoroi k grafu Nikite Ivanovichu Paninu*, p. 158; *SIRIO*, XIII, p. 138; *SIRIO*, XLII, p. 288.

⁶¹ *Pisma i zapiski imperatritsy Ekateriny vtoroi k grafu Nikite Ivanovichu Paninu*, p. 29.

пошли приложенное письмо.’⁶² Consultation on letters to third parties built an enlightened, collaborative atmosphere in Catherine’s work with her secretaries and made sure that the best possible letters were produced on matters of state.

Diplomatic letters were not the only ones that Catherine handed over unsealed to her associates: her later favourites were often given the privilege of sealing her letters to Potemkin or of handing them over to Potemkin’s adjutant, M. A. Garnovsky, to seal. Garnovsky claimed in his reports to the head of Potemkin’s chancellery, V. S. Popov, that Aleksandr Dmitriev-Mamonov could influence Catherine’s letters to Potemkin, for instance in softening her admonition that the field marshal remain with his army on 25 September 1787 (OS).⁶³ However, Olga Eliseeva observes that Bezborodko’s account of the situation at court at this time gives cause to doubt Garnovsky’s story of the letter’s composition.⁶⁴ In the absence of a written record of changes to Catherine’s letters to Potemkin, it is hard to verify the extent of the favourites’ influence. It is reasonable to conjecture that she followed her typical pattern of consulting more frequently with others, including favourites, about letters when major political issues were at stake. Zubov, for better or for worse, played the same role as secretaries and ministers: one of her notes to him asks him to decide between two versions of a letter, to have a copy made, and to have it sealed with black wax.⁶⁵ Catherine’s notes to Zubov show that even in the last years of her life, while she seems to have copied out rather more of her official correspondence from other people’s drafts than before, she nonetheless continued to write on her own initiative. Zubov was an intermediary between Catherine and her secretaries and ministers as each contributed to the

⁶² *SIRIO*, XLII, p. 280.

⁶³ ‘Zapiski Mikhaila Garnovskago, 1786-1790’, *Russkaya starina*, 15, 2 (1876), 237-65 (p. 254).

⁶⁴ Eliseeva, *Perepiska Ekateriny II i G. A. Potemkina perioda vtoroi russko-turetskoi voiny*, pp. 44-45.

⁶⁵ *SIRIO*, XLII, p. 327.

epistolary process: while one note suggests mere copying ('Si le P. script que Markof fait est prêt, qu'on me le donne; ma lettre seconde est écrit'), another shows Catherine writing a letter without consulting anyone beforehand ('Vous verrez par le contenu même de la lettre, ce qui m'a obligé de l'écrire, il faut l'envoyer par Moscou [...]').⁶⁶ Regardless, bestowing on ministers, secretaries, and favourites the right to read, seal, and dispatch letters did not really constitute a relinquishment of her authority: in each case, stylistic originality and strategic initiative—twin marks of the enlightened monarch—originated with Catherine alone, as did final decision-making power over what was sent.

The content of a given letter and the intended audience always determined Catherine's procedure for composing it and the degree of involvement of her secretaries. Catherine usually composed letters to Friedrich Melchior Grimm entirely unaided: whereas Catherine repeatedly read letters to Zimmermann and de Ligne to Khrapovitsky and asked him to copy them, he mentions in his diary only the externals of her letters to Grimm. He prepared some enclosures and gifts for Grimm, like a musical score 'видно для посылки в Париж к Гримму' ['apparently to be sent to Grimm in Paris']; manuscript copies of proverb plays and a copy of the Koran printed in St. Petersburg; and copies of Catherine's letters to the Marquis de Bouillé and the comte d'Artois.⁶⁷ Only on one occasion did Catherine read to him a postscript that she added to a notification of a series of Russian victories on 25-26 September 1789 (OS): it was a message denouncing the French Revolution in literary and historical terms, again using the rhetorical tools of the enlightened, well-read monarch as a call to political action. Khrapovitsky could see it because it was, unlike her usual letters to Grimm, essentially

⁶⁶ *SIRIO*, XLII, pp. 332, 339.

⁶⁷ *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskogo*, pp. 76, 165, 375.

an open letter: Catherine sent the letter by post so that it would be opened on the way, be shared around, and thus publicise the victories. Khrapovitsky also copied out an identical war bulletin to be sent by the same means and on the same day to Zimmermann; Catherine merely added a different postscript in her own hand to personalise it.⁶⁸ Thus the content that Catherine wished to transmit, and the broader audience for which she intended it, dictated a substantial departure from her usual techniques of writing to Grimm.

From 1781 onward, Catherine and Grimm normally corresponded privately and primarily by courier, and no one else had any role in composing the letters. Unlike most letters to Voltaire, de Ligne, and Zimmermann, she did not make drafts and had no copies made for her records. She habitually replied to Grimm's letters and enclosures not just instantly after reading them, but even as she read them, scribbling down her answers as she read. Catherine proudly declared the spontaneity of her epistolary practice: 'J'écris tout ceci, tenant la lettre de M. Reiffenstein à la main, et tout en la lisant'; 'Tenez, souffre-douleur, à peine ai-je le temps de vous faire une petite lettre de vingt pages, pour laquelle je ne fais ni brouillon ni dépense de belles phrases'; 'Au reste, des lettres que je vous écris il n'existe ni copies ni brouillons; c'est ce dont je vous assure dans la plus exacte vérité'.⁶⁹ These statements reflect a certain literary ostentation: eighteenth-century readers expected good letter writers to give at least an impression of spontaneity and 'naturel' in their art.⁷⁰ Grimm informed Reiffenstein of Catherine's manner of commenting on his letter, for which she was duly praised, and in

⁶⁸ *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskogo*, pp. 310-11; Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, 70 recto and verso. The published edition of the Zimmermann correspondence does not indicate the change of hand (*Der Briefwechsel zwischen der Kaiserin Katharina II. von Russland und Joh. Georg Zimmermann*, pp. 109-10).

⁶⁹ Catherine to Grimm, 17 August 1778, 12 September 1781, 19 April 1788 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 98, 220, 441.

⁷⁰ Benoît Melançon refers to a 'pacte de spontanéité' (*Diderot épistolier: Contribution à une poétique de la lettre familière au XVIII^e siècle* (Québec: Fides, 1996), pp. 146-52).

reply she adopted the Voltairean enlightener's comic anti-Catholic tone to express her mock indignation: 'Mais quelle folie, s'il vous plaît! pourquoi mandez-vous à Reiffenstein ce que j'ai fait de sa lettre? frère Jacquier embrassé par mon ordre ne saura qu'imaginer, et tous les monsignori de Rome seront scandalisés du peu de politique qui règne dans mes démarches.'⁷¹ On other occasions, however, she indicates rereading some of his letters and examining them before putting pen to paper.⁷² She repeatedly noted that she had reread her letter when she finally reached the end of a multi-week composition, but only on occasion did she change things: 'Ce matin j'ai relu cette pancarte, je ne sais pas bien pourquoi, et j'y ai ajouté entre les lignes plusieurs interlocutions rectificantes, comme aurait dit le divin de Rome dans son patois.'⁷³ Such comments underscore the natural skill that supposedly permitted her to write spontaneously, in keeping with eighteenth-century epistolary aesthetics; the description of rereading as part of the letter-writing process charmingly replaces the usual convention of neatness to indicate Catherine's time and effort invested in the exchange. Such instances of what Benoît Melançon calls 'l'autoreprésentation épistolaire' make an important point about Catherine's authorship of and authority in her letters.⁷⁴ Her personal voice appears most clearly in the letters least doctored by secretaries: she, not her secretaries, must be credited with her wit and epistolary skill.

In Catherine's letters to Grimm, such depictions of the epistolary process served a practical and aesthetic purpose of tying one letter to the next, while at the same time they fleshed out Catherine's overarching persona as an affable and conscientious but absolute sovereign. Through her characteristic device of comic inversion, Catherine

⁷¹ Catherine to Grimm, 30 October 1778 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, p. 108.

⁷² *SIRIO*, xxiii, pp. 172, 302.

⁷³ Catherine to Grimm, 28 May 1788 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, pp. 448-49.

⁷⁴ Melançon, *Diderot épistolier*, p. 216.

foregrounded minor physical and circumstantial impediments on her power, all the better to depict the extent to which she herself commanded all her correspondence and thereby the whole Russian state. The epistolary process became a metaphor for her entire mode of enlightened government. Her consideration for those who sharpened her quills stood in for the enlightened monarch's responsibility not to overburden her subjects: 'mes valets de chambre me donnent deux plumes neuves par jour, que je me crois en droit d'user; mais quand elles sont gâtées, je ne m'enhardis guère d'en demander d'autres, mais je les tourne et retourne, comme je puis.'⁷⁵ Catherine knew perfectly well how adorable such a statement would sound under the pen of an Eastern autocrat who could order every goose in Russia to be plucked for her amusement, if she so wished. In the 1780s, Catherine's openers and closers repeatedly and jokingly complained that the rhythm of her exchange was subject to the arbitrary will of Bezborodko, who managed the dispatch of imperial couriers: 'le seigneur factotum vient de m'ordonner de tenir prête la réponse, pour laquelle généreusement il me donne trois jours'; 'M. factotum m'a déclaré en termes nets et clairs que je n'ai qu'à tenir mon paquet prêt pour lundi'; 'Le seigneur factotum m'ordonne de tenir prête une missive pour votre seigneurie'.⁷⁶ By adopting the official language appropriate to the subject's perspective on orders coming from above, Catherine distinguished her voice from that of a tyrant, who would be unable to perceive and to joke about the dictatorial ring of government clichés. She again inverted the real power hierarchy: the factotum ought to be a mere instrument of his employer's will. To a certain extent, though, this comic picture was accurate: the empress had to exercise her authority through a complex government apparatus, through the continually shifting alliances and intrigues of the

⁷⁵ Catherine to Grimm, 30 June 1775 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 27.

⁷⁶ Catherine to Grimm, 16 August 1783, 27 September 1785, 26 December 1786 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 281, 363, 388.

court, and through the cooperation of innumerable and often unreliable officials. By her awareness of and involvement in every stage of the epistolary process, she proclaimed her authority, which her respect for others, her good humour, and her literary skill displayed as enlightened and therefore well deserved.

Epistolary Etiquette

All eighteenth-century letter writers inevitably had to counterbalance authority and familiarity in the openers and closers of their letters. Combined with the ‘ceremonial of expression’ (stylistic features and formulae used in the body of the letter) and a letter’s material features, the superscription and subscription of a letter constituted the ‘formal means by which early modern letter writers signified status relations’; ‘superscriptions and subscriptions registered hierarchies and acknowledged relations of power’, making them a possible ‘key to the interpretation of an eighteenth-century letter’.⁷⁷ Marie-Claire Grassi sees in the eighteenth-century observance of epistolary ‘bienséances’ the continuing role of the letter as a social and political necessity, but she also draws attention to the increasing tendency toward informality and intimacy as part of the ‘invention of the self’ at the verge of modernity.⁷⁸ Catherine the Great’s letters challenge that narrative. Given her unique position of authority, her status in the real social hierarchy quite rarely came into question. Catherine hardly needed to register any hierarchies because she was so indisputably at the top. Yet her ubiquitous gestures of informality have almost nothing to do with the ‘invention of the self’. Rather, Catherine put every aspect of the letter to use, from the format of her writing paper to her opening and closing formulae and the addition of postscripts. In making each of

⁷⁷ Sternberg, ‘Epistolary Ceremonial’, p. 39; Bannet, *Empire of Letters*, p. 65.

⁷⁸ Grassi, ‘L’Etiquette épistolaire au XVIII^e siècle’, pp. 160-61; *L’Art de la lettre*, pp. 186-87.

these choices, Catherine balanced dignity and familiarity in ways not always foreseen by the precepts of the epistolary manuals. One of the enlightened monarch's key tasks was to temper the reality of absolute power with a show of respect for other human beings. This was but one of the many actions that Catherine could take by manipulating epistolary convention. While editors in the past have considered such elements as closing formulae so mechanical that they could be left out of print editions of Catherine's correspondence, such conventions and their subtle modifications are far too important to neglect.⁷⁹ Through them, Catherine performed enlightened monarchy through a subtle interplay of emotional and political authority.

Materiality

Epistolary manuals devoted significant attention to the material aspects of the letter, such as the quality of the paper, neatness, layout on the page, and folding and sealing: Catherine included all these and more in her repertoire of epistolary tactics.

Catherine typically wrote all her letters to be sent abroad on the same kind of paper, whether they were addressed to writers like Friedrich Melchior Grimm, Johann Georg Zimmermann, or Elisa von der Recke, or to more exalted correspondents like the dukes of Württemberg or Frederick the Great.⁸⁰ A sheet measured approximately 370 x 225 mm, which she then folded in half to make four pages: the smaller size of the paper distinguished it from the official letters produced in the chancellery, which were

⁷⁹ Krauel leaves off the closers in *Briefwechsel zwischen Heinrich Prinz von Preußen und Katharina II. von Rußland*, for example.

⁸⁰ Sergueï Karp and Sergueï Iskioul, 'La correspondance entre Grimm et Catherine II: la longue histoire des manuscrits et des éditions', in *La Culture française et les archives russes: Une image de l'Europe au XVIII^e siècle*, ed. by Georges Dulac (Fernel-Voltaire: Centre International d'Etude du XVIII^e Siècle, 2004), pp. 83-98 (p. 86); Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a; Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. germ. quart. 452, fol. 9; Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, G261 Bü 5; Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, I. HA Rep 96, Nr. 110 P Bd. 1-2, for example.

approximately 400 x 300 mm before folding.⁸¹ Mostly her paper was gilt-edged, but even Frederick the Great received letters without gilt. The presence or absence of gilt edging did not have any obvious significance: it seems Catherine simply used whatever paper was at hand, even when writing to a king. Nonetheless, gilt edging was distinctly luxurious in Russia, as was the silver powder that she used to dry her ink and which sometimes still sticks to page.⁸² This uniformity in writing materials suggests elegance and superiority: Catherine was so highly placed that she need not worry about distinguishing between recipients, and she could simply follow the rules of politeness with everyone. The watermarks include a range of Dutch paper manufacturers: ‘JHONIG & ZOONEN’, ‘C & I HONIG’, ‘GR’, ‘CR’, ‘D & C BLAUW’, ‘JAN KOOL’.⁸³ These were fairly typical watermarks for letter paper in the second half of the eighteenth century and were often imitated by paper manufacturers outside the Netherlands.⁸⁴ The epistolary manuals recommended using only whole pieces of paper, never cutting them in half except for jotting down a very short compliment or ‘billet’.⁸⁵ Catherine almost always followed this custom: even when her letter consisted only of five lines, a dateline, and not even a signature (‘Monsieur le Chevalier de Zimmermann, je / Vous envoie un extrait dela lettre de l’Ad / miral Greigh que j’ai reçue hier au Soir / fort tard je me flatte quelle Vous fera / plaisir / a St. Petersb: ce 10 Juillet 1788’), she

⁸¹ Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Darmstaedter 1 1762, fol. 3; Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, G263 Bü 1, for example.

⁸² Eliseeva, *Perepiska Ekateriny II i G. A. Potemkina perioda vtoroi russko-turetskoi voyny*, p. 20. I have also found traces of her silver powder on several letters in the Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, e.g. her letter to Friederike Dorothea, wife of Friedrich Eugen of Württemberg, date 16 July 1781 (OS), G261 Bü 5.

⁸³ These were observed on the letters stored in the Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; they can be identified with functioning Dutch manufactories from W. A. Churchill, *Watermarks in Paper in Holland, England, France, etc., in the XVII and XVIII Centuries and their Interconnection* (Amsterdam: Menno Hertzberger & Co., 1935), pp. 13-18.

⁸⁴ Claire Bustarret, ‘Usages des supports d’écriture au XVIII^e siècle: une esquisse codicologique’, *Genesis*, 34 (2012), 37-65 (pp. 47-49).

⁸⁵ Antoine de Courtin, *Nouveau traité de la civilité, qui se pratique en France parmi les honnêtes gens* (Paris: Durand, 1750), pp. 235-36.

sent to Zimmermann the entire sheet of the usual size, with the remaining pages blank and the copy of Greigh's letter on a separate full sheet in a secretarial hand.⁸⁶

Epistolary etiquette and materiality constitute a unifying motif in the Grimm correspondence: Catherine and Grimm enjoyed violating epistolary regulations while joking about their faux pas. In so doing they relished their joint status as such well-informed letter writers that they might ignore the rules they both knew: mockery reinforced mastery as in so much of the enlightened aesthetic of Catherine's letters. When Catherine used a cut page rather than a whole one in a letter, she apologised by making light of the fault of etiquette: 'Je sais bien qu'à la cour de Saxe-Gotha il est d'usage de commencer une lettre sur une feuille entière; mais il y a des gens qui n'en ont pas et dont la patience n'attend pas qu'on leur en apporte pour commencer, et alors chez nous on commence ses lettres comme l'on peut, et l'on fait ses excuses à la troisième page; cela est poli au moins.'⁸⁷ Especially when writing abroad, Catherine selected and utilised her letter paper with polite regard for her correspondents; even this small material detail displayed the personal care and attentiveness to others that should characterise the enlightened monarch.

Many of her love notes and business notes sent within the palace were of quite a different nature. One hundred and forty-five notes to her secretary and minister Aleksandr Bezborodko have survived, scribbled on scraps of paper, old envelopes, and other bits of waste paper.⁸⁸ The early nineteenth-century copy of her gallant notes to Zakhar Chernyshev includes sketches of the paper format, indicating that several of the

⁸⁶ Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, 38 recto-41 verso.

⁸⁷ Catherine to Grimm, 18 August 1776 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 54.

⁸⁸ Grigorovich, *Kantsler knyaz Aleksandr Andreevich Bezborodko*, II, p. 326.

notes were written on sheets torn on one or two sides.⁸⁹ In a note to Potemkin, Catherine turned the paper itself into motif of the lover's language: the choice of waste paper for a love note became an expression of her involuntary drive to tell him that she loved him ('Посмотри, пожалуй, ненарочно случилось, а опять новое [письмо]—лист сей попался, так разгляди, пожалуй, лист поперек писан'). The thought of paper also elicited one of the pet names in her extensive arsenal: she closed the letter 'Adieu, французские пять томов in-folio.'⁹⁰ In this case, her choice of paper matched physically the theme of love's mental chaos, while she portrayed her addressee as a sound mind housed in a fine body, the human equivalent of a luxuriously printed work of French scholarship. Sometimes, though, she might also use a full sheet for internal notes, which might cause trouble in interpreting the purpose of the note. One such note, held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, has been interpreted by a collector as a 'draft', but the content and material evidence suggest otherwise. In the note, which dates from after July 1794, Catherine scripts what she would like an official in foreign affairs, possibly Vice-Chancellor I. A. Osterman or Bezborodko, to 'glisser dans la conversation' with the Swedish ambassador regarding Baron G. M. Armfeldt. The many cross-outs were not editing a previously written draft, but occurred as she wrote: she crossed out 'Si l'on me parleroit' and, after trying another variant above, continued 'en me parlant' inline with the previous text. Moreover, the note shows signs of folding and sealing in the fashion which Catherine usually used for notes within St. Petersburg.⁹¹ She may have left the full sheet to allow a response on the same page from her official, or to permit

⁸⁹ St. Petersburg, Institut russkoi literatury Rossiiskoi akademii nauk, F. 424, N. 57, 4 recto-5 verso.

⁹⁰ Undated [March-April 1774], *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, pp. 20-21.

⁹¹ Oxford, Bodleian, MS. Montagu d. 20, fol. 3-4. When the Swedish regent, Duke Charles of Södermanland, persecuted Gustav III's former favourite Armfeldt, Catherine permitted him asylum in Kaluga and refused, as in this note, to so much as acknowledge Armfeldt's presence in Russia (Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, pp. 449-50).

sealing for maximal secrecy. Catherine's paper usage was thus practical but also entirely integrated into her many epistolary stratagems.

Free access to paper, pens, and ink were a privilege of rank for Catherine. Forbidden as grand duchess to write any letters of her own and permitted merely to sign letters written by the college of foreign affairs, Catherine could not even possess writing materials. To send a clandestine letter to her mother, she tore a blank page from a book, purchased a silver pen on the pretext of making a gift to an attendant, and convinced her valet to fill the pen with ink for her.⁹² The past restrictions on her letter writing help to explain the delight that Catherine expressed in letters to Grimm at the availability of paper and pens and her impulse to use them: she slipped in the 'anecdote intéressante' that 'je n'ai jamais encore vu de plume neuve sans lui sourire et sans avoir senti une vive tentation de m'en servir', or excused herself for writing a seemingly unmotivated letter, 'voyant sur ma table une belle plume, un encrier très propre avec du papier blanc, le démon du griffonnage m'a tenté, car, comme dit le proverbe, l'occasion fait le larron.'⁹³ While this purported little weakness seemed trifling for an empress, it also bore a hint of triumph: Catherine truly luxuriated in the imperial privilege of writing whenever and on whatever she wished.

Catherine's handwriting in all her languages was unmistakable and clear, demonstrating the regularity and control that ought to characterise the great enlightened ruler. Her handwriting consistently slants to the right, and the lines of text are even and straight, although sometimes they tilt downward toward the right in her freer letters to Zimmermann, for instance. In Russian, she did not join up the characters in words, as was typical for the mid-eighteenth century when she learned to write Cyrillic; she

⁹² *Sochineniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, xii, pp. 125-26.

⁹³ 30 June and 14 September 1775 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, pp. 27, 34.

almost always formed her characters in Russian as in her other languages identically.⁹⁴ Her German *Kurrentschrift* is equally regular, but the letters are more joined up than in Russian or French, as the norm required. Her epistolary mastery is particularly clear in French, however: the jaunty arch of her lower-case 'd' particularly distinguishes her confident hand. She wrote her letters and notes in black and brown ink, occasionally in pencil; she used red pencil for annotating government papers and printed books.⁹⁵

Seventeenth-century epistolary manuals insist heavily on showing respect for one's addressee by leaving substantial margins, a great deal of space between the salutation and the start of the letter ('donner la ligne'), and a similarly large gap between the end of the letter and the subscription. By the later part of the eighteenth century, however, the fashion for 'donner la ligne' had passed except when writing to people much superior.⁹⁶ However, Catherine had no superiors. She often left no margins at all, but she could leave up to 1.5 cm on the left and up to two or three on top and bottom. When she left a large margin at the top, it usually contained the location and date at the very top right. She was somewhat more likely to leave margins on her letters to Frederick II than to Zimmermann, but some letters to the latter also contain large margins. The amount of margin left often had more to do with spacing than with meaning: she sometimes increased the size of her handwriting and margins to take up more of the available space on the page.⁹⁷ Not particularly concerned with saving paper, she only very rarely wrote sideways or otherwise tried to squeeze extra text onto

⁹⁴ Eliseeva, *Perepiska Ekateriny II i G. A. Potemkina perioda vtoroi russko-turetskoi voyny*, p. 20.

⁹⁵ Lopatin, *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, p. 542; 'par conséquent donc le livre de monsieur Necker est admis aussi à l'honneur du crayon rouge', Catherine to Grimm, 5 October 1777 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 66.

⁹⁶ Courtin, *Nouveau traité de la civilité*, pp. 236, 238; Louis Philpon de la Madelaine, *Modèles de lettres sur différents sujets* (Lyon: Pierre Bruyset Ponthus, 1771), pp. 61-62.

⁹⁷ For example, the letter to Frederick of 19 January 1771 (OS), in Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, I. HA Rep 96, Nr. 110 P Bd. 2, [n.p.], *SIRIO*, xx, pp. 297-304; and the letter to Zimmermann of 19 April 1791 (OS), Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, 84 verso.

a page.⁹⁸ In more official letters, the date and place of composition appear on the last page on the left, with the salutation, if there is one, and signature on the right. In more informal letters, such as the ones to Johann Georg Zimmermann, the date and place might appear at the top right of the first page or on the left below the text at the end: no clear pattern governs Catherine's choice of one or the other. The manuals express disagreements about the most polite place for the dateline: putting it at the top was most convenient and immediately informative for one's reader, but writing it as low as possible on the last page showed the most respect.⁹⁹ The unelaborate layout of Catherine's letters reflected both her imperial prerogative and the evolving tastes of her century.

Datelines might be as important to the interpretation of a letter as any other element of epistolary form. Some manipulations could be invisible and could fulfil only Catherine's momentary tactical needs. In 1788, Princess Augusta of Württemberg, née Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel and known by her nickname of Zelmire, died under mysterious circumstances in Lohde, where Catherine had given her shelter from her abusive husband, Grand Duchess Mariya Fedorovna's brother, Friedrich of Württemberg. The former steward of Tsarskoe Selo, the Baltic German Reinhold Wilhelm von Pohlmann, into whose care Catherine had entrusted Zelmire, seems to have wanted to conceal the real cause of death, which might have been complications from the birth of a child fathered by Pohlmann. He reported the death on 19 September, three whole days after it occurred, and then took weeks to reply to Catherine's

⁹⁸ The only example of sidewise writing in the margin that I have found is her letter to Stanislas Poniatowski of 12 November 1762 (OS), which was sold in Paris on 18 November 2014 for €17,500. The image can be found on the website of the auction house, Ader: <http://www.ader.auction.fr/_fr/lot/catherine-ii-1729-1796-imperatrice-de-russie-1762-1796-6837455#.VV9iOaZ4jTA> [accessed 22 May 2015].

⁹⁹ Grimarest, *Traité sur la manière d'écrire des lettres*, pp. 124-25.

immediate request on 21 September for a medical report to send to Zelmire's family. By 10 October, rumours of the death were circulating in St. Petersburg: Catherine could not risk the family discovering the news by other means, so she wrote to Zelmire's parents and in-laws, attaching Pohlmann's letter (the original and a copy, respectively) and antedating the letters to 23 September. Catherine clearly had been waiting for the medical report before writing, but the delicacy of the situation demanded an epistolary intervention; transit times made the false date plausible. The date thus covered up for Pohlmann's fault and prevented diplomatic fallings-out.¹⁰⁰

Other datelines, or their absence, could send more overt messages. For example, Catherine withheld the location on her famous letter to Marmontel, instead adding a postscript: 'P.S. Je ne sais d'où dater ma Lettre. Je suis sur un Vaisseau, au milieu du Volga, avec un assez gros tems, que bien des Dames appelleroient un orage effroyable.'¹⁰¹ Concealing her location sketched out a novelesque scene of adventure appropriate for the intrepid enlightened ruler who takes time out amongst all kinds of labours to patronise the arts. As many of these examples suggest, datelines became especially important when she travelled: Catherine's epistolary output notably seems to have increased rather than decreased during her various voyages: the letters allowed her not only to advertise herself as a good monarch familiarising herself with her empire, but also to project images of her empire or to win her subjects' affection by expressions of pleasure at what she saw on her progress through their provinces. Epistolary mastery of space went hand in hand with real control of territory.

¹⁰⁰ A. G. Brikner, "'Zelmira". Epizod iz istorii tsarstvovaniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II. (1782-1788)', *Istoricheskii vestnik*, 41 (1890), 277-303, 551-72 (pp. 566-67); *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskago*, p. 170. Brikner merely notes that the date is 'неверна' without attempting to interpret it. The letter to Zelmira's father-in-law, Friedrich Eugen of Württemberg, with the attached copy of Pohlmann's letter of 19 September, is in the Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, G236 Bü 133, second folder.

¹⁰¹ 7 May 1767 (OS), Jean-François Marmontel, *Correspondance*, ed. by John Renwick, 2 vols (Clermont-Ferrand: Institut d'études du Massif Central, 1974), 1: (1744-1780), p. 169.

Catherine's inventiveness manifested itself most in the fanciful datelines of her correspondence with Grimm. She could mock him for his materialism ('A S^t Pétersbourg, ce 3 d'août, jour destiné à un Te Deum, ne vous en déplaie, pour la paix'), inform him about her empire and her planned actions ('De Tver qui, après Pétersbourg, est la plus jolie ville de l'empire, au beau milieu du palais archiépiscopal de l'évêque Platon, qui dans deux jours d'ici va perdre son évêché pour passer au siège de Moscou'), or joke about a supposed loss of control over time ('Ce 17, 18 ou 19 d'octobre 1778').¹⁰² The Grimm correspondence was throughout bound together by such play with such 'autoreprésentation épistolaire': Catherine's descriptions of the spaces in which she wrote her letter operate in a similar manner to her datelines. A whole series of portraits of herself in her palaces convey her mastery of space, even as her descriptions aim at simplicity and ordinariness: for example, on 22 August 1785 (OS) she gave an account of her day, 'dès après mon café je m'enfuis à l'hermitage, où je me mets dans mon petit cabinet de dix toises à faire un salmigondis que j'appelle extrait; quand j'en ai assez de celui-là, je me promène et je regarde les tableaux ou la Néva fort couverte de vaisseaux'.¹⁰³ Catherine may be a human being like so many others, working away with pen and paper in a little study, going for walks around her house, and looking out the window, but her work is also the legislation for a whole empire, her walks take her past a priceless collection of paintings, and out the window she sees the flourishing commerce that her reign encourages. The graceful miniatures of Catherine's epistolary space open a literal and figurative window onto her vast space of rule.

¹⁰² *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 5, 13, 104.

¹⁰³ *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 362; also, for example, p. 379.

Salutations

The mere fact that Catherine reliably adhered to Western epistolary convention made the political point that she was a European monarch on a par with or even superior to other rulers. As in so many other domains, Peter I had paved the way by including epistolary etiquette in his campaign to westernise Russia: the second book printed in the newly invented civil type in 1708 was a collection of model letters entitled *Priklady kako pishutsya komplementy raznye na nemetskom yazyke* [*Examples of how to write various compliments in the German language*]. A second augmented edition appeared in the same year and was reprinted in 1712 and 1725; as the title states, both the original *Priklady* and the added annex were translated from late seventeenth-century German epistolary manuals. The *Priklady* modeled first and foremost the appropriate formulae for exchanges between princes: it began with a letter announcing a prince's accession to the throne.¹⁰⁴ In Catherine's day, the official letters produced in the chancellery for German princes retained formulae derived from German models. Announcements, congratulations, and condolences on the occasions of births, deaths, and weddings opened with Russian salutations like 'Светлейший Князь, / Дружебнолюбезный племянникъ!' ['Most Serene Prince, / Friendly and Dear Nephew'], which were direct calques of the formulae in the accompanying German translations, like 'Durchlauchtiger Fürst, / freundlichlieber Vetter!' ['Serene Prince, / Friendly and Dear Cousin']). The letters similarly closed with 'Вашей любви / Дружебно-охотная / Екатерина' ('Eurer Liebden / freundwillige / Catharina' ['Your Grace's / Sincere Friend / Catherine']).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Gabriele Scheidegger, *Studien zu den russischen Briefstellern des 18. Jahrhunderts und zur "Europäisierung" des russischen Briefstils* (Bern, Frankfurt am Main, Las Vegas: Peter Lang, 1980), pp. 41-42, 46, 51.

¹⁰⁵ Catherine to Unknown, 18 April 1792 (OS), Oxford, Bodleian, MS. Autogr. c. 24/3, fol. 430-32. Many similar letters can be found in various European archives, like the announcement of the birth of the future Emperor Alexander I (Catherine to Friedrich Eugen, 12 December 1777 (OS), Landesarchiv

In her autograph letters, Catherine employed the simpler French style, the standard throughout Europe. Eighteenth-century sovereigns addressed one another as ‘brother’ and ‘sister’: Catherine therefore opened her letters to all monarchs, like Frederick II, Maria Theresia, Joseph II, Christian VII and Juliana Maria of Denmark, and Stanislas August of Poland, as ‘Monsieur mon Frère’ or ‘Madame ma Sœur’. Lesser princes, like the dukes and duchesses of Württemberg and Brunswick, were saluted as ‘Monsieur mon Cousin’ and ‘Madame ma Cousine’. However, behind this apparent even-handedness of address lay a keen awareness of status. As Lucien Bély has observed, the complex familial ties between the ruling families of Europe, which in theory established equality and brotherhood among rulers, coexisted with a hierarchy of power and prestige.¹⁰⁶ Catherine was well aware that the letters she wrote and received would reflect both the familial and hierarchical sides of princely interaction. For example, Catherine’s first cousin by blood, Gustav III of Sweden, had to be addressed as ‘Monsieur mon Frère et Cousin’: amusingly, the draft of one of Catherine’s early letters to him bears her annotation, enquiring of her secretaries, ‘Le terme de Cousin est-il nécessaire? Le Roi de Suède s’en est servi dans sa lettre.’ The secretary replied: ‘Je crois, Madame, que ce terme de Cousin est nécessaire, puisque Votre Majesté est en effet à ce degré de parentage avec le Roi.’¹⁰⁷ This marginal exchange highlights not just Catherine’s desire to show as little intimacy as possible with a cousin she disliked, but, more importantly, her sensitivity to epistolary convention: on Gustav’s accession, she wanted to be sure that the international hierarchy of princes remained intact. When, soon after her own accession, the French ambassador Breteuil attempted to renew the

Baden-Württemberg, Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, G236 Bü 133, third folder); Catherine to Unknown, 6 October 1780 (OS), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Darmstaedter 1 1762, fol. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Lucien Bély, *La société des princes: XVI^e-XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1999), p. 18.

¹⁰⁷ Catherine to Gustav, 6 October 1771 (OS), *Catherine II et Gustave III: une correspondance retrouvée*, ed. by Gunnar von Proschwitz (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1998), p. 33.

agreement that France would not observe the ceremonies suited to the Russian imperial title, Catherine had issued an entirely autograph declaration that neither she nor her successors would ‘entretenir quelques correspondances avec des puissances, qui refuseront de reconnaître le titre Impérial, dans les personnes des Souverains de toutes les Russies’.¹⁰⁸ This was not mere vanity: Catherine was setting up the preconditions for greatness by claiming her place in the international hierarchy. Her actions in this respect were perfectly in keeping with the image of the great ruler that she would have perceived from classic Enlightenment authors. In his *Siècle de Louis XIV*, Voltaire recounted the Sun King’s successful acquisition of precedence over the Spanish Habsburgs as one of the very first actions by which he ‘montra d’abord qu’il ambitionnait toute sorte de gloire, et qu’il voulait être aussi considéré au dehors qu’absolu au dedans.’¹⁰⁹ As Marmontel phrased it in the *Encyclopédie* article ‘Grandeur’, ‘la dignité positive dans un *grand* est l’accord parfait de ses actions, de son langage, de sa conduite en un mot, avec la place qu’il occupe.’¹¹⁰ Upon attaining power, Catherine had to establish the ‘place’ she occupied as imperial, so that her later actions could be in accordance with the highest possible rank. For her, appropriate dignity in imperial titles and in forms of epistolary address was a necessary precondition for greatness in eighteenth-century monarchical correspondence.

Most often, Catherine sought to balance respectful address with flattering familiarity in her letters to individuals below the rank of royalty. She used ‘Monsieur’ or ‘Madame’ with or without the surname of the person addressed; if she did not include the surname, she might put ‘Monsieur’ or ‘Madame’ within the first sentence of the

¹⁰⁸ 21 November 1762 (OS), *SIRIO*, xii, p. 58.

¹⁰⁹ Voltaire, *Œuvres historiques*, ed. by René Pomeau (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 688 (chapter 7).

¹¹⁰ Marmontel, ‘Grandeur, (*Phil. mor.*)’, in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, ed. by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert, 17 vols (Paris: Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1751-72), vii, p. 856.

letter rather than at the very start, which was characteristic of the more informal ‘billet’ form.¹¹¹ The normal pattern seems to have been to start the correspondence by using the addressee’s surname, but to drop it as the correspondence or relationship became closer and more informal: Catherine’s first two letters to d’Alembert begin ‘Monsieur d’Alembert’, but the later ones contain just ‘Monsieur’. Analogously, her first letter to her mother’s friend Johanna Bielke opened ‘Madame de Bielcke’, while later ones used only ‘Madame’.¹¹² In German, Catherine had a similar practice: she addressed the writer Elisa von der Recke as ‘Frau von der Reeck’ [‘Mrs. von der Reeck’], but with one of her subordinates, the former steward of Tsarskoe Selo and an associate of Grigory Orlov, Reinhold Wilhelm von Pohlmann, she used ‘Mein Herr’ or ‘Mein lieber Herr’ [‘Good Sir’ or ‘My dear sir’].¹¹³ With Zimmermann, however, Catherine seems to have oscillated freely between ‘Monsieur’ alone and ‘Monsieur de Zimmermann’: this may have reflected respect for him and pride in her own achievement, since it was she who ennobled him by awarding him the Russian Order of St. Vladimir in 1786. The higher the rank of the addressee, the more likely she was to retain the full name as a mark of respect. Despite the friendly terms on which she stood with the prince de Ligne, she invariably began her letters with ‘Monsieur le prince de Ligne’: he was, after all, a prince, but not a sovereign entitled to be addressed as a ‘brother’ or ‘cousin’. The respect due to rank overrode the familiarity between them and demanded that Catherine continue to use this relatively formal salutation.

¹¹¹ For more on writing *en billet*, see below, pp. 120-21.

¹¹² ‘Correspondance avec Catherine II’, in *Œuvres et correspondances inédites de d’Alembert*, ed. by Charles Henry (Paris: Perrin, 1887), pp. 193-261 (pp. 204, 215, 222); *SIRIO*, x, pp. 28, 47, 62.

¹¹³ This salutation is from Catherine’s only surviving autograph letter to von der Recke, dated 5 October 1795 (OS), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. germ. quart. 452, fol. 9; ‘Pisma imperatritsy Ekateriny Velikoi k Reingoldu Vilgelmu von Polmanu’, *Russkii arkhiv*, 1 (1888), 1-16.

Catherine's letters to Voltaire exemplify the dignified dance of respect and familiarity that characterised Catherine's self-presentation before the elite of Europe. She never addressed Voltaire as 'Monsieur de Voltaire', but rather only as 'Monsieur'. This familiarity was a kind of honour for the man of letters: 'Monsieur de Voltaire' would have seemed too distant for such a regular correspondent.¹¹⁴ She never had to use 'Monsieur de Voltaire' because the correspondence began with literary games. Catherine addressed her first two messages through François-Pierre Pictet: what is generally considered the first letter of the direct correspondence, her reply to Voltaire's letter to Pictet of 4 July 1763 (NS), in fact continues indirect address.¹¹⁵ The direct correspondence began only when Voltaire replied directly to a thank-you note for the dedication of *La Philosophie de l'histoire* (1765), which Catherine had veiled in several layers of indirectness, writing it in the third person and addressing it to Voltaire's pseudonymous alter ego: 'L'Impératrice de Russie, est très obligée au Neveu de l'Abbé Bazin [...] Comme le Neveu de l'Abbé Bazin a gardé un profond silence sur le lieu de sa résidence, on adresse cette réponse à Monsieur de Voltaire'.¹¹⁶ Subsequently, Catherine maintained the dignity of the exchange, while occasionally slipping 'Monsieur' into the first line rather than keeping it as an opener.¹¹⁷ Only on one occasion did she omit 'Monsieur' entirely: opening simply with the date and the words 'Je Vous avoit menacé d'une lettre de quelque bicoque de l'Asie, je Vous tient parole aujourd'hui', she drew attention to the unusual dateline, 'à Casan ce 29 May 1767'. The dateline replaced the salutation in maintaining the continuity of the exchange and

¹¹⁴ This salutation appears quite rarely in Voltaire's incoming post, but 'Monsieur de Voltaire' was the form of address selected by other monarchs like Stanislas II August, Gustav III, and Christian VII, whose exchanges with Voltaire in no way matched Catherine's in extent or interest (for example, D16826, D17169, D17542).

¹¹⁵ D11210, D11421.

¹¹⁶ May/June 1765, D12631.

¹¹⁷ D15612, D19188.

forcefully claiming Voltaire's admiration for the empress familiarising herself with and legislating for the exotic spaces and inhabitants of her empire. The form of address thus matched the general tenor of her exchange with Voltaire: a certain degree of carefully arranged familiarity lent greater lustre to the dignity and achievements of both correspondents.

Catherine's personal acquaintance with Grimm in the context of informal court sociability, as well as the particular collusion between the two correspondents, allowed her to realise in this exchange the full literary and parodic potential of informality in the correspondence of a monarch. Mocking ceremonial salutations was the epistolary equivalent of the mock-heroic mode that Catherine so enjoyed in literature, from Le Sage to the German imitators of *Tristram Shandy*: these inversions and substitutions relied on a canonical image of the true hero for their comic value. The simple appellation 'Monsieur' furnished the two correspondents with a rich store of jokes about etiquette: Catherine enjoyed them as part of a style of court sociability that derived its piquancy from a contrast with the rigid etiquette of formal occasions. Only the first surviving letter from Catherine begins with 'Monsieur de Grimm'. Afterward he received alternative names derived from literary discourse, such as 'Monsieur le philosophe' or 'Monsieur George Dandin': literature rather than etiquette became the bond between the empress and her inferior. Or Catherine played on the difficulty of balancing excessive conventional respect with too little: 'En relisant ma lettre j'ai trouvé que le mot de monsieur ne s'y trouve point: je m'en vais le mettre à la fin, afin que vous puissiez le placer au moins une fois à chaque page, et voilà la quantité que j'y destine: monsieur, monsieur, monsieur.'¹¹⁸ Soon they agreed to put aside such etiquette

¹¹⁸ *SIRIO*, xxiii, pp. 1, 2, 4, 79, 17.

(‘Vous n’aurez plus de *Monsieur*, puisque vous n’en voulez point; cela est très commode pour moi, et mademoiselle Cardel [Catherine’s governess] est morte’), but ‘Monsieur’ continued to slip into Catherine’s jocular titles (especially ‘Monsieur le souffre-douleur’) or her semi-proud, semi-mocking reminders of his official positions (‘monsieur le ministre plénipotentiaire’, ‘monsieur le baron’).¹¹⁹ All these variations occurred within the first two years of the correspondence: the neglect and distortion of formal address served to tie the bonds of Catherine’s most enduring, truly personal, and literarily adventurous correspondence. The letters once again show her skill in implementing her century’s diverse and charmingly comic style as an artful counterpoint to her never-quite-forgotten imperial persona.

The particular Enlightenment character of Catherine’s dignified, refined, literary, and well-calculated play with salutations emerges clearly when contrasted with the modified openers used by her predecessors on the Russian throne. Russian rulers before Peter were sticklers for epistolary etiquette: Elizabeth I of England had to apologise to Fedor I for altering the tsar’s exceedingly lengthy ‘Big Title’.¹²⁰ This episode indicates how much offence Fedor’s father Ivan IV meant to give when he changed the salutation in a letter to Polish King Stefan Batory. Ivan added to his own full title a jibe at Stefan’s status as an elected rather than dynastic king: Ivan was tsar ‘по божью изволенью, а не по многоятежному человечества хотению’.¹²¹ The concept that epistolary familiarity could be flattering was entirely foreign to him: when Queen Elizabeth used a small personal seal in place of the big seal as a mark of

¹¹⁹ *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 35, 42, 79.

¹²⁰ Allinson, *A Monarchy of Letters*, pp. 115-16.

¹²¹ Ivan to Stefan Batory, 1581, *Poslaniya Ivana Groznogo*, ed. by D. S. Likhacheva, Ya. S. Lure, and V. P. Adrianova-Perets (Moscow-Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1951), p. Also cited in Scheidegger, *Studien zu den russischen Briefstellern des 18. Jahrhunderts und zur “Europäisierung” des russischen Briefstils*, p. 21.

friendship, Ivan interpreted it as an affront.¹²² He might flaunt his Christian humility, but when it came to declaring his power in letters, his manner was blunt and aggressive: ‘Тако убо и вы мнесте под ногами быти у вас всю Русскую землю; но вся мудрость ваша ни во что же бысть божиим изволением. Сего ради трость наша наострился к тебе писати.’¹²³ As for Peter I, he played with openers and closers and used multiple languages in his letters too, but a strategy of charm could not have been farther from his style. He addressed I. A. Musin-Pushkin, for example, as ‘Bruder’ [‘Brother’ in German] and signed ‘Piter’; he similarly opened a letter to F. Yu. Romodanovsky with ‘Siir’.¹²⁴ But ‘Piter’ was by no means always polite to his ‘Bruder’: he opened another letter with bluntness worthy of Ivan, writing, ‘Писмо ваше я принял, на которое отвечаю. Зело удивляюсь тебе, понеже я чаял, что есть ум в вас, а ныне как вижу, что скота глупее.’¹²⁵ He left it to his successor Catherine to introduce Enlightenment politeness into the imperial letter, beginning with playful yet dignified salutations.

Closers

However, the observance of monarchical dignity also limited the rhetorical tools available to Catherine in her letters. A normal seventeenth- or eighteenth-century closer had three parts: the last line of the body text, which had to be in the second person to prepare the subscription (‘Je vous supplie tres-humblement, SIRE, d’en être persuadé, & du profond respect avec lequel j’ai l’honneur d’être [...]’); the subscription proper

¹²² Allinson, *A Monarchy of Letters*, pp. 30-32.

¹²³ Second Epistle to Kurbsky, 1577, *Poslaniya Ivana Groznogo*, p. 210. In modern Russian: ‘Так и вы мнили, что вся Русская земля под ногами вашими, но по божьей воле мудрость ваша оказалась тщетной. Вот ради этого я и наострил свое перо, чтобы тебе написать’ (p. 387).

¹²⁴ 30 June and 13 June 1707 (OS), Peter I, *Pisma i bumagi imperatora Petra Velikago*, 13 vols (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennaya Tipografiya, 1887-), v: *yanvar-iyun 1707* (1907), pp. 346, 307.

¹²⁵ Peter to Musin-Pushkin, 18 June 1707, *Pisma i bumagi imperatora Petra Velikago*, v, p. 313.

(usually ‘votre très humble et très obéissant serviteur’, for superiors and equals); and a signature.¹²⁶ Catherine worked with an etiquette only slightly softened from Louis XIV’s time. No one below Louis’ relatives received a subscription at all, and even then he used a kinship term rather than ‘serviteur’ or ‘ami’.¹²⁷ Therefore, unlike most letter writers, the monarch could only rarely use the subscription itself to send messages about the relationship between writer and addressee. Codes of etiquette governed the few subscriptions available to Catherine, mostly in letters to other sovereigns: she usually signed ‘Monsieur mon Frère, / de Votre Majesté, / la bonne Sœur / Catherine’ or, to lesser princes like members of the House of Württemberg, ‘Monsieur mon Cousin / De Votre Altesse Serenissime / La bonne Cousine / Catherine’. Custom also dictated the aspects of the relationship between states that should be conveyed in royal subscriptions. For example, both the familial relationship and the proximity of Russia and Sweden had to be reflected in Catherine’s closers for Gustav: ‘Monsieur mon Frère et Cousin, / de Votre Majesté, / la bonne Soeur et Cousine et Voisine, / Catherine’.¹²⁸ Alliances similarly informed etiquette: beginning with the letter confirming her ratification of the treaty between them, Catherine signed her letters to Frederick II of Prussia ‘la bone Soeur et [Sincere] Alli[e]’.¹²⁹ Catherine addressed Joseph II, in recognition of his status as Holy Roman Emperor and therefore of his greater equality with her rank, ‘la bonne soeur et amie’, until May 1781, when she became ‘la bonne soeur, fidèle amie et alliée’.¹³⁰ The individual monarch could change very little, except by the addition or subtraction of adjectives like ‘fidèle’ and ‘sincère’, which could give

¹²⁶ Grimarest, *Traité sur la maniere d’écrire des lettres*, pp. 121-23.

¹²⁷ Sternberg, ‘Epistolary Ceremonial’, pp. 58.

¹²⁸ *Catherine II et Gustave III*, p. 41.

¹²⁹ Beginning with the letter of 6 April 1764 (OS), Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, I. HA Rep 96, Nr. 110 P Bd. 1, 48 recto; *SIRIO*, xx, p. 200. The gender of ‘Alliée’ varies, but more frequently Catherine wrote the masculine form ‘Allié’.

¹³⁰ 26 May 1774 and 26 May 1781 (OS), *Joseph II. und Katharina von Russland. Ihr Briefwechsel*, ed. by Alfred Ritter von Arneth (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1869), pp. 4, 92.

only a somewhat more intimate tone to the correspondence. These adjectives had usually lost their literal meaning: the alternation of ‘la bonne Cousine’ with ‘l’affectionnée’ or ‘la très affectionnée Cousine’ in letters to Duke Friedrich Eugen of Württemberg and his wife meant fairly little. The term ‘affectionné’ may seem more emotional, but it was in fact just an adjective used for inferiors.¹³¹

When writing to individuals even further down the hierarchy, Catherine could use ‘votre (très/bien) affectionnée’ (German ‘Ihre Wohlaffectiönnirte’), but it was quite a stiff formula: it appears mostly in non-autograph letters, to her ambassador Count Otto Magnus von Stakelberg or to Elisa von der Recke, for example. It surfaces very rarely in her autograph letters, such as a few of her letters to Madame Bielke; she did not use it in her one autograph letter to von der Recke.¹³² Frederick II signed his letters to Voltaire as his ‘très affectionné ami’, or variations thereupon, from his first letter until just after their meeting in 1740, when more intimate formulae replaced it.¹³³ Catherine never passed through that stage with Voltaire at all, just as she did not need to begin the correspondence by saluting him as ‘Monsieur de Voltaire’: the indirect correspondence through François-Pierre Pictet and subsequent literary games with pseudonyms allowed her to become sufficiently acquainted with him to forego such formal address entirely. Given the limited available conventions for closers, the majority of Catherine’s letters, and generally the most interesting ones in a literary sense, lack subscriptions proper. Yet the example of Voltaire suggests a real problem in the interpretation of her use of ceremonial: since Catherine typically did without subscriptions in all but her princely

¹³¹ Catherine to Friedrich Eugen, 22 August 1791 (OS), Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, G236 Bü 133, third folder.

¹³² Catherine to Stakelberg, 3 February 1792 (OS), ‘Pisma Ekateriny II k grafu Stakelbergu. 1773-1793’, *Russkaya starina*, 3 (June 1871), 689-99 (p. 690); Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. germ. quart. 452, fol. 2-39; Catherine to Bielke, 10 July 1765 (OS), *SIRIO*, x, p. 28.

¹³³ The first letter from Frederick was of 8 August 1736 (D1126); the last letter containing the formula is of 28 November 1740 (D2370).

correspondences, the resultant familiarity might be flattering, but it also exercised her imperial prerogative to treat others without such respect. Therefore other elements in the opening and closing sequences take on more importance for performing actions, defining relationships, and often compensating for the potential rudeness that a missing subscription might imply.

The final lines of the body of the letter often shouldered the full burden of the closer's definition of the relationship between writer and addressee. Catherine had at her disposal appropriate formulae, but they had very little to do with hierarchy. Both Frederick II and Voltaire could rest assured of Catherine's 'estime' and 'considération'; monarchs and mere noblewomen like Johanna Bielke were entitled to Catherine's 'sentiments', 'amitié', and 'reconnaissance'.¹³⁴ She could modify these nouns with adjectives like 'distingué', 'sincère', and 'particulier' without distinction for rank; only 'haute' was limited to her 'considération' for other rulers. The various formulae with which Catherine closed her letters generally expressed one and the same thought: she assured her correspondent that their relationship remained the same as it had been. While such formulae indicated that the channels of communication were open and a correspondence might continue, they also often reminded the recipient that Catherine had absolute authority to withdraw her favour should she so desire. This was especially clear in the formulae that concluded her letters to subordinates. Relatively official

¹³⁴ 'Je prie Votre Majesté d'être assuré de la haute consideration avec laqu'elle je Suis bien Sincèrement [...]', Catherine to Frederick II, 24 December 1769 (OS), Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, I. HA Rep 96, Nr. 110 P Bd. 2, [n.p.]; *SIRIO*, xx, p. 270; 'Adieu Monsieur, soyés assurés de la considération toute particulière que j'ai pour Vous', Catherine to Voltaire, 14 July 1769 (OS), D15775; 'C'est avec tous les sentiments de la plus haute et plus parfaite considération et de l'amitié la plus sincère que j'ai l'honneur d'être....', Catherine to Joseph II, 4 July 1781 (OS), *Joseph II. und Katharina von Russland*, p. 97; 'Je suis toujours avec beaucoup d'amitié', Catherine to Madame Bielke, 30 April 1766 (OS), *SIRIO*, x, p. 75; 'C'est avec ces sentiments et ceux de la reconnaissance la plus vive et de l'amitié la plus réciproque que je signe ma prédiction', Catherine to Joseph II, 11 July 1780 (OS), *Joseph II. und Katharina von Russland*, p. 9; 'soyez assurée de la reconnaissance que j'ai pour vous de toutes les marques d'amitié que vous me donnez', Catherine to Madame Bielke, 28 April 1776 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxvii, p. 81.

Russian letters, in Catherine's hand or in that of a secretary, generally concluded with variations on 'пребываю к вам благосклонна' or 'В прочем остаюсь как всегда к вам доброжелательна'.¹³⁵ While these formulae were essentially the same as the assurances of her 'sentiments' that appeared in other letters, the life-and-death importance of the monarch's goodwill toward her subjects seems residually present in them.¹³⁶ Nonetheless, opening and closing formulae were ordinarily neutral: they normally upheld the status quo, according to which Catherine communicated in a suitably dignified manner with her subordinates or sometimes equals. Yet Catherine could and often did send real messages through them by shaping the context in which they appeared or altering the formulae themselves. While many different kinds of action were possible, most frequently these changes confirmed the genuineness of her good wishes or insinuated that something was troubling and threatening the relationship.

On some occasions, the discursive context allowed the use of a standard formula to send an important message about the bond between the correspondents. One notable instance of this occurred on 13 March 1790 (OS): upon the death of Joseph II, Catherine received a letter from his successor Leopold, signed 'très humble et très obeissant serviteur'. The record of this event in the diary of Catherine's secretary Khrapovitsky implies a certain amount of consternation at this most unusual subscription in a royal letter: even though Leopold had not yet been elected Holy Roman Emperor, he was still a reigning head of state and Joseph's clear successor. The 'most humble and obedient

¹³⁵ Examples taken from Catherine's letters to M. N. Volkonsky, governor of Moscow: 30 June 1765 (OS), 10 January 1772 (OS), 'Pisma gosudaryni imperatritsy Ekateriny II-i k knyazyu Mikhailu Nikitichu Volkonskomu', in *Osmnadsatyi vek. Istoricheskii sbornik*, ed. by Petr Bartenev, 2nd printing, 4 vols (Moscow: Tip. Gracheva i komp., 1869), I, pp. 79-184 (pp. 83, 93).

¹³⁶ It appears, for instance, in a non-autograph letter to Elisa von der Recke before the latter became Catherine's subject: 'halten Sie sich des aufrichtigen Wohlwollens versichert mit dem Ich stets verbleiben werde', 24 April 1789 (OS), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. germ. quart. 452, fol. 19.

servant' pose not only derogated from his royal dignity: it implied a rupture in the alliance that at that moment bound the two nations in a war against the Ottoman Empire. In replying with the habitual formula that she had used for Joseph, 'la bonne sœur et fidèle amie et alliée', Catherine reminded Leopold that the agreement bound Joseph's heirs as well.¹³⁷ She was particularly anxious to secure Austria's continued support because she had received that very day a courier notifying her that the war with the Ottomans would continue for another campaign.¹³⁸ Asserting equality and alliance between herself and Leopold implied a demand that he fulfil his obligations to provide military and diplomatic support, rather than slip out of them via misplaced humility.

More frequently, the choice to use a formula had meaning when Catherine resorted to it in a correspondence that she had previously conducted without ceremony. Surprisingly enough, sometimes a return of fixed expressions could help Catherine to reinforce a relation and insist on the genuineness of her respect for her correspondent. When, after the disastrous Second Battle of Svensksund, the commanding vice-admiral Charles of Nassau-Siegen resigned his command in despair, Catherine 'wrote to Nassau-Siegen the kind of letter which secured her such good service throughout her life', reassuring him of her high regard for his services and comparing his travails with those of other great heroes of the past.¹³⁹ Whereas her previous letters ended either with no formula at all or with her favourite informal conclusion, 'Adieu, portez vous bien', her letter of 9 July 1790 (OS) ended with a combination of the informal and the reassuringly formulaic: 'Adieu, reprenez Vos forces, et soyez assuré de ma reconnaissance.'¹⁴⁰ On other occasions, Catherine might adhere to ceremony for letters intended for more eyes

¹³⁷ *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskogo*, p. 328.

¹³⁸ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, p. 412.

¹³⁹ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, p. 414.

¹⁴⁰ *SIRIO*, I, p. 211.

than just the addressee's or for letters that needed to serve official administrative purposes. Hence she addressed Potemkin on 5 October 1789 (OS) with the formal 'Вы' ['Vous'] and with the standard conclusion 'Пребываю всегда Вам доброжелательная' ['I continue always to wish you well'] because the letter contained the order to reward his soldiers with a ruble each. The official form matched the letter's public role as an imperial order for the disbursement of money.¹⁴¹ In these two very different examples, ceremonial closers nonetheless bore the same meaning: they endowed the recipient with the full force of Catherine's authority and approval.

Foregoing Etiquette

Foregoing etiquette could take many forms: the significance of such a dispensation again derived largely from context, but also from the content and tone of the letter. Scribbled orders or love notes would seem to obviate etiquette by their mere function. If her most passionate notes to her lovers were without formality, so were those to secretaries: she very often dashed off instructions without unnecessary niceties of etiquette, especially when there was another document attached or when she was writing directly on another item.¹⁴² These *billets* were frequently tantamount to orders: here familiarity had nothing to do with affection. Even in the affectionate notes, Catherine's position of power was never far from the surface: one need only look at the replies she received from her correspondents to observe the difference. When writing to Potemkin, Catherine was absolutely free to invent any forms of affectionate address and to show as much or as little regard for him as she wished. In his surviving replies, however, Potemkin showed rather more restraint: his most frequent appellation for her

¹⁴¹ *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, p. 377.

¹⁴² See her notes to Postmaster von Eck and to Bezborodko in *SIRIO*, XLII, pp. 271-94, 428-32.

is ‘матушка’ [‘dear mother’], which nicely maintains the ambiguity between the folksy equivalent of ‘бабинька’ [‘papa’], as she called him, and the female equivalent of the all-powerful patriarchal sovereign or ‘царь-батюшка’ [‘tsar-father’], generating formulae such as ‘матушка Всемилостивейшая Государыня’ [‘dear mother All-Merciful Sovereign Lady’].¹⁴³ The situation was the same in her foreign correspondences: where Catherine dispensed with closing formulae in her very first letter to Zimmermann, signing only ‘Adieu / Catherine’, Zimmermann still had no choice but to respond as ‘de Votre Majesté Impériale / le très humble, très obéissant et très soumis serviteur / J.G. Zimmermann.’¹⁴⁴ The rejection of etiquette was thus a prerogative of power.

A return to ceremony most obviously signaled the cooling of a relationship. Within Russia, Catherine generally addressed her subordinates quite simply by title or by first name and patronymic or both together. If writing in French, she followed the same practice, but replaced the first name and patronymic with a surname. For example, she quite consistently addressed the governor of Moscow, P. S. Saltykov, as ‘Граф Петр Семенович’ [‘Count Petr Semenovitch’] or ‘Monsieur le maréchal comte Soltikow’; Count Burkhard Christoph von Münnich received ‘Monsieur le Feld Marechal’, and her secretaries, whom she saw most every day, usually received just first name and patronymic.¹⁴⁵ During her romantic relationship with her secretary P. V. Zavadovsky, she honoured him with the nickname ‘Петруша’ [‘Petrusa’] and the

¹⁴³ *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, pp. 52-53.

¹⁴⁴ Catherine to Zimmermann, 22 February 1785 (OS), Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, fol. 2 recto; Zimmermann to Catherine, 29 March 1785 (NS), *Der Briefwechsel zwischen der Kaiserin Katharina II. von Russland und Joh. Georg Zimmermann*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Pisma imperatritsy Ekateriny Velikoi, k feldmarshalu grafu Petru Semenovichu Saltykovu, 1762-1771’, ed. Petr Bartenev, *Russkii arkhiv*, 9 (1886), 5-105. This form of address appears in a draft letter to Münnich in *SIRIO*, VII, p. 163, and in an unidentified facsimile probably addressed to him, in Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Darmstaedter 1 1762, fol. 2. Her manner of address to her secretaries and ministers can be observed throughout the five volumes of her papers in *SIRIO*, VII, X, XIII, XXVII, and XLII.

affectionate tags of ‘Галубинка’ [‘little dove’] and ‘Батинка’ [‘papa’]. These formulae could vary with the ups-and-downs of the romance: when Zavadovsky sent a note to apologise after a tiff, Catherine thanked ‘Петруса, сегодня умной’ [‘Petrusa, who is clever today’]. But when the relationship ended and terms needed to be agreed upon for his departure, she simply reverted to first name and patronymic, as appropriate for a secretary: ‘Петр Васильевич, от трех до четырех тысячи душ по вашему выбору в Беларуси и в Украину [...]’.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, at the end of Catherine’s romantic relationship with Grigory Potemkin, he departed to inspect the regiments stationed in Novgorod province and began to receive letters addressed to ‘Князь Григорий Александрович’ [‘Prince Grigory Aleksandrovich’] and signed with the usual formulae for subordinates (‘В прочем пребываю как и всегда доброжелательна’ [‘Moreover I continue as ever to wish you well’]). Under these circumstances, the assurances of continuity in the relationship rang particularly hollow. But upon Potemkin’s return to the capital in July, Catherine resumed writing informal notes without any ceremonial at all, as she did for all her closest associates.¹⁴⁷ As these examples show, the use of etiquette was not always a matter of rote: its appearance and disappearance could tighten or loosen a relationship or indicate a different epistolary function. The well-timed implementation and removal of etiquette thus helped Catherine to modulate her relationships with the people on whom she relied to exercise her power.

Writing *en billet*, as the elimination of salutations and subscriptions was called, allowed Catherine to spare her addressees the humiliation of condescending formality, but it also exposed her right not to show the usual regard for others that etiquette

¹⁴⁶ ‘Pisma imp. Ekateriny II k gr. P. V. Zavadovskomu (1775-1777)’, ed. by Ya. Barskov, *Russkii istoricheskii zhurnal*, 5 (1918), 223-57 (pp. 244-47).

¹⁴⁷ Catherine to Potemkin, 30 June 1776 (OS), and subsequent notes, *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, pp. 107-108.

implied.¹⁴⁸ One must accordingly be very attentive in interpreting the real power dynamics at play when Catherine wrote *en billet*. Her favourite closers combined her most typical *billet* ending, ‘Adieu, portez-vous bien’, with a more formal kind of assurance, ‘soyez assuré de l’estime / de la parfaite considération / [...]’.¹⁴⁹ The equivalent can even be found in her official Russian letters to subordinates with whom she was on friendly terms: she ended an autograph set of instructions to General P. S. Saltykov, ‘Желаю вам здравствовать и остаюсь к вам всегда доброжелательная’.¹⁵⁰ The combination of ‘adieu’ with assurances of continued sentiments was the norm in late eighteenth-century familiar letters.¹⁵¹ But, coming from a monarch, it was an honour, which both Frederick II and Catherine granted to Voltaire, for example.¹⁵² But the frequency of Catherine’s simple formula ‘Adieu, portez-vous bien’ was quite her own.¹⁵³ It did not show a lack of creativity: it was rather her version of the Enlightenment’s ideal style for a great man’s letters. ‘Adieu’ and ‘portez-vous bien’ are the two translations of the Latin phrase ‘vale’: both Voltaire and the *Encyclopédie* praise the Roman practice of signing all letters ‘vale’ regardless of rank. For the *Encyclopédistes*, ‘vale’ was part of ‘le ton noble épistolaire des Romains sous la

¹⁴⁸ On this form of royal letter, see Sternberg, ‘Epistolary Ceremonial’, pp. 74-78.

¹⁴⁹ The examples are numerous, but include, to Voltaire, D14211, D15398, D16670, D18762; to de Ligne, *Correspondances russes*, I, pp. 169, 244, 251; to Bielke, *SIRIO*, x, p. 214, and xxvii, pp. 119, 147.

¹⁵⁰ 25 June 1763 (OS), ‘Pisma imperatitsy Ekateriny Velikoi, k feldmarshalu grafu Petru Semenovichu Saltykovu, 1762-1771’, p. 14.

¹⁵¹ Philipon de la Madelaine, *Modèles de lettres sur différents sujets*, pp. 69-70, gives the following examples: ‘adieu, Monsieur, vous connoissez mes sentiments à votre égard. Je vous prie, Madame, de m’honorer toujours de votre amitié’. An edition of this manual was anonymously translated into Russian in 1788 (Anna Joukovskaïa, ‘La naissance de l’épistolographie normative en Russie’, *Cahiers du monde russe*, 40, 4 (October-December 1999), 657-89 (p. 674)). On Catherine’s elaboration of the plea for ‘amitié’, see below, pp. 130-37.

¹⁵² Frederick used ‘Adieu, portez vous bien’ in D2686; variations on ‘adieu’ with assurances can be found in many letters, like D2182, D2250, D3525, although the ‘adieu’ usually follows the assurances, unlike in Catherine’s letters.

¹⁵³ In the Voltaire correspondence alone, Catherine concludes with ‘Adieu, Monsieur, portés Vous bien’, with or without interjected phrases, in D15698, D15938, D15974, D16582, D16670, D16711, D16825, D17365, D18762, D19188, D20207, D20951. She uses it with the prince de Ligne on many occasions too: *Correspondances russes*, I, pp. 152, 163, 169, 182, 190, 219, 223, 244, 251. One could provide similar lists for Bielke, Zimmermann, and Gustav III.

république’, which decayed into ‘bassesse’ and ‘flatterie’ from the time of the Empire. According to Voltaire, this inflation of epistolary honours grew to ridiculous proportions in eighteenth-century France.¹⁵⁴ Frederick II signed over 80 of his letters to Voltaire with ‘Vale’, but, as a woman, Catherine would have appeared ridiculous if she employed a Latin closer associated with the male confraternities of Roman senators and contemporary schoolboys. ‘Adieu, portez-vous bien’—the translation of ‘vale’ emphatically doubled—offered a welcome substitute: she too could adopt the ‘noble epistolary tone’ of the ancients in refusing to stand on ceremony and expressing simple her care for her correspondent’s health. Translated into French, and perhaps connoted with the feminine domain of care for the body, Catherine’s favourite closer was the modern monarch’s version of classical simplicity.

In the letters to Geoffrin, refusal of formal salutations and closers constituted an openly programmatic statement of an enlightened elite persona. Catherine’s letters to Geoffrin are exclusively *en billet*, with ‘Madame’ slipped in at various points in the first line or not at all. Geoffrin, as a commoner, could hardly expect much respect in the standard etiquette. Catherine instead adopted the more intimate form of ‘mon amie’ as an alternative etiquette that created an air of equal exchange, even as it in fact displayed her charming salon-style act of seeming to lay aside her imperial dignity.¹⁵⁵ On one occasion, Catherine thematicised the difference between letters addressed to ‘Madame’ and the emphatically friendly letters to ‘mon amie’. She began one segment of her letter with ‘Madame’ and in it described dryly her life in ‘une maison qu’il a plut a feu

¹⁵⁴ Voltaire, ‘Des titres’, ed. by Ahmad Gunny and David Williams, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. by Theodore Besterman and others (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968-), XXXIIIa: *Writings of 1750-1752 (I)* (2006), pp. 271-87 (p. 287); ‘Lettre, Epitre, Missive’, *Encyclopédie*, IX, p. 410.

¹⁵⁵ In the salon, an obviously asymmetrical relationship like that of ‘protection’ ‘tire sa force et son utilité pour chacun des participants du fait qu’elle emprunte le langage de l’amitié et de la sociabilité, de la bienfaisance et de la reconnaissance’ (Antoine Lilti, *Le Monde des salons: Sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), p. 182).

l'Imp: Elisabeth de dorer en dedans et en dehors', but after concluding 'Voila pour Madame', she started over with 'Et voici pour mon Amie, qui m'aime [...]'. The distinction was not, however, between the serious business of government and the life of leisure, which would have replicated Cicero's differentiation between public eloquence and informal conversation. Rather, Catherine situated her true public activity on the side of informal conversation: Catherine's point was that she was not just a boring, run-of-the-mill monarch or high aristocrat, who saw nothing beyond the traditional life of leisure, hunting, reading, and playing cards in a gilded country house. 'Madame' would be interested in these markers of status, which Catherine enjoyed in that capacity but which were not essential to her epistolary persona. Rather, Catherine reverted to her main message and habitual style in the words 'pour mon Amie': she described in a light sociable tone her encouragement of the arts and sciences: 'Je batis, je batirai j'exiterai a batir, j'encouragerai les sciences, je donnerai des spectacles et je ferai tout ce que mon amie voudra, voyés comme je suis complaisante.'¹⁵⁶ Catherine thus showed off her personal engagement with the business of government, which went hand-in-hand with her humane and personal relations with others through informal correspondence. She realised the grandeur of Louis XIV's absolute authority through the frivolity and informality of the friendly letter.

Yet, in such an epistolary culture, which required from the imperial letter writer dignity and informality at once, the complete refusal of etiquette often became untenable. Even in the Geoffrin correspondence, the language of friendship became an alternative set of formulae, especially as Catherine's effusive professions entirely lacked grounding in a real face-to-face acquaintance, much less genuine affection. Another

¹⁵⁶ 15 January (?) 1766, *SIRIO*, I, p. 281.

example of the inherent instability of informality can be seen in the ‘lettres furtives’ exchanged between Catherine and Gustav III of Sweden: after his visit to St. Petersburg in 1777, Gustav initiated this private correspondence alongside the customary two-tiered exchange of formal chancellery letters and royal autographs between heads of state. He hoped that the ‘furtive’ correspondence would have more political import, but Catherine resolutely evaded his efforts for over a decade, until she decided to exploit these epistolary ties to push Gustav toward armed action against Revolutionary France. When the two royal correspondents thus relinquished ceremonial on the (false) pretense of a close friendship, they had to work out a new system of address that could sustain the correspondence. In the light tone of the court sociability that had first brought them into closer contact, the correspondents engaged in literary play that rehabilitated the language of familial relations latent in all inter-monarchical epistolary etiquette at the time.

Power dynamics structured even the process by which the two monarchs freed themselves from etiquette. At first, Gustav had to respect Catherine’s unquestionably superior position as his elder and as an empress, an even higher dignity than that of king. He wrote to her in full ceremonial to request that ceremonial be dropped: ‘Madame ma Sœur et Cousine, [...] Votre Majesté me permettra de Lui dire qu’il a grande envie de quitter avec Elle ce ton cérémonieux et tout le protocole usité, pour ne La traiter que de *Sestra* en Vous priant de le traiter de Votre *Brat*.’¹⁵⁷ Gustav explained that the idea grew out of their interactions in St. Petersburg, where his incognito as the Count of Haga and the conditions of court sociability had permitted familiarity between them. Moreover, the exoticism of the Russian translation of the French epistolary form

¹⁵⁷ Gustav to Catherine, 5 September 1777 (NS), *Catherine II et Gustave III*, p. 85.

of monarchical address cut a loophole in the Louis XIV-inspired etiquette of the court. Yet, as the superior party, Catherine had to be the first to drop ceremonial. Gustav would have understood her affirmative answer from the very start of her return letter: she wrote it *en billet*, shifting the date from the bottom of the page to the top and omitting any form of address.¹⁵⁸ She also took responsibility for drawing attention to and filling the vacuum left when ceremonial was removed. As she explained, their positions of power made total epistolary freedom impossible: ‘J’ai encore un autre embarras sur les bras en Vous écrivant de cette façon-ci, c’est qu’il m’est impossible de Vous dire, *Monsieur*, et que le *Vous* n’étant pas toujours infiniment poli, pourrait choquer malgré Vous, Vos deux oreilles accoutumés aux expressions les plus recherchées d’honneurs, de titres et de gentilleses inventés pour les flatter.’¹⁵⁹ ‘Monsieur’ was the form of address that Catherine used for inferiors with whom she was on friendly terms. As for ‘le *Vous*’, eighteenth-century epistolary etiquette prescribed *vouvoiement* exclusively, with *tutoiement* proscribed by all manuals and generally appearing only in the most intimate of relations.¹⁶⁰ Catherine’s remark also contained a dose of irony: Gustav was quite punctilious about etiquette, so she probably discerned a certain disingenuousness in his attempt to cater to her taste for well-calculated informality.¹⁶¹

Catherine showed more literary flair and sensitivity to the possibilities and limits of the epistolary form than her correspondent did as they invented a new etiquette to replace the old. Since Gustav’s request forbade verbal formulae, she tried to put

¹⁵⁸ Catherine to Gustav, 7/18 September 1777, *Catherine II et Gustave III*, p. 86.

¹⁵⁹ Catherine to Gustav, 12 October 1777 (OS), *Catherine II et Gustave III*, p. 95.

¹⁶⁰ Grassi, *L’Art de la lettre*, pp. 175-76.

¹⁶¹ Gunnar von Proschwitz highlights a similar instance where Catherine ironically designated Gustav as ‘un grand saint de la secte des non façonniers’ (Catherine to Gustav, 22 April 1780 (OS), *Catherine II et Gustave III*, p. 142, note 3).

physical gestures into words: she concluded her first informal letter, ‘Je Vous embrasse cordialement en bonne parente.’¹⁶² As a good letter should, his response mirrored the elements of their new game: the recourse to Russian language and custom as an antithesis to Frenchified etiquette, the appeal to familial ties, and the replacement of empty verbiage with something supposedly more genuine. His closer extended her motif of physicality: ‘Je Vous salue à la russe en vous baisant les mains.’¹⁶³ Catherine then drew this sequence to a close by integrating a traditional closer with their gestural language: ‘Ne doutez point de l’amitié avec laquelle je Vous rends Votre salut à la russe sur Votre joue droite.’¹⁶⁴ Such a valediction suited the general tenor of Catherine’s letter: she had no intention of allowing this exchange to be anything more than sociable.

The physical metaphor was only an intermediate stage, and in the end Catherine ran with Gustav’s proposal to reinvigorate the clichés of inter-monarchical etiquette. She was not the first Russian monarch to do this: in a letter to the Polish King August II (‘The Strong’), Peter I had rehabilitated the convention of ‘brotherhood’ between rulers: he opened one letter, ‘Мой господине и брате любезнейший (и дружбе истинною, а не политикою)’. Although not related by blood, Peter and August had met in 1698 and struck up a friendship more genuine than the later pair, Catherine and Gustav, could profess.¹⁶⁵ Catherine turned to the truly familial for a form of address that would seem to break with custom while maintaining the dignity of both parties: ‘Tenez voilà un mezzo termine tout trouvé. Écoutez, mon cher Frère, [...]’.¹⁶⁶ Frederick II typically addressed his real brother Henry as ‘Mon cher Frère’ or ‘Mon très cher Frère’

¹⁶² *Catherine II et Gustave III*, p. 87.

¹⁶³ Gustav to Catherine, 21 September/2 October 1777, *Catherine II et Gustave III*, p. 91.

¹⁶⁴ Catherine to Gustav, 12 October 1777 (OS), *Catherine II et Gustave III*, p. 95.

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in E. V. Anisimov, *Petr Velikii: lichnost i reformy* (St. Petersburg: Piter, 2009), p. 152; and in Scheidegger, *Studien zu den russischen Briefstellern des 18. Jahrhunderts und zur “Europäisierung” des russischen Briefstils*, p. 152.

¹⁶⁶ *Catherine II et Gustave III*, p. 95.

(Catherine never went so far as to call Gustav ‘très cher’).¹⁶⁷ Catherine wrote to her son and daughter-in-law as ‘mon cher fils’, ‘ma chère fille’, and ‘mes chers enfants’; when writing in Russian to her granddaughter Aleksandra, she used either the Russian convention of first name and patronymic (‘Александра Павловна’ [‘Aleksandra Pavlovna’]) or the translation of ‘chère petite-fille’ (‘Любезная внучка’).¹⁶⁸ On this model, Catherine addressed Gustav as ‘mon cher Frère’ in most of her letters from then on, although she continued to write *en billet* for informality: the salutation appeared somewhere within the first sentence, rather than at the very start of the letter. Besides filling the gap left by missing etiquette, this style helped Catherine to restrict their discussions to the two domains that dictated it: the sociable (descriptions of court parties and society literature) and the familial (advice on raising children).

Defamiliarisation and rejuvenation of linguistic clichés is, according to Formalist theory, the very definition of literariness: literariness thus helped Catherine to resolve the risky instability of an inter-monarchical correspondence freed from the ordinary procedures of state diplomacy and epistolary etiquette. She reclaimed power over the correspondence by restoring an alternative ceremonial, which, while purporting to reflect the intimacy of blood relations, in fact helped Catherine to keep Gustav in his place as her younger cousin and a monarch who had not mastered the appropriate balance between dignity and familiarity as well as she. Catherine’s letters to Gustav once more exemplify the duality of her epistolary conduct: competition for greatness and the handling of the most serious affairs on the one hand, and marked informality of

¹⁶⁷ As one example, see Frederick to Henry, 17 March 1771, *Politische Correspondenz Friedrichs des Großen*, ed. by Johann Gustav Droysen and others, 46 vols (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, Hobbing; Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1879-1939), xxxi, p. 29 (No. 19760).

¹⁶⁸ ‘Imperatritsa Ekaterina II. Istoricheskie materialy, khranyashchiesya v Biblioteke dvortsa goroda Pavlovskaya’, *Russkaya starina*, 9 (1874), 277-300 (p. 291-93, for example).

manner, the sociable exchange of texts, and surreptitious, adventurous, almost novelistic correspondence on the other.

A parallel instance of familial forms of address diffusing hierarchy can be found in Catherine's journalistic writings. Familial role-play framed the famous exchanges between her satirical journal *Vsyakaya Vsyachina* [*All Sorts*] and the journals that followed her example, like Novikov's *Truten* [*The Drone*], Chulkov's *I to i se* [*This and That*], and Emin's *Adskaya pochta* [*Devil's Post*]: *Vsyakaya Vsyachina* was the 'granny' whose authority was to a greater or lesser extent called into question by her juniors. These exchanges, moreover, largely took place in epistolary form. The mask of a 'granny' endowed Catherine's journal with authority while rendering other writers' challenges humorous and domestic, cutting them down to size and making a certain amount of discussion from different perspectives possible.¹⁶⁹

As the 'furtive' exchange with Gustav demonstrates, Russian language and customs furnished material for reinventing etiquette. Already in 1701, Peter had banned the diminutive forms of names that, in the closers of traditional Russian letters, demonstrated the signatory's humility before the addressee; in 1702, he prescribed new modern formularies for petitions addressed to the sovereign.¹⁷⁰ He also taught his courtiers, and thence the rest of Russia, to use the second person formal 'ВЫ' ['vous'] by the example of his own letters.¹⁷¹ Where Westernised forms and the use of 'ВЫ' ['vous'] were the innovations in Peter's correspondence, by Catherine's time resorting to older Russian forms or to the second person informal 'ТЫ' ['tu'] was marked out

¹⁶⁹ Kevin J. McKenna, 'Empress Behind the Mask: The *Persona* of Md. Vsiakaia Vsiachina in Catherine the Great's Periodical Essays on Morals and Manners', *Neophilologus*, 74 (1990), 1-11; Victoria Ivleva, 'Catherine II as Female Ruler: The Power of Enlightened Womanhood', *Vivliofika: E-Journal of Eighteenth-Century Russian Studies*, 3 (2015), 20-46 (p. 37).

¹⁷⁰ Scheidegger, *Studien zu den russischen Briefstellern des 18. Jahrhunderts und zur "Europäisierung" des russischen Briefstils*, pp. 149-50.

¹⁷¹ Scheidegger, *Studien zu den russischen Briefstellern des 18. Jahrhunderts und zur "Europäisierung" des russischen Briefstils*, pp. 122-24.

affectively. In her exchanges with her subordinates, folksy forms of address broke with the Western standard to create greater intimacy between herself and her servitors. Early in her reign, Catherine used such forms with her former allies from her time as grand duchess. A. P. Bestuzhev-Ryumin, the former chancellor in whose fall from imperial favour Catherine had been dangerously implicated in 1758, received the quite exceptional salutation in Catherine's corpus of 'Батюшка Алексей Петрович' ['Dear Father Aleksey Petrovich'], an acknowledgement of their long acquaintance and their previous shared peril.¹⁷² She addressed her associate from her years as grand duchess and subsequent head of the imperial theatres, Ivan Elagin, informally by patronymic only ('Перфильевич' ['Perfilevich']) in some of her notes, even using 'Слушай Перфильевич' ['Listen [informal] Perfilevich'] to open a letter scolding him for his laziness.¹⁷³ She continued for some time to use the informal 'ты' ['tu'] form, whereas most of her secretaries and ministers received 'вы' ['vous']; she used 'вы' ['vous'] when a note was intended for someone else's eyes as well as Elagin's.¹⁷⁴ With these Russian forms, Catherine implicitly acknowledged the old political loyalties that bound them together and implied that her now-subjects would retain her affection even when she rebuked them. The emotional inflection of Russian custom again helped Catherine to solicit good service from those around her.

In her notes to her lovers, Catherine similarly employed diminutives as affectionate elements of everyday speech, rather than as traditional written signs of a hierarchical distance between a humble slave and a sovereign. Completely dissociated from the Russian pre-Petrine epistolary tradition, her diminutives appear more as salutations than as closers and act as pure terms of affection: 'Милая милушечка

¹⁷² For example, *SIRIO*, VII, p. 135.

¹⁷³ *SIRIO*, VII, pp. 149, 351.

¹⁷⁴ *SIRIO*, VII, pp. 308, 326, 336.

Гришенька, здравствуй’, ‘Душенька Гришенька’, ‘Миленький голубчик и безценный дружок’, ‘Душатка’.¹⁷⁵ Catherine paid attention to the choice of oral forms rather than written ones as part of the display of informality that characterised her style even in her personal affairs. When Potemkin wrote a letter following the official model for petitions, Catherine lovingly admonished him: ‘Il n’y a rien de plus impertinent que ce “раб” [“slave”].’¹⁷⁶ Given the relationship between them, signing as Catherine’s ‘slave’ became an ironic gesture that mocked her authority, although not in a threatening way. It flouted the honour that Catherine did him in treating him without ceremony: she decided to use French to draw his attention to his mistake, a choice that reminded him of what an external viewer might think of their intimate relation. In Russian as in French, Catherine adopted the conventions of oral rather than written speech to compensate for hierarchy and thereby to seek her correspondents’ affection.

Affection-Seeking Formulae

Seeking affection was perhaps the most characteristic technique of Catherine’s personalised etiquette. It was not a sign of vanity or a pathological neediness, but rather it was related to what Richard Wortman has called her ‘scenario of power’ in the early years of her reign: official imagery and rhetoric proclaimed that her subjects’ love justified her rule. In this ‘scenario’, Catherine returned her subjects’ affection and would therefore govern well and in their interests.¹⁷⁷ The language of friendship also framed Catherine’s letters to Westerners in the 1760s and 1770s. Affection-seeking

¹⁷⁵ *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, pp. 19, 20, 32, 34.

¹⁷⁶ Undated [14 September 1774 (OS)], *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, p. 41. The subscription for petitions was ‘всеподданнейший раб’ [‘most humble slave’] until Catherine’s decree of 19 February 1786 (OS), when it was replaced by ‘всеподданнейший’ or ‘верный подданный’ [‘most humble’ or ‘loyal subject’] (*Polnoe sobranie zakonov rossiikoi imperii*, XXII, p. 534 (No. 16329)).

¹⁷⁷ Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, I, pp. 111-14.

closers were an essential element in the rhetoric by which she sought to form her first network of friends and allies across Europe and to make a reputation for herself on the continent. In seeming to yield emotional authority to her correspondents, she charmed them and secured an emotional sway of her own over them. She repeated the same phrases of love and friendship to various correspondents: ‘aimez-moi’ and ‘continuez-moi votre amitié’ were the standard forms, but as always the particular context of the correspondence inflected their meanings. The request that the correspondent continue his or her ‘amitié’ was standard for a familiar letter, implying relative equality between correspondents; normally, the superior ought to reassure the inferior of his or her continuing benevolent sentiments, while the inferior should express humility and respect. According to early eighteenth-century manuals, the superior might acknowledge the inferior’s ‘attachement’ in a closer, but always in terms that might ‘en même tems conserver sa grandeur’: for example, ‘*Je n’ai jamais douté de votre attachement pour moi; & vous m’obligerez de me faire naître des occasions de vous en marquer ma reconnaissance par mes services.*’¹⁷⁸ Such an overt expression of a patron-client relation was by no means in fashion for the enlightened monarch in the later half of the century: even if this relation was sometimes implied, Catherine had to find more subtle, more informal, and more allusive ways of expressing it.

The traditional, utilitarian function of affection-seeking can be seen most clearly in exchanges with Voltaire. These expressions abound in the years of the first Russo-Turkish War, when Voltaire was publishing news on Catherine’s behalf in the *Nouvelles de divers endroits*, a Bern newspaper. The link between the gazettes and his ‘friendship’ cannot be clearer than in a little note that Catherine sent to him soon after

¹⁷⁸ Grimarest, *Traité de la manière d’écrire des lettres*, pp. 194-95.

he began printing her information. The content of the letter fit into two lines: Russia had taken Iassy, becoming mistress of Moldavia and chasing the grand vizier across the Danube. But the frame in which Catherine set the news joined friendship and press wars: in her opening line she claimed to be sending the news only as a response to his desire to hear of Sultan Mustapha's defeat. She labeled the news 'ce qui fera taire la gazette de Paris, le Courier d'Avignon et le nonce qui fait la gazette de Pologne', and then concluded: 'soyés persuadé que je répons bien à l'amitié que Vous me témoigné'.¹⁷⁹ In seeking and reciprocating Voltaire's friendship, Catherine sought his participation in publicising her nation's military might. This was the trade-off of friendship throughout the exchange: Voltaire's 'amitié' took the concrete form of public support for her in published texts, a fairly traditional manifestation of the patron-client relationship.

But Catherine's rhetoric was particular to her time, place, and epistolary style, which required an greater air of relinquishing authority: this closer came early in a whole string in which Catherine emphasised above all the reciprocity of their fellowship in opposition to the Ottomans, rather than the 'services' that resulted from his 'attachement'. She constructed closers that put his friendship and hers on as equal footing as possible: 'Soyés persuadé que je sens parfaitement le poix de Votre amitié, je Vous prie de me la continuer, et d'être assuré de la mienne'; 'Adieu Monsieur, portés Vous bien, continués moi Votre amitié et soyés assuré de la mienne'; 'Eh bien Monsieur êtes Vous content? Je vous prie de l'être autant de mon Amitié que je le suis de la Vôtre'; 'Je Vous prie de me conserver Votre Amitié et d'être assuré de la mienne.'¹⁸⁰ She invented ways of situating herself as morally dependent upon his approval. In two

¹⁷⁹ Catherine to Voltaire, 17 October 1769 (OS), D15974.

¹⁸⁰ D16003; D16582; D16604; D16661.

letters during the war, Catherine asserts that Voltaire regards her as his favourite: ‘Je me recomande à Votre amitié et à Vos prières, l’on ne sauroit en faire un plus grand cas qu’en fait votre favorite’; ‘jugés par là du plaisir que j’ai à lire Vos écrits, du cas que j’en fait, de l’amitié et de l’estime que j’ai pour le s. Hermite de Ferney qui me nome sa favorite. Vous voyés que j’en prends les airs.’¹⁸¹ Voltaire certainly called himself her ‘admirateur’ and ‘sujet’ but in none of his extant letters to anyone, nor in any of his printed works, does he name her as his ‘favourite’. Catherine apparently placed the word in his mouth and therefore exercised power in dictating his words even as she claimed to be subject to his royal whim: nothing could better represent the curious play of authority in these letters. The word ‘favourite’ cast the moral authority that Catherine relinquished to Voltaire in the tantalising vocabulary of court intrigue: it hints that Voltaire’s influence is of an informal, in no way legal kind, ultimately dependent on Catherine’s imperial will. Catherine’s expressed need for Voltaire’s moral and emotional endorsement would have lacked charm had she not in reality held absolute power. The public at large endorsed her success. When, after Voltaire’s death, Catherine wrote to Madame Denis, the address on the letter attracted the most attention: ‘Pour madame Denis, nièce d’un grand homme qui m’aimait beaucoup’. The letter was printed, with the address foremost, in the *Mercure de France* and other newspapers, and Grimm assured Catherine that it was the address that particularly ‘enflamed’ Rome and Paris.¹⁸² This appreciation was another manifestation of the Enlightenment taste for flirtation with power: real power should come clothed in light, seductive dress.

Catherine’s greatness was best reflected in the endearing gratitude she showed for the

¹⁸¹ 18/29 August 1770, D16618; 14/3 March 1771, D17081.

¹⁸² Catherine to Grimm, 25 December 1778 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, p. 122; the letter appeared in the *Mercure de France* (5 December 1778), 59-62, and in the *Esprit des journaux français et étrangers*, 2 (February 1779), 228-30.

‘love’ of a great man; emotional simplicity of address best facilitated the exchange of images of greatness.

Catherine included the ‘aimez-moi’ motif in her rhetoric of the enlightened monarch and hero. The ostensible inversion of hierarchy, which granted moral authority to her correspondent even as Catherine displayed her imperial authority, structured the exchange with Geoffrin as much as and even more than that with Voltaire. Catherine expressed most pleasure when Geoffrin’s letter showed ‘que Vous pensés a moi et m’aimés’. The motif here appeared in the body of the letter as well as the closer (‘je suis sensible au dernier point de toutes les amitiés que Vous me temoignés’). Catherine’s emphasis on friendship with Geoffrin was not a derogation from authority, but a demonstration of a new style of sovereign power: she contrasted Geoffrin’s assumption that ‘la verité et l’amitié fuit les Souverains’ with her own intention to be amiable, ‘continué seulement a m’écrire et a me parler librement, devrai je meme convenir que je suis aimable, je le ferai pour maquerir Votre amitié.’¹⁸³ Catherine thus stated very clearly that, for her, writing friendly letters occupied an important place in the performance of the new, enlightened power. Even twenty-five years later, the ‘aimez-moi’ motif continued to make the same point. These closers did not string together the Zimmermann correspondence as it had some of the earlier exchanges. However, on 19 May 1791 (OS), Catherine wrote to Zimmermann in a show of defiance at the British threat to send its navy into the Baltic. She closed her letter to George III’s privy councilor and personal physician: ‘C’est la justice de ma cause qui inspire de l’interet a l’Europe, j’ai lieu de m’en glorifier. Adieu Soyés toujours

¹⁸³ Catherine to Geoffrin, 4 October 1764, *SIRIO*, I, p. 259.

de mes Amis et quand la Flotte Angloise aura passé le Sund ne m'ecrivés plus'.¹⁸⁴ The expression sent several messages. Catherine claimed to be the heroine on the side of justice, acquiring glory in standing up to aggression: her touching human care for her correspondent's 'friendship' at such a moment played to the Enlightenment aesthetic combining humanity with grandeur. Yet in a time of war, would it not have been almost treasonous on Zimmermann's part to be a 'friend' of his king's enemy? In seeking Zimmermann's moral support, Catherine asserted that her cultivation of friends was a greater power than military might or even Zimmermann's official loyalties. She thus sought to present herself to her contemporaries—and potentially to the British government, should the letter be intercepted—as someone who could unite European opinion through her letters as an effective rhetorical tool.

The authority that Catherine exerted through the 'aimez-moi' motif was not always on such a grand scale: it could also send messages about the conduct of correspondence itself. Catherine's gratitude and request for continued 'amitié' ran through her exchange with Johanna Bielke: as the conversation with the nearly seventy-year-old gentlewoman petered out in 1776-1777, Catherine closed a series of three letters with the same phrase, 'aimez-moi toujours un peu'. In the latter two cases, the closer explicitly linked the present and previous letters and offered an apology for Catherine's increasingly protracted silences. The third letter came after a silence of nine months: following her tried-and-true habit, Catherine played the paradoxical humble sovereign to charm her correspondent into forgiving her, writing 'Adieu, Madame, aimez-moi toujours un peu, malgré mes inexactitudes; en vérité j'en ai honte;

¹⁸⁴ Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, fol. 86 verso.

pardon encore une fois.’¹⁸⁵ This series contrasts strikingly with a similar one in the correspondence between Frederick II and Voltaire: in the months of his father’s final illness and his own accession to the throne, Frederick called on the same ‘aimez-moi’ motif to express the intensity of this transitional moment, in hopes of securing Voltaire’s allegiance and a face-to-face meeting once Frederick became king. But a formula that under Catherine’s pen expressed a charming humility became abrasive and even obscene under Frederick’s. There was no sign of Catherine’s ‘sensibilité’ to Voltaire’s friendship in Frederick’s demand: ‘Aiméz moi toujours un peu, car je suis jaloux de Votre estime, et soyéz persuadé que Vous ne pouvez faire moins sans beaucoup D’ingratitude’. Less than a month after his accession, Frederick closed another letter with the grudging concession that Voltaire would not leave Emilie Du Châtelet for the new Prussian king: ‘je sais trop que l’amitié doit céder à l’.... Adieu, mon cher Voltaire; aimez moi toujours un peu.’ He then promised to Voltaire ‘the gloves’ of his odes and epistles and spoke of ‘la carrière où je viens d’enfiler à présent’: this punning continuation leaves no doubt of the sexual innuendoes of his ‘love’.¹⁸⁶

Catherine, unlike Frederick, would never try to win affection with rudeness: abrasiveness had no place in her rhetoric. She delivered even rebukes through a thoroughly polite reinvention of the same ‘aimez-moi’ formula. Angry with the prince de Ligne for publishing without her permission her letter of 6 November 1790 (OS) and thereby exposing her to a possible diplomatic disaster, Catherine responded to his subsequent letter coldly and allusively, explicitly refused to write him a richer and more informative letter, and concluded: ‘Adieu mon prince je serai toujours flattée de votre

¹⁸⁵ 28 April 1776, 5 September 1776, 12 June 1777 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxvii, pp. 81, 119, 132.

¹⁸⁶ Frederick to Voltaire, 18 May and 21 June 1740 (NS), D2207 and D2242. A similar expression, ‘Aiméz moi toujours’, appeared earlier on 23 March 1740, D2186.

amitié et vous pouvez être assuré de ma façon de pensée invariable à votre égard'.¹⁸⁷

The lack of reciprocity in this variant of the closer signaled her displeasure: she placed herself firmly above him, assuring him of continuity of sentiments just as she would any inferior. Moreover, his 'amitié' became flattery, the praise of an inferior for a superior. To be 'flattée' is not to be 'sensible': since de Ligne had made their private correspondence public, she reduced their emotional bond to one that existed only in the eyes of the public, one of flattery and reputation rather than sentiment. The significance of the formula can be seen from her next letter, in which she relented and let him back into her confidence, closing with 'Adieu portez-vous bien et soyez assuré qu'à un peu de rancune près je vous aime beaucoup.'¹⁸⁸ Whereas the stern letter was signed like an official act, the second lacked a signature, marking restored familiarity. In both letters Catherine expressed only apparently positive, polite sentiments: the emotional differentiation between the stiff assurances of a public relationship and the congenial humour of 'à un peu de rancune près' transmitted distinctly enough her attitudes. Catherine's, unlike Frederick's, was a rhetoric of charm that worked by degrees, revealing and veiling power relations in as light a manner as the occasion permitted and never resorting to heavy-handedness.

Balancing Formulae with Other Structural Elements

In addition to selecting, foregoing, and modifying formulae, Catherine found a favourite technique in the counterbalancing of ceremonial with other structural elements of the letter. Her *entrée en matière* at the start of most of her letters followed the pattern of her salutations, maintaining a simple dignity often modified playfully to set the tone

¹⁸⁷ 24 March 1791 (OS), *Correspondances russes*, I, p. 188.

¹⁸⁸ 21 May 1791 (OS), *Correspondances russes*, I, p. 190.

of a more informal relationship. Most frequently, she acknowledged almost mechanically the receipt of her correspondent's last letter. While these acknowledgements helped both correspondents to ensure that no letters got lost in transit, only a superior had the right to state baldly that he or she had received a letter.¹⁸⁹ In her more carefully crafted and more playful letters, Catherine integrated conventional epistolary accounting into the main message of her letter. Sometimes, she provided some statement of the circumstances of the letter's reception, giving the impression of letters pouring in at the most dramatic or opportune moments, just as in a novel. For example, it offered a convenient excuse to send to Voltaire a copy of her refusal of d'Alembert's request for the liberation of French prisoners taken in Poland: 'Monsieur, J'ai reçue Votre lettre du 29^{bre} lorsque je répondois à une belle et longue lettre que m'a écrit M^r d'Alembert après cinq ou six ans de silence [...] le billet ci joint contient m'a réponse.'¹⁹⁰ Elsewhere, Catherine opened her letters in accordance with epistolary manuals' injunction to avoid mere repetition of the letter to which one is replying: as one manual put it, 'Il faut confondre son sentiment avec la chose sur laquelle on repond.'¹⁹¹ This practice appears regularly in the correspondence with Voltaire: 'Monsieur, Je vois avec plaisir par Votre lettre du 29 May, que mes noisettes de Cèdres Vous sont parvenues', 'J'ai reçue le 20 Juin Votre lettre du 27 May. Je suis charmée d'apprendre que le printemps rétablit Votre santé, quoique la politesse Vous fait dire que mes lettres y contribuent'.¹⁹² Catherine's awareness of such conventions generates some parodic passages in letters to Grimm, where she dissects the stages of receiving, reading, and replying to a letter: 'Avertissement. Je me sens des dispositions à répondre

¹⁸⁹ 'Il n'y a que les Supérieurs qui puissent dire: *J'ai reçu votre Lettre, ou, la Lettre que vous avez pris la peine de m'écrire*' (Grimarest, *Traité sur la manière d'écrire des lettres*, pp. 198-99).

¹⁹⁰ Catherine to Voltaire, 22 November 1772 (OS), D18062.

¹⁹¹ Grimarest, *Traité sur la manière d'écrire des lettres*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁹² Catherine to Voltaire, 6 July 1772 (OS), D17833; Catherine to Voltaire, 14 July 1769 (OS), D15775.

aujourd'hui. Monsieur, j'ai reçu votre No. 19 au moment que je montais en carrosse pour venir ici. Commentaire sur le mot *ici*: [...]' ¹⁹³ Rather than eliding the steps as recommended by the manuals, so that there would be 'rien de superflu dans le tour que l'on donne à son expression', Catherine lengthened her opener while underscoring the customary indication of receipt and the additional cliché that softened the declaration with a sense of time and place. ¹⁹⁴ Catherine demonstrated her epistolary mastery by seeming to reject etiquette, rather than by enforcing it as Louis XIV had. She knew the rules, but also how to shape relationships by creative transformations of form.

A similar phenomenon can be observed in some of the ways in which Catherine blended her closers into the main body of her epistolary text. The indications in manuals are somewhat contradictory regarding the amount of effort a letter writer ought to put into the transition to the closer. Some, especially later in the century, claimed that one could simply add a subscription when everything necessary had been said: 'Autrefois on se tuoit de peine pour amener avec esprit la fin d'une Lettre, comme si l'on devoit chercher tant de mystere pour prendre congé à la fin d'un entretien.' ¹⁹⁵ But one was also expected to help the reader directly yet pleasantly wend his or her way from start to finish: 'lorsqu'on ne se sert précisément que des termes absolument nécessaires pour faire entendre la suite des pensées, on conduit agréablement le Lecteur jusqu'à la fin d'une Lettre, sans qu'il puisse se distraire.' ¹⁹⁶ Catherine sometimes dropped in her closers abruptly, emphasising the sprightliness of her discourse: 'Ma santé est meilleure et ma dépense moindre que les gazettes d'Hollande ne l'annoncent,

¹⁹³ Catherine to Grimm, 30 June 1775 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, p. 26.

¹⁹⁴ Grimarest, *Traité sur la maniere d'ecrire des lettres*, p. 31.

¹⁹⁵ Philipon de la Madelaine, *Modèles de lettres sur différents sujets*, p. 65

¹⁹⁶ Grimarest, *Traité sur la maniere d'ecrire des lettres*, p. 32.

et je suis remplie d'estime pour vous. / Catherine.'¹⁹⁷ Writing these lines to Zimmermann, Catherine crossed out 'très bone' and replaced it with 'meilleure': she had initially intended her closer to be just a customary mutual assurance of good health, but she saw an opportunity for a witty closer that also sent a serious message about the condition of Russia and its empress, which Catherine might like her correspondent to drop into conversation. This letter to Zimmermann also exemplifies her ability to burden her closers with important information, thus fulfilling the standard requirement that a good letter be as concise as possible. In one short missive to de Ligne, the closer performed the letter's main rhetorical action. The body informed him that she had granted him an estate where Iphigenia was thought to have lived in Crimea and that she was intending a tour of the province, but it was only in the closer that she invited him to join her: alluding to the laurels she hoped he would win in the ongoing conflict in the Netherlands, she told him, 'venez les cueillir en Tauride où ils croissent en plein champ, et soyez assuré que je me ferai une tête de vous y revoir, et de vous assurer de bouche des sentiments distingués que j'ai pour vous / Catherine'.¹⁹⁸ The invitation, of course, was the main point of the letter, and the artful suddenness with which Catherine made her proposal was designed to lend it all the more allure for its recipient.

She also flattered her correspondents by writing closing sequences that mirrored those of the letters to which they responded. When Voltaire ended one of his early letters, 'Mais soit Junon, Minerve ou Venus ou Cérès qui s'ajustent bien mieux à la poésie en tout pays, je me mets aux pieds de votre majesté impériale avec reconnaissance et avec le plus profond respect', Catherine repeated and elaborated on the same list of goddesses in her own closing paragraph, explaining why each title did

¹⁹⁷ Catherine to Zimmermann, 1 July 1787 (OS), Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, fol. 20 recto.

¹⁹⁸ Catherine to de Ligne, 12 September 1785 (OS), *Correspondances russes*, I, p. 139.

not fit. She finally ended by refusing all ceremony ('je vous en éviteré l'inutile répétition'): flattering literary repartee partook of the negotiation about the terms of the correspondence and the necessary etiquette.¹⁹⁹ De Ligne and Catherine similarly matched one another in joking about ceremonial: she ended one letter with appreciation of his military-epistolary pun ('Jamais développement d'arrière-garde ne fut plus agréable que la déploïade de celle par laquelle vous finissez votre lettre'), and in another she joined him in the witty denial of wit ('Je finirai tout comme vous par un trait de génie: c'est avec une estime très particulière que je suis / Catherine').²⁰⁰ Catherine thus sometimes played the wit of the old Voltairean school, whom the later eighteenth-century manuals blamed for putting too much effort into their closers. She again sought to impress by restyling monarchy in her light and entertaining manner.

Postscripts

Catherine's postscripts perhaps best exemplify her skill in balancing ceremonial with well-calculated playful violation of the rules. Epistolary manuals categorically forbade postscripts: 'Les apostilles, les *post scriptum* annoncent qu'on a eu peu d'attention en écrivant. La politesse les proscriit.'²⁰¹ Catherine inverted this principle in her letters to subordinates: the postscript became the locus of sociable discourse, where the empress compensated for the impersonal harshness of official etiquette, made personal contact with her correspondent, and thus secured his allegiance for action.

Catherine explicitly stated the principle of counterbalancing etiquette with postscripts in

¹⁹⁹ Voltaire to Catherine, [November 1765], D12973; Catherine to Voltaire, 28 November 1765 (OS), D13032.

²⁰⁰ Catherine to de Ligne, 11 July 1782 (OS) and 2 December 1788 (OS), *Correspondances russes*, I, pp. 132, 155.

²⁰¹ Philippon de la Madelaine, *Modèles de lettres sur différents sujets*, p. 65. See also Grimarest, *Traité sur la manière d'écrire des lettres*, pp. 160-61: 'Il seroit incivil d'écrire une Lettre à un Supérieur remplie de ratures, d'interlignes, d'apostilles, & de longs poscrits [sic]: on doit recommencer une telle Lettre; car cette négligence est un défaut de respect tres-grossier.'

her recommendation letter to Potemkin for the American naval commander John Paul Jones: after signing the genuinely rather insipid recommendation letter, Catherine added at the bottom, ‘Прочтя сие письмо, мне оно показалось очень чинно написано и для того заблагоразсудила сказать, что я тебя, мой друг, очень люблю запросто.’²⁰² The statement confirms Catherine’s sensitivity to tone: Potemkin might have read the excessively short and dry recommendation as insincere or indicative of a cooling in her regard for him as the recipient; the postscript allowed Catherine to counteract the risks of etiquette with more colloquial and personal language.

Notably, Catherine’s famous first letter to Potemkin, which spurred him to return to Petersburg newly elevated as a favourite, employs precisely such a light-hearted postscript to involve her addressee in sociable rather than purely official converse. The letter pertains to a well-established epistolary genre, the exhortation to a young military man that he not expose himself to unnecessary dangers. The first epistolary manual to be published in Russia since Peter I’s reign, the 1765 *Nastavlenie, kak sochinyat i pisat vsyakiye pisma k raznym osobam* [*Instruction on how to compose and write all kinds of letters to various individuals*], contains just such a letter, in which a correspondent admonishes ‘Count N.’: ‘всякой час спешить в опасности, и добровольно в них вдаваться как простому солдату отнюдь не надобно, чтоб без всякой нужды потерять жизнь, которая со временем может быть весьма полезна, естли Вы ее соблюдете на пристойной Вам случай.’²⁰³ Catherine’s letter echoes this model: ‘Но как с моей стороны я весьма желаю ревностных, храбрых, умных и искусных людей сохранить, то Вас прошу попустому не даваться в опасности.’ Formally, the letter perfectly respects etiquette, addressed to ‘Господин Генерал-

²⁰² 7 May 1788 (OS), *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, p. 284.

²⁰³ *Nastavlenie, kak sochinyat i pisat vsyakiya pisma k raznym osobam, s priobshcheniem primerov iz raznykh avtorov* (Moscow: Pri Imperatorskom Moscovskom Universitete, 1765), pp. 88-89.

Поручик и Кавалер’ and closed ‘ибо я всегда к Вам весьма доброжелательна. / Екатерина.’ But the tone of the letter balances service language (‘усердие ко мне персонально и вообще к любезному Отечеству, которого службу Вы любите’) with chatty self-consciousness about the letter form (‘Вы, я чаю, столь упражнены глазеньем на Силистрию, что Вам некогда письма читать’). The postscript clinches it as a letter that Catherine meant to be particularly charming: ‘Скажите и бригадиру Павлу Потемкину спасибо за то, что он хорошо турок принял и угостил, когда оне пришли за тем, чтоб у Вас батарею испортить на острове.’²⁰⁴ By remaking the war into a pleasurable and hospitable romp, Catherine enacted in her postscript the transformation that she desired in her relations with Potemkin: his state service, which was represented in the form and genre of the letter, should change tones and become friendly and flirty. This example merely exaggerates the act of seduction implied in the enlightened monarch’s restyling of power as sociable epistolary exchange.

The appearance of this kind of charisma by postscript can almost be predicted: Catherine made such additions when she needed to secure or restore her subordinates’ faith in her and thus to affirm what the regular closer was meant to say, namely that her favourable dispositions toward them were unshaken. In 1789, Catherine desperately needed an able and loyal representative in Britain: the Regency Crisis had just been averted with George III’s recovery from his bout of madness, but Prime Minister Pitt the Younger’s hostility toward Russia threatened to turn into military aggression even as Catherine recruited British seamen to fight against Sweden in one of her two ongoing wars. At precisely this time, her ambassador in London, S. R. Vorontsov, complained about favouritism in the military, accusing even Potemkin in a letter to Catherine’s most

²⁰⁴ 4 December 1773 (OS), *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, p. 7.

important secretary and official in charge of foreign affairs, Bezborodko.²⁰⁵ Vorontsov had never been on extremely good terms with Catherine. Although she had no obligation to reply personally, Catherine added an autograph postscript in French to the next official Russian instruction letter. She essentially reiterated the normal closing formula, but writing in her own hand made it more genuine: she thanked him for his ‘confidence’ and added, ‘soyez assuré que je ne la démentirai jamais et continuez à me marquer le même zèle que je remarque dans toute votre correspondance.’²⁰⁶ The attentiveness shown in the postscript was aimed at Vorontsov’s personal loyalty above and beyond the mere formalities of service and epistolary commerce: rather than react harshly to implied criticism, the enlightened monarch instead tried to disarm her potential enemy and to make him serviceable through personal epistolary communication. One finds throughout Catherine’s letters to subordinates such postscripts in which the empress is demonstratively not displeased. In March 1765, when the governor-general of Moscow, P. S. Saltykov grew concerned that a denunciation would harm his reputation with the empress, she reassured him by altering the official form of the letter. She switched to French in the text; ‘good dispositions’ were supplanted by ‘trust and friendship’ in the closing formula (‘Впрочем остаюсь ныне, как и всегда, к вам с неотменной поверенностью и дружбою’); and, to impress upon him the genuineness of her trust, she added a postscript inviting him to join her in St. Petersburg for a carousel.²⁰⁷ A few years later, when Catherine sent to Aleksey Orlov bad news about delays in ship construction to reinforce the Russian fleet fighting the Ottomans, she tacked on a postscript about personal celebrations that also

²⁰⁵ Vorontsov to Bezborodko, 8/19 May 1789, *Arkhiv knyazya Vorontsova*, ed. by P. I. Bartenev, 40 vols (Moscow: Tip. A. I. Mamontova and others, 1870-95), xvi, pp. 219-20.

²⁰⁶ Catherine to Vorontsov, 7 June 1789 (OS), *Arkhiv knyazya Vorontsova*, xxviii, p. 104.

²⁰⁷ ‘Pisma imperatritsy Ekateriny Velikoi, k feldmarshalu grafu Petru Semenovichu Saltykovu, 1762-1771’, p. 33.

highlighted the extraordinary excitement of the Russians at their presence in the lands of classical antiquity and Oriental tales: ‘Поздравляю вас с именинами. Где то вы сей день празднуете?’²⁰⁸ Catherine’s typical method in such postscripts was to maintain the authority inherent in the official letter form, but to reinvent the epistolary bond as a sociable one in the postscript. Rather than distracting from the affairs of state, Catherine’s practice of sociable correspondence civilised the governing process, presenting it as gentle and understanding about human weakness even as she demanded unflinching service from those honoured with the monarch’s letters.

Signatures, Addresses, and Attachments

Her signatures tell a more interesting tale than one might expect. Monarchs like Louis XIV signed with only their first names, or they might write their first name and ‘R’ for ‘rex’ or ‘regina’; Stanislas II Poniatowski, in his letters to Elisa von der Recke, signed with either ‘Stanislas Auguste Roy’ or his monogram.²⁰⁹ Catherine needed three different signatures for her three different languages. Her Russian signature was invariable during her reign: ‘Екатерина’ [‘Ekaterina’], with an especially large ‘E’ curling inward at the top and bottom. In German, she signed ‘Catherina’, although translations of Russian official letters by secretaries might change the spelling of her name to ‘Catharina’.²¹⁰ In French, although in her early years she seems to have wavered between ‘Catherine’ and ‘Caterine’, almost all her autograph letters as empress pre-1781 are signed ‘Caterine’. Sometime in Spring 1781 she definitively added an ‘h’

²⁰⁸ Catherine to Orlov, 5 October 1770 (OS), *SIRIO*, I, pp. 63-64.

²⁰⁹ Sternberg, ‘Epistolary Ceremonial’, p. 59; Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. germ. quart. 452, fol. 83, 89-91.

²¹⁰ Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. germ. quart. 452, fol. 9; Oxford, Bodleian, MS. Autogr. c. 24/3, fol. 430-32.

to spell her signature ‘Catherine’.²¹¹ The beginning of the 1780s was a turning point in Catherine’s practice of letter writing, as her cultural interests shifted towards Germany and the correspondence with Grimm took on its more intense and diaristic form; this moment also saw a significant reorientation of Russian foreign policy from Nikita Panin’s Northern system to an Austrian alliance and all attention on the southern provinces: the change in her signature nicely marks this transition. Many of her letters *en billet* are not signed at all, relying on her correspondents’ recognition of her handwriting and style. There does not, however, seem to be a very clear pattern for when she did or did not sign a letter to someone like Voltaire or Zimmermann. Even letters that she sent specifically by post to have them read along the way were not always signed.²¹² Asking a correspondent to guess the exalted hand was a bit of epistolary coquetry admired in the eighteenth century: one epistolary manual cites an anecdote in which ‘La Reine ayant aperçu une Dame qui écrivoit à M. le Président Hénaut, S. M. eut la bonté d’ajouter à la Lettre quelques lignes, au bas desquelles elle mit ce mot: *devinez.*’ The manual then printed Hénaut’s elegant impromptu verse response, which also circulated along with the anecdote in poetry collections and

²¹¹ For example, in Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, G261 Bü 5, Catherine’s letter to the wife of Duke Friedrich Eugen of Württemberg of 21 March 1781 is signed ‘Catherine’, but that of 13 May, ‘Catherine’. In the text of two of her letters to Voltaire, she refers to her name as ‘Catherine’ (D13032, D17081), but all her signed letters read ‘Catherine’ in the signature. Pre-1781, a reproduction of a note to Petr Fedorovich from 1744 shows a signature of ‘Catherine’ (*Pisma i bumagi Ekateriny II khranyashchiesya v Imperatorskoi publichnoi biblioteke*, ed. by A. F. Bychkov (St. Petersburg: V Tipografii Vtorago Otdeleniya Sobstvennoi Ego Imperatorskago Velichestva Kantselyarii, 1873), pp. 1-2). There is one letter in a secretarial hand in Stuttgart, G230 Bü 46, which appears to be dated 1765 and signed ‘Catherine’. All other letters in Stuttgart pre-1781 are signed ‘Catherine’. The correspondence with Frederick II suggests that there was some hesitation in late 1780 and early 1781: her letters of 1 October 1780 and 26 April 1781 (OS) are signed ‘Catherine’, but the intervening letter of 15 November 1780 (OS) reverts to ‘Catherine’ (Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, I. HA Rep. 96, Nr. 110 P Bd. 2, [n.p.]).

²¹² For example, the letter of 26 January 1791 (OS), which, as Khrapovitsky indicates, Catherine sent by post via Berlin, ‘дабы чрез то дать знать Прусскому королю, что Турок спасти не может’. Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, 80 recto-81 verso; *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskogo*, p. 357.

periodicals.²¹³ Although the French queen probably ought not to be termed ‘enlightened’, she certainly displayed here the teasing aesthetic of power appreciated by her century. Though she may or may not have known of Hénault’s verses, Catherine sought to delight her correspondents with the same transparent anonymity. She began the final segment of her first letter to sculptor Etienne-Maurice Falconet with her favourite *billet* closer and a bit of familiar prodding on the French queen’s model: ‘Adieu, Monsieur, portez-vous bien, allons, devinez qui vous écrit.’²¹⁴ It was not just a game for foreign eyes, however: a few years later, she ended her letter to General A. I. Bibikov about P. S. Saltykov’s failings in the Moscow plague with a semi-official closer and a coquettish signature, ‘За сим желаю вам здравствовать и остаюсь к вам доброжелательна, / А кто я вы ведаете.’²¹⁵ No epistolary tactic could better seem to relinquish authority while in fact retaining it in a more personable guise: leaving off the signature that had force of law and power of life and death, Catherine asked her correspondents to recognise the inherent quality in her letters. She revealed her grandeur in the very gesture of laying it aside for familiar epistolary amusements.

When sending letters abroad, Catherine typically folded her letter into quarters and put it in an envelope, which the polite norm expected from people at court.²¹⁶ An offhand comment to Grimm suggests that she made at least some envelopes herself: ‘Adieu, souffre-douleur, pour aujourd’hui je m’en vais faire une enveloppe à cette pancarte’.²¹⁷ It was an honour to receive a letter addressed in the empress’s own hand.

²¹³ Philippon de la Madelaine, *Modèles de lettres sur différents sujets*, p. 69; the verses appear in a review of *Pièces échappées aux seize premiers Almanachs des Muses* (Paris: la veuve Duchesne, 1780), in *L’Esprit des journaux, françois et étrangers*, 2 (February 1781), 141-58 (pp. 145-46).

²¹⁴ 18 February 1767 (OS), *SIRIO*, xvii, p. 3.

²¹⁵ 20 October 1771 (OS), *SIRIO*, xiii, p. 181.

²¹⁶ ‘La maniere la plus simple de plier une Lettre est toujours la meilleure. Il est bien de la mettre sous une enveloppe; c’est un égard en province, à la Cour c’est un usage’ (Philippon de la Madelaine, *Modèles de lettres sur différents sujets*, p. 71).

²¹⁷ 18 December 1783 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, p. 266.

Elisa von der Recke and Johann George Zimmermann carefully preserved the envelopes they received with autograph addresses.²¹⁸ Three envelopes remain in Zimmermann's archive: he cut them open in a V-shape to leave the red wax seals intact and annotated them with the date of receipt and, for two of them, the name of the courier who delivered them.²¹⁹ These envelopes also became collector's items: another envelope in Catherine's hand, evidently for Zimmermann, can be found in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century collector Ludwig Darmstaedter's autograph collection, now in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.²²⁰

When sending letters more locally, however, Catherine did not always use envelopes: she (or her secretary) might fold the letter into quarters, then fold up a lower corner of the resulting rectangle, and affix her wax seal there. She then addressed the note on the other side.²²¹ Though not always a reliable witness, the court doctor Melchior Adam Weikard plausibly testifies that Catherine almost always sealed her notes: 'wenn sie auch nur einige Zeilen schrieb, so war das Zettelchen versiegelt, und es stand eine Adresse darauf.'²²² The evidence points to this: the Bodleian note about Armfeldt and a surviving note to Weikard were sealed in this manner.²²³ It would be a sensible practice to prevent prying eyes from spying Catherine's words. Weikard made the observation, though, in the context of an exchange of unsealed notes that he

²¹⁸ Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. germ. quart. 452, fol. 9.

²¹⁹ Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, fol. 15, 30, 56.

²²⁰ Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Darmstaedter 1 1762, fol. 1.

²²¹ Examples include Catherine's letter to Friedrich of Württemberg informing him that his wife Zelmire has taken refuge with her and that he should leave Russia as soon as possible; although undated, it was written on 18 December 1786 (OS), the day after Zelmire threw herself at Catherine's feet and begged for help (Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, G243 Bü 66; Brikner, "Zelmira", p. 299-300). The same archive contains a similarly folded and sealed note to Friedrich's brother Karl, thanking him for his letter (G263 Bü 1).

²²² Melchior Adam Weikard, *Denkwürdigkeiten aus der Lebensgeschichte des Kaiserl. Russischen Statsrath M. A. Weikard, nach seinem Tode zu lesen* (Frankfurt and Leipzig: [n.p.], 1802), pp. 334-37.

²²³ A facsimile of this note, including the seal on the back with evidence of the folds, can be found in Otto M. Schmitt, *Melchior Adam Weikard: Arzt, Philosoph und Aufklärer* (Fulda: Parzeller & Co., 1970).

claims to have had with Catherine on 8 December 1786 (OS): he interpreted the gesture as marking Catherine's impending wrath, which might end his deportation from Russia or his exile to Siberia. This was undoubtedly an exaggeration for dramatic effect: if Catherine really did send a 'large Moor' with such notes to enquire about a personal spat that had arisen between Weikard and Zimmermann, the openness of the notes if anything reflected the triviality of such a pedants' squabble in her eyes.²²⁴ Nonetheless, one can perceive in Weikard's comments the significance that Catherine's addressees ascribed to the material element of her epistolary communications.

The text of Catherine's addresses going abroad was perfectly standard. As one manual explained, 'Au dessus des autres Lettres on exprime les titres, la profession & la demeure des personnes, à moins que ce ne soient des gens bien connus, & que la ville ne soit pas considérable. [...] L'on sait que l'adresse d'une Lettre s'écrit ainsi: *A Monsieur / Monsieur, &c.*'²²⁵ She did not, however, regularly follow the spacing of the address required by the manuals: one was expected to put 'A Monsieur' or 'A Madame' as far to the right as possible, but she could centre it or put it at left. Her letters to Zimmermann and Bielke follow the requisite text. Before she granted the Order of St. Vladimir to Zimmermann, she addressed her letters 'A Monsieur / Monsieur de Zimmermann / Conseiller de Cour et premier Medecin de S.M. / Britanique / à / Hanover', or, without his name, as 'A Monsieur le Conseiller / de Cour et premier medecin / de Sa Majesté Britanique'.²²⁶ After he received the award, however, the knighthood became the only title that mattered: 'A Monsieur / Monsieur de Zimmermann

²²⁴ Catherine's final note cited by Weikard confirms this interpretation: 'Die Herrn Gelehrten tächten woll, wenn sie das schelten und zanken beyseiten laßen wolten. Den dabey ist sehr wenig Ehre zu verdienen' (*Denkwürdigkeiten aus der Lebensgeschichte des Kaiserl. Russischen Statsrath M. A. Weikard*, p. 337).

²²⁵ Philipon de la Madelaine, *Modèles de lettres sur différents sujets*, pp. 72-73.

²²⁶ Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, fol. 15 verso; Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Darmstaedter 1 1762, fol. 1.

/ Chevalier de L'Ordre / de St: Wladimir / à / Hanover.'²²⁷ Less familiar female correspondents seem to have required their maiden names: Catherine's only autograph to Elisa von der Recke was addressed 'A Madame / Madame la Baronne de Reeck / née Comtesse de Medem. / a / Mietau', and Catherine's first reply to Bielke 'A madame de Bielcke, née de Grothus, à Hambourg', but subsequently just 'A madame, madame de Bielcke à Hambourg.'²²⁸ Local business notes in Russian might be addressed just with the addressee's full name and/or title, in the dative, or with the verb 'отдать' ['give']: 'Отдать генерал прокурору Александру Ивановичу Глебову'.²²⁹ Local notes in French or German read 'To [...]'] and then gave the name and/or titles of the addressee: 'an den Hof und Kamer / artz Weickart' or 'Pour Monsieur le Prince / Charles de Wurtemberg / Stougard'.²³⁰ Yet there was also room for fun in the address. When Gustav III was traveling in Europe, Catherine addressed one of her 'lettres furtives': 'A Monsieur le Comte / de Haga Mon tres honoré / frere / Dieu Sait ou.'²³¹ Although a sovereign travelling under a transparent pseudonym should have been easy to find, Gustav replied that the letter had reached him at last 'après avoir fait le tour du monde'.²³² Catherine's facetious address took the usual vagueness of eighteenth-century addresses a bit too far.

She excelled in a genre closely related to the address: the inscription or label on a gift. The most famous is her reward to G. R. Derzhavin for his poem 'Felitsa': entering into the Oriental masquerade of his ode, Catherine sent a diamond-studded

²²⁷ Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, fol. 30 verso, and, with slight variation, 56 recto.

²²⁸ Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. germ. quart. 452, fol. 9; *SIRIO*, x, pp. 28, 62, 71, and xxvii, p. 132, for example.

²²⁹ *SIRIO*, vii, pp. 126 and 186, for example.

²³⁰ Schmitt, *Melchior Adam Weikard: Arzt, Philosoph und Aufklärer*, p. 52 and facsimile; Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, G263 Bü 1.

²³¹ The address on her letter of 31 July 1780 (OS) is reproduced in facsimile in *Catherine II et Gustave III*, p. 152.

²³² Gustav to Catherine, 9 November 1780 (NS), *Catherine II et Gustave III*, p. 154.

gold snuffbox, filled with 500 ducats, ‘Из Оренбурга от Киргизской Царевны к Мурзе’.²³³ This little note continued the literary back-and-forth between the empress and the poet, who in his ode flattered her by drawing on the characters and motifs of her fairytale, the *Skazka o tsareviche Khlore* [*Fairy Tale about Tsarevich Khlor*]; the note also displayed Catherine’s toleration of a rather loving satire aimed at her courtiers and which gently admonished her to live up to the ideal image of her reign. The gift label thus performed, like Derzhavin’s poem, the literary transformation of her rule into an ideally enlightened one. Only a few months before, Catherine had taken a similar literary action in sending a medallion worth 36 ducats and representing the newly-unveiled Bronze Horseman statue to Friedrich Nicolai with the inscription: ‘Au Sr. Fr. Nicolai, Libraire à Berlin; et il est prié d’envoyer à St. Petersburg tout ce qui pourroit sortir de la plume de l’Auteur de Sebaldus Nothanker’.²³⁴ The privilege of the autograph initiated a commercial relationship between Catherine and Nicolai: he became her chosen bookseller in Germany and published many of her subsequent literary and historical works. The inscription was thus a highly literary genre, an act of patronage in the enlightened style.

Inscriptions also belong to the larger category of letters that accompanied material gifts: in keeping with Catherine’s style, they added the human touch to the monarch’s magnificence. All kinds of gifts travelled with Catherine’s letters: Siberian cedar seeds for Voltaire; a sable hat, tea, and coffee for Zimmermann; a Guido Reni drawing of the angel Gabriel for Gustav III; a diamond-studded gold laurel wreath for

²³³ Derzhavin reports the gift in his *Obyasneniya na Sochineniya Derzhavina*, cited in G.R. Derzhavin, *Sochineniya*, ed. by G. N. Ionin, Novaya biblioteka poeta (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2002), p. 558.

²³⁴ *Die Beiden Nicolai: Briefwechsel zwischen Ludwig Heinrich Nicolay in St. Petersburg und Friedrich Nicolai in Berlin (1776-1811)*, ed. by Heinz Ischreyt (Lüneburg: Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1989), p. 41.

Potemkin; and pineapples for Field Marshal Count P. A. Rumyantsev-Zadunaisky. In each case, the epistolary setting defined the action that Catherine carried out through her gifts. The Siberian cedars were a literary action in defense of Russia: she objected in one letter to Voltaire's disparaging comments about Siberia's fertility and promised to prove him wrong with samples of the region's natural productions, to which he replied with a request for the cedars.²³⁵ In a similar vein, the gift to Zimmermann fulfilled his request for a 'map of her empire' in that form, if her troops should take Constantinople: the gift replied that her empire already possessed the wealth and diversity of the Orient, with or without new conquests.²³⁶ A seemingly sweet postscript concealed a little sting at Gustav's rumoured homosexuality: with the Reni drawing, Catherine prodded her younger cousin to produce an heir, writing 'Je souhaite que le dessin de l'ange Gabriel peint par le Guide qui accompagne cette lettre annonce à la Suède un Prince Royal beau comme le jour et bien portant.'²³⁷ The laurel wreath for Potemkin and the pineapples were each rewards for victories. Catherine wrote a passage of her letter accompanying the wreath to 'celui dont [l]e nom retentit dans l'Asie et dans l'Europe': the gift and the French language set Potemkin in the eyes of Europe and in the Western tradition of heroism and greatness, which Catherine and Potemkin jointly sought to enter.²³⁸ The pineapples might seem a rather pathetic gift in comparison and might be thought to reflect Catherine's lack of personal affection for Rumyantsev. But in fact this exotic and rather rare gift exemplified Catherine's skill of combining the touchingly human with the great: the opening mention of 'тридцать ананасов, которые к вам посылаю,

²³⁵ Catherine to Voltaire, 8/19 December 1771 and 30 March 1772 (OS), D17521 and D17690; Catherine to Voltaire, 6/17 October 1771, D17407; Voltaire to Catherine, 18 November 1771 (NS), D17455.

²³⁶ Catherine to Zimmermann, 1 February 1788 (OS), Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, fol. 29 verso, and *Der Briefwechsel zwischen der Kaiserin Katharina II. von Russland und Joh. Georg Zimmermann*, pp. 62-64.

²³⁷ Catherine to Gustav, 28 July 1777 (OS), *Catherine II et Gustave III*, pp. 78-79.

²³⁸ Catherine to Potemkin, 20 December 1789 (OS), *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, pp. 390-91.

зная, что вы их любите', preceded the information that she would delay celebrating the peace of Kuchuk Kainardzhi until the victor returned to his native city of Moscow.²³⁹ The literally sweet gift was the Baroque counterpart to the classical Roman triumphal arch that Catherine had built for Rumyantsev's entry in July 1775.²⁴⁰ In these reward letters, then, Catherine once again combined in her own way the modern taste for the exotic and the personal with the staging of classical greatness.

Apart from actual gifts, Catherine also sent various kinds of paper attachments with her letters: news bulletins, lists, decrees, other kinds of official papers, and originals and copies of other people's letters. The Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart contains a particularly striking instance where Catherine accomplished her diplomatic aims while demonstrating her power by enclosing other people's letters with her own. In 1781-82, Catherine negotiated a marriage between Grand Duchess Mariya Fedorovna's sister, Princess Elizabeth of Württemberg, and Archduke Francis, the future Holy Roman Emperor Francis II.²⁴¹ Much was at stake for Catherine's foreign policy objectives: she wished to cement through a marriage her shift of alliances from Prussia to Austria; to tear the House of Württemberg from Frederick II of Prussia's clientele network; and to confirm her role as arbiter of Europe, which she had acquired by mediating the Peace of Teschen in 1779.²⁴² Catherine and Joseph II had agreed on the marriage when they met in Mogilev in 1780, but Frederick II had already secured the princess's hand for his grand-nephew: Catherine broke the former engagement and arranged the new one by positioning herself as Friedrich Eugen's personal patron. The first step was Catherine's:

²³⁹ Catherine to Rumyantsev, [July-August 1774], *SIRIO*, XIII, p. 429.

²⁴⁰ John T. Alexander, *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 141.

²⁴¹ For an account of the politics surrounding the marriage negotiations, see Claus Scharf, *Katharina II., Deutschland und die Deutschen* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1995), pp. 317-21.

²⁴² According to Isabel de Madariaga, '[t]he mediation thus brought Russian influence into the centre of Europe' (*Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, p. 381);

her role was to request the consent of the princess's father Friedrich Eugen, thereby saving Joseph from the possibility of an impermissibly humiliating refusal. Accordingly, on 21 March 1781 (OS), she announced the new marriage plan with a packet of autograph letters designed to make a substantial impression on the family at Montbéliard. Catherine herself wrote a fairly lengthy autograph letter to Friedrich Eugen, unveiling Joseph's secret plan to ask for Elisabeth's hand and grandly displaying the scale of her power by promising the princess 'le premier trône de la Chrétienneté'. She further demonstrated her patronage of the family in a postscript, in which she notified him of the fifty thousand rubles that she had sent as a dowry for his other daughter, Friederike, who was about to marry Catherine's younger cousin and former ward, Prince Peter Friedrich Ludwig of Holstein-Gottorp.²⁴³ On the same day, Catherine wrote another autograph to Friedrich Eugen's wife, in which she flattered the duchess that the expectation of imperial crowns for her daughters was 'le fruit de Vos Vertus'.²⁴⁴ However, the deciding touches were the other autographs that Catherine enclosed with her own: letters from Paul and Mariya Fedorovna, in which they declared their capitulation to Catherine in clichéd terms of gratitude. The House of Württemberg, including Mariya Fedorovna, favoured Prussia over Austria and therefore initially opposed the match. But Catherine proved through epistolary maneuvering that the family henceforth had to regard her, not Frederick, as their patron. Written on smaller paper and in a much smaller hand than Catherine's, Mariya Fedorovna's letter, in both physical form and wording, testified to her own and her family's subordination to Catherine. Whereas Catherine undoubtedly demanded the letters from her son and daughter-in-law, Mariya Fedorovna claimed that Catherine 'veut bien avoir la grace de

²⁴³ Stuttgart, G236 Bü 133, first folder.

²⁴⁴ Stuttgart, G261 Bü 5.

se charger de ma Lettre'. Mariya then reminded her parents of the gratitude that they owed to their imperial Russian patron: 'Ma Reconnissance pour ses Bontés qu'elle m'a prouvée plus que jamais dans cette occasion en daignant prendre une part aussi vive au bien être de nôtre famille est au comble'. Paul's grudging assent to the plan and to his own role as accomplice in Catherine's epistolary plan can be discerned between the lines of his stiff formal expressions: 'Ne pouvant, qu'applaudir au choix, que l'Empereur fait [...] Je regarde en même tems de mon devoir[s?] mes chers parens de Vous dire la manière gracieuse dont s'est expliquée Sa Majesté l'Impératrice à ce sujet et l'empressement avec le quel Elle Vous en a voulu faire part.'²⁴⁵ Appearing merely to facilitate communication when she included others' autographs alongside her own, Catherine in fact commandeered Germany's princely clientele networks. Even her use of other people's letters could be an act of mastery.

In addition to managing every aspect of a letter's material form, production, and packaging, Catherine could even control the conditions under which her letters were delivered, orchestrating their means of delivery for rhetorical effect. It has already been seen how Catherine could select transmission by courier or by post, depending on the desired breadth of audience for a letter. The most famous staged delivery was that of Catherine's letter of 17 December 1768 (OS) to Voltaire, which Prince F. A. Kozlovsky brought to Ferney along with an ivory and gold snuffbox bearing Catherine's portrait and made by Catherine herself, a Russian fur, a French translation of the *Nakaz*, and a manuscript journal of Catherine's inoculation against smallpox, as well as letters from the writer A. P. Sumarokov and statesman A. R. Vorontsov. The delivery of the gifts was narrated rapturously in the *Correspondance littéraire* of 15 March 1769 (NS) and

²⁴⁵ Stuttgart, G261 Bü 5. Catherine and Paul wrote on paper of approximately the same size, 373 x 232 mm and 378 x 227 mm, respectively. Maria's paper was 311 x 188 mm. All three were gilt-edged.

presented as a first subject for Jean Huber's depictions of the private life of Voltaire.²⁴⁶ Catherine apologised in her letter for the delay necessitated by the collection of all the gifts and attachments; she also claimed that a letter would be an inadequate return gift for the complete collection of his works, so she needed to respond by 'quelque action qui puisse lui plaire', namely her inoculation. But the delivery of her letter was also such an action, and the whole event had to be appropriately staged to send the full variety of messages in one moment. Sending a prince as a courier was equivalent to sending an embassy to a foreign state: Catherine thereby expressed the joint power that she and Voltaire acquired in their various forms of cooperation. The Oriental allure of the gifts was also not lost on Voltaire, who called the fur a 'Caffetan' and designated Kozlovsky as the 'capigi bachi de vos janissaires' in his reply. He and Catherine both needed an audience: the reply also included verses supposedly pronounced by 'ceux qui étaient dans ma chambre' when the package arrived.²⁴⁷ The delivery of the letter and gifts, which could not fail to get reported in manuscript and by word of mouth if not immediately in print, was a public act of alliance between the empress and the poet as they began their joint opposition to the Ottomans through writing, whether letters on Catherine's part or Voltaire's more public pronouncements in print. The arrangements that Catherine made for transmission were in this case more important than the content of the letter.

Conversely, the means of transmission could affect the form and content of her letters: the letters to Grimm assumed their diary-like quality from the epistolary pact according to which Catherine sent a courier to deliver her packets and collect his every

²⁴⁶ *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*, VIII, pp. 309-10.

²⁴⁷ Catherine to Voltaire, 17 December 1768 (OS), D15396; Voltaire to Catherine, 26 February 1769 (NS), D15487. The number of copies of Voltaire's letter that survive suggest that it circulated in manuscript and thus advertised Catherine's epistolary action.

three months or so. The recommendation letter is another obvious example of a letter to a greater or lesser extent dictated by its bearer. But Catherine could play with these occasions too. When requested to provide a recommendation letter to Gustav III for the son of her courtier and favourite satirical target Lev Naryshkin, Catherine wrote a parody of a recommendation letter: ‘en honneur je ne puis lui refuser ces lignes parce que le père en prendrait de l’humeur, ce qui me priverait de mille ricaneries par jour’. In closing, she highlighted the emptiness of the formal occasional letter: ‘Ayant rempli ma tâche [...]’.²⁴⁸ Although she pretended merely to offer a bit of paper that could fulfil the demands of its bearer, Catherine in fact could not have written a more effective recommendation letter: in ridiculing all the rules, Catherine made it clear that her endorsement derived from true sociable bonds rather than the codes of etiquette. Though Catherine might seem to be subject to material and social conditions, her real control of the epistolary situation always makes itself visible directly or indirectly in the text and in the material form of her letters.

Catherine reinvented the monarchical autograph letter as a vehicle of her unique persona: she embraced stylistic dissonance and thus created an epistolary voice that was both charming and powerful. Epistolary theory in the later half of the eighteenth century still insisted that letter writers observe the necessary concordance between style and person: ‘Bien sentir qui on est, & à qui on parle, est la première chose nécessaire pour bien parler; & par conséquent pour bien écrire. [...] La moindre dissonance avec lui fait difformité’.²⁴⁹ Catherine’s trick was to observe and disobey this principle at the same time: her adherence to etiquette never let anyone forget that an empress held the

²⁴⁸ Catherine to Gustav, 6 May 1780 (OS), *Catherine II et Gustave III*, p. 147.

²⁴⁹ Batteux, *Cours de Belles Lettres ou principes de la littérature*, IV, p. 283.

pen, but she manipulated that etiquette and feigned to cast aside her dignity, descending to jokes and touching affection for others, just enough to fulfil perfectly the Enlightenment taste for both coquetry and power, humanity and grandeur. To accomplish this, Catherine exploited every structural element of the letter. The primary dualities of her letter-writing practice can be discerned throughout. Her choices of language, style, formulae, materials, and layout all served both momentary tactical aims and a larger project of creating an epistolary persona and an epistolary presence that would please contemporaries and impress posterity. Catherine pursued these multiple aims through a double persona: that of the charming human being, with her characteristic light tone, and that of the great, monumental personality who deserves the authority she possesses and who shall attain a prominent place in history. Playfulness stood next to, blended into, and even conveyed authority in Catherine's tone and in her use of the epistolary form. Catherine's style and her manipulations of the epistolary form were products of her century, enmeshed as they were in the literary and sociable practices of her elite European milieu. It remains to be explored how her character of authority, as expressed in her letters, also matched and developed the literary discourses of the Enlightenment.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LETTERS OF AN ENLIGHTENMENT *GRAND HOMME*

Catherine's letters were a central element in her effort to embody her century's ideals of greatness. The Enlightenment challenged traditional notions of military heroism and of glory to be acquired exclusively on the battlefield, most famously in Voltaire's memorable denunciations of the senseless destruction and cruelty of war. Yet concepts like greatness and heroism were far from dead in the eighteenth century: the most famous derider of heroism, Voltaire himself, also reinvented and promoted these notions throughout his *œuvre*.¹ Nor was the Enlightenment's renovation of greatness limited to displacing princely 'hommes illustres' and making way for artists and men of letters as 'grands hommes'.² Rather, eighteenth-century writers continually redescribed and rethought the features of the great hero in general and the great prince more specifically. The philosopher king was just one of the manifestations of this figure in a discussion that took place in every written genre throughout the century and across Europe.³ Writers demanded more than strength and courage from the aspiring *grand homme*: although military greatness was by no means excluded and might even be necessary to the good king, it was no longer sufficient. New civic, social, ethical, and even literary merits were required.⁴ Jaucourt's opening sentence in the

¹ John R. Iverson, *Voltaire's Heroes: Violence and Politics in the Age of Enlightenment* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Chicago, 1998), pp. 5-6.

² Jean-Claude Bonnet, *Naissance du Panthéon: essai sur le culte des grands hommes* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), p. 34.

³ On the philosopher king, see Derek Beales, 'Philosophical Kingship and Enlightened Despotism', ed. by Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 495-524.

⁴ Iverson, *Voltaire's Heroes*, pp. 101-30; Robert Morrissey, 'Introduction', in *Héroïsme et Lumières*, ed. by Sylvain Menant, Robert Morrissey, and Julie Meyers (Paris: Honoré-Champion, 2010), pp. 7-15; Pierre Briant, 'Alexandre: « Héros » des Lumières', in *Héroïsme et Lumières*, pp. 105-115; Philippe Roger, 'Avatars de l'héroïsme au siècle des Lumières', in *Héroïsme et Lumières*, pp. 179-201 (pp. 191-98).

Encyclopédie article ‘HÉROS, (*Gramm.*)’ may be taken as programmatic: ‘le terme *héros*, dans son origine, étoit consacré à celui qui réunissoit les vertus guerrieres aux vertus morales & politiques; qui soutenoit les revers avec constance, & qui affrontoit les périls avec fermeté. L’héroïsme supposoit le grand homme’.⁵ The aim was not so much to replace the hero with the great man as it was to reunite the two: military accomplishments had to be supplemented with ethical qualities and with political skill exercised for the right purposes.

Like all her contemporaries, Catherine had at her disposal a wide range of sources, old and new, on which to base her own vision of greatness. She would have found relevant material in Voltaire’s texts in all genres, from *La Henriade* through his tragedies, histories, odes and epistles to monarchs, commissioned works for Catherine herself, and, of course, his letters to her; in *Encyclopédie* articles like Marmontel’s ‘Grandeur, (*Phil. mor.*)’ and Jaucourt’s ‘HÉROS’; in the voluminous histories that she read in her youth, like Brantôme’s *Les Vies des hommes illustres* and Hardouin de Péréfixe’s history of Henri IV; in works of political theory like her beloved Montesquieu’s *De l’Esprit des lois*; in fiction like Marmontel’s *Bélisaire*; in the works of seventeenth-century tragedians and moralists; and in ancient texts like Plutarch, whom she translated with Platon Zubov during the French Revolution. Within Russia, Catherine’s reign saw widespread discussion in print of the image of monarchy and the monarch.⁶ Catherine assimilated these many sources and reworked these discourses in

⁵ *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, ed. by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert, 17 vols (Paris: Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1751-72), VIII, p. 182; compare with Montesquieu’s remarkably similar observations in his *Pensées* about the degeneration of heroism from the beneficent figures of Hercules and Theseus to mere warriors, quoted and analysed in Roger, ‘Avatars de l’héroïsme au siècle des Lumières’, pp. 179-81.

⁶ Cynthia Hyla Whittaker speculates that while 10% of the texts printed in eighteenth-century Russia contained discussion of monarchy, 20% of texts did so under Catherine’s reign, a period which also saw a huge increase in the numbers of texts written, translated, and published in Russia (*Russian Monarchy*:

ways that reflected the *Zeitgeist*, the particular exigencies of her position and of her momentary tactics, and her personality as she created it in her letters.

In her writings, Catherine sought to paint a portrait of her own character as worthy to enter the annals of history, and the historical discourse of her time suggested letters as a handy place to inscribe one's character for posterity to approve. The definitive redaction of her memoirs opens with a syllogism setting up a Plutarchan parallel between Catherine's character and that of her late husband Peter III: 'j'en ferai le syllogisme suivant: Les qualités et le caractère seront la majeure. La conduite la mineure. La fortune ou l'infortune la conclusion. En voici deux exemples frappans. Catherine II. Pierre III.' Catherine particularly emphasised character as the principle behind historical accomplishments: 'La fortune n'est pas aussi aveugle qu'on se l' imagine [...] elle est encore dans les personnes plus particulièrement un résultat des qualités, du caractère et de la conduite personnelle.'⁷ Catherine might have learned to locate the foundation of greatness in a ruler's character from none other than Voltaire. In his portrait of France's great king, the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, Voltaire explains that '[c]e n'est point une pénétration supérieure qui fait les hommes d'État, c'est leur caractère.' This is particularly true in a monarchy: Voltaire states that 'C'est le sort des monarchies que leur prospérité dépende du caractère d'un seul homme', and, in his own Plutarchan parallel between the contenders William III and James II for the English throne, Voltaire determines that 'Les caractères de Guillaume et de Jacques firent tout.' Voltaire's history also demonstrates that letters could help to prove one's character to posterity. He uses letters not only as sources for historical facts and anecdotes, but

Eighteenth-Century Rulers and Writers in Political Dialogue (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), p. 5).

⁷ *Sochineniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II: na osnovanii podlinnykh rukopisei*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, 12 vols (St. Petersburg: Tip. Imp. Akademii nauk, 1901-1908), XII, p. 197.

equally as testimonials offering the best grounds for judging the characters of prominent individuals. Regarding Queen Christine of Sweden, for example, he writes: ‘Pour connaître le génie unique de cette reine, on n’a qu’à lire ses lettres.’⁸ Catherine knew about and shared this discourse about reading letters. In her first indirect note to Voltaire, she indicated that she was collecting Peter the Great’s letters for publication because they painted a flattering portrait his character: ‘Il s’y peint. Ce qu’il y avoit de plus beau dans son Caractère, s’est que quelque Colérique qu’il fût, la vérité avoit toujours sur lui un ascendant infaillible, et pour cela seul il mériteroit je pense une statue.’⁹ She therefore knew perfectly well that her letters would be read for the same purposes of assessing her character and historical stature.

Letters are a uniquely rich source for studying eighteenth-century greatness as Catherine interpreted and pursued it: they show at least three stages in her interactions with these discourses. First, her letters were working documents by which she turned language into action: she gave orders, asked for advice and information, and fulfilled day-to-day tasks of government and of personal life by letter. Second, in letters to trusted correspondents, she reflected on what greatness was and how she was going about achieving it. Although Catherine’s letters are always tailored to the addressee, frequently ironic, and therefore never fully confessional, they nonetheless testify to the intellectual work that fed into her actions and her writings. Third, her letters were an essential means of advertising and projecting her persona as a great individual and as a great monarch of her age. This is the most famous aspect of her correspondence, yet even this has been studied only partially: analyses generally focus on one

⁸ Voltaire, *Œuvres historiques*, ed. by René Pomeau (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), pp. 685, 802, 768, 677.

⁹ Catherine to Voltaire, via François-Pierre Pictet, c. September 1763, Voltaire, *Correspondence and related documents*, ed. by Theodore Besterman, 2nd edn, 51 vols (Geneva, Banbury, Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968-77), in *Electronic Enlightenment* <<http://www.e-enlightenment.com/index.html>>, D11421.

correspondence in isolation, especially that with Voltaire. However, only when Catherine's many correspondences are examined together can a fuller picture of her epistolary discourse of greatness be discerned. The persona of the *grand homme* in keeping with her time was central to Catherine's rhetoric: she used it both to achieve tactical aims and to create in her letters a persona that would impress and please her contemporaries and posterity.

More-Than-Military Greatness

Catherine was completely surrounded by images of greatness that combined the military and the civic. Jaucourt's article 'Héros' concluded on a similar note to that on which it began, asserting that the true hero combined the patriotic and humane virtues of the great man with the hero's bravery: 'le parfait *héros*, est celui qui joint à toute la capacité, & à toute la valeur d'un grand capitaine, un amour & un desir sincere de la félicité publique.'¹⁰ In the article 'Grandeur (*Phil. mor.*)', Marmontel observed on a more ironic note: 'Un roi qui aura passé sa vie à entretenir dans ses états l'abondance, l'harmonie, & la paix, tiendra peu de place dans l'histoire. On dira de lui froidement *il fut bon*; on ne dira jamais *il fut grand*.'¹¹ Marmontel presented this fact as a lamentable prejudice, but a reality: in hopes of attaining her own place in history, Catherine accepted this reality and sought to make the best of the wars and of the other challenges of governance that came her way.

To do so, she needed to speak the appropriate language of greatness. She therefore employed in her letters the standard division between the mere military hero and the true Enlightenment *grand homme*, who exercised his bravery and other virtues

¹⁰ *Encyclopédie*, VIII, p. 182.

¹¹ *Encyclopédie*, VII, p. 856.

in selfless service of the state. For instance, when Johann Georg Zimmermann praised her favourite Grigory Orlov as ‘ce grand homme’ and in the language of sensibility lamented his death, Catherine replied in similar terms, saying that they would always regret ‘cet homme unique et vraiment grand’ and celebrate his ‘vertus Heroiques’. Orlov’s heroism lay not in military exploits, but in the service of society: Catherine alluded to his major role in stopping the plague in Moscow in 1771. She sent Zimmermann a medal celebrating that deed, alongside a medal celebrating Prince Orlov’s brother Alexey’s victory over the Ottoman Empire at Chesme, noting that ‘Ses deux medailles Sont un rare exemple dans une meme famille et n’en prouve pas mal les vertus, glorieuses pour les individus, et utiles a leurs patrie.’¹² In this exchange of 1785, Catherine thus flawlessly reproduced the discourse of greatness that she learned from Voltaire, the *Encyclopédie*, and other French Enlightenment sources: she called Grigory, but not his brother, ‘grand’, as the former’s deeds were in the service of society, but the latter’s were essentially military. Catherine exhibited Grigory’s actions as fitting into the Enlightenment model for greatness: he pursued and received glory in the service of his nation, and his action in saving a city by suppressing fanaticism and employing enlightened techniques of quarantine and public-health management counted as a feat on the European scale. His achievement, moreover, was hers too: the truly great monarch elicited greatness from her subjects, and bragging about her beloved subjects allowed Catherine to illustrate her own success in identifying, rewarding, and encouraging merit.

¹² Zimmermann to Catherine, 29 March 1785 (NS), *Der Briefwechsel zwischen der Kaiserin Katharina II. von Russland und Joh. Georg Zimmermann*, ed. by Eduard Bodemann (Hannover and Leipzig: Hahn, 1906), p. 7; Catherine to Zimmermann, 9 May 1785 (OS), Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, 3 verso-4 recto.

While Catherine, as empress, had to foster both heroes and great men amongst her subordinates, it was her role to combine the two roles and be the perfect embodiment of Enlightenment greatness. Writers continually applied the combined image of military and civic greatness to the empress herself. Voltaire had written to I. I. Shuvalov about Peter the Great that ‘Un roi soldat est appelé un héros; [...] un monarque législateur, fondateur et guerrier est le véritable grand homme, et le grand homme est au dessus du héros’; this opposition guided his treatment of Charles XII of Sweden and Peter I of Russia in his *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Histoire de l’empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand*.¹³ He then transferred this composite image of Peter, with the necessary modifications, onto Catherine: his *Epître à l’impératrice de Russie* is addressed to the ‘Elève d’Apollon, de Thémis, et de Mars, / Qui penses en grand homme, et qui permits qu’on pense’.¹⁴ The triple-faced image appeared throughout the correspondence with ‘la législatrice, la guerrière, la philosophe’, and Voltaire even had it included in the painting ‘Le Triomphe de Voltaire’, which still hangs in his *château* at Ferney today.¹⁵ Catherine herself employed it in the more public manifestations of her persona: the allegorical figure chosen to represent her ever since her coronation festivities, ‘Minerva Triumphant’, emblematised the wise ruler who also had her belligerent side.¹⁶

¹³ Voltaire to Shuvalov, 17 July 1758 (NS), D7792; Michel Mervaud, ‘Introduction’, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. by Theodore Besterman and others (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968-), XLVI-VII: *Histoire de l’empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand*, ed. by Michel Mervaud (1999), XLVI, pp. 89-379 (p. 212).

¹⁴ Voltaire, ‘Epître à l’impératrice de Russie’, ed. by John Pappas and Andrew Kahn, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, LXXIII: *Œuvres de 1771* (2013), pp. 435-50 (pp. 443-44).

¹⁵ Voltaire to Catherine, 26 February 1769 (NS), D15487; see the discussion in Kelsey Rubin-Detlev, ‘La Correspondance de Voltaire et Catherine II: un jeu de rôle littéraire’, *Revue Voltaire*, 11 (2011), 237-56 (pp. 241-42).

¹⁶ ‘Torzhestvuyushchaya Minerva’ [‘Minerva Triumphant’] was the title of the three-day street masquerade held to celebrate Catherine’s coronation in 1763; Richard Wortman selected this image as the primary one for his analysis of Catherine’s ‘scenario of power’ in chapters entitled ‘Minerva Triumphant’ and ‘Minerva and Telemachus’, in *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*

Catherine unfolded this emblem in her letters. As a woman, she could not lead on the battlefield, but by letter she could give orders and publicise her military enterprises in the correct light. Contemporary discourse required that the great man compensate for his military conquests by giving back: he should found cities, ensure the prosperity and happiness of the conquered, and patronise the arts. The Enlightenment also placed ethical demands on the *grand homme*: he or she had to display exemplary, Stoic steadfastness and equanimity in the execution of his or her great deeds. Performing the role of the *grand homme* or the ‘parfait héros’ could be very serious business, and Catherine could assume an appropriately regal air for such letters. But she also often put her jovial personal tone to use in this domain: it appears most obviously in the letters where she described her own fulfilment of the crowning achievement expected of the Enlightenment *grand homme*, that of legislating for her nation. These letters ideally demonstrate the Catherine’s outstanding ability to take advantage of the stylistic contrasts permissible and even expected in the epistolary form: she could enhance her image of greatness by seeming to downplay it. The letter’s versatility of purpose and of style made it the perfect genre in which Catherine could create, contemplate, and tout her own image as an exemplar of Enlightenment greatness.

The Correct Exercise of Military Might

Catherine faced multiple wars in the course of her long reign: the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774, which was inseparable from the conflict in Poland that led to the partition of 1772 and coincided with the suppression of the Pugachev Rebellion in 1773-1774; the Russo-Swedish War of 1788-1790; a second Russo-Turkish War, 1787-

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995-2000), I: *From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I* (1995), I, pp. 110-65 (for the masquerade, pp. 119-20).

1792; and further armed interventions in Poland in 1792 and 1794. Despite the utopian dreams of writers like the abbé de Saint-Pierre, war was a reality of eighteenth-century Europe. Catherine's task was to make these wars benefit her nation not just in terms of territorial gains, but also in terms of her own and her nation's image and influence in Europe. Her own and her subordinates' heroism had to be disinterested and show their fundamental abhorrence for bloodshed, which only their national interests could overcome. The image of the victorious but just and not bloodthirsty ruler was a useful rhetorical tool not just for public relations, but also for conducting foreign affairs.

Leaders in all times and places try to present their causes as just: Catherine was no exception, but her justificatory rhetoric had a particular eighteenth-century inflection in her explicit appeals to European public opinion as judge of Russian successes, with emphasis on the disinterestedness, patriotism, and honesty of these actions. For example, in an official rescript to the commander-in-chief of the Russian fleet in the Mediterranean and the brother of her favourite, Aleksey Orlov, Catherine explained the official rhetoric that should defend Russian naval action, presenting this language as 'персональные Наши мысли и разсуждения' ['Our personal thoughts and reflections'] on the campaign. She began with a profession of faith in natural law: 'Государи и государства должны полагать взаимное свое поведение одних к другим на обще принятых правилах естественной справедливости.' The notion that rulers should apply the dictates of natural law as a 'law of nations' was a common idea in the early Enlightenment, espoused, for example, by Montesquieu; Catherine herself propagated the language of natural law from early days of her reign.¹⁷ She then

¹⁷ 'Dans le cas de la défense naturelle, j'ai droit de tuer, parce que ma vie est à moi, comme la vie de celui qui m'attaque est à lui: de même un État fait la guerre, parce que sa conservation est juste comme toute autre conservation.' Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois*, ed. by Laurent Versini, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), I, pp. 299-300 (X. 2). See also Jean Terrel, 'Droit des gens', in *Dictionnaire Montesquieu*, ed. by

furnished Orlov with the language necessary to satisfy Western European opinion governed by that belief in natural justice: ‘польза и слава отечества Нашего требуют неотменно сохранять и утверждать в публике сие для Нас толь выгодное мнение’. It hardly needs to be stated that the increasing dominance of public opinion was one of the defining features of the Enlightenment. Catherine asserted that Russian actions had to appear just, disinterested, courageous, and patriotic in the eyes of that public: ‘для того и надобно, чтоб все наши меры и предприятия действительно ограничивались в пределах видимаго правосудия и собственной безкорыстности, а особливо те, кои ныне, под вашим мужественным и патриотическим руководством, производится в Греции’.¹⁸ According to Robert Morrissey, the Enlightenment’s new model of heroism, in one of its primary manifestations, demanded precisely disinterestedness and patriotism: Catherine was asking her best general to frame his actions in keeping with this new vision.¹⁹ This concept derived largely from Christian ethics, and so it was well suited to Orlov’s first public-relations task, which turned out to be a manifesto encouraging the Orthodox Greeks to rise up against Ottoman ‘slavery’. The language of Enlightenment heroism thus blended seamlessly into Catherine’s efforts to create through her letters an official rhetoric to defend her first Southern campaigns.²⁰

Catherine’s letters were an essential element in the creation of this Russian official rhetoric, which required her to project an image of herself and her leading

Catherine Larrère and Catherine Volpilhac-Augier <<http://dictionnaire-montesquieu.ens-lyon.fr/fr/article/1377670648/fr/>> [accessed 30 August 2015]. The first Russian-language anthology of writings on natural law was published in 1764, and the terminology of natural law appeared in Catherine’s *Nakaz* (Whittaker, *Russian Monarchy*, pp. 108-109).

¹⁸ Catherine to Alexey Orlov, 19 July 1770 (OS), *Sbornik imperatorskago russkago istoricheskago obshchestva* [henceforth *SIRIO*], 136 vols (St. Petersburg: Imp. Akademiya Nauk, 1874-1916), I, p. 41.

¹⁹ Robert Morrissey, ‘Introduction’, in *Héroïsme et Lumières*, pp. 7-15 (pp. 10-11).

²⁰ On that official rhetoric that combined Christian and civilisational discourses, see Andrei Zorin, *Kormya dvuglavogo orla: literatura i gosudarstvennaya ideologiya v Rossii v poslednei treti XVIII-pervoi treti XIX veka* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2001), pp. 33-64.

subordinates as true Enlightenment heroes. Catherine's letters to Voltaire served precisely this purpose. In a letter written only a few months after the instruction to Orlov, Catherine announced to Voltaire one of the most important victories of her reign, the Battle of Chesme. She carefully showed herself and her commander-in-chief to be true Enlightenment heroes who engaged in war successfully but with the requisite horror at the loss of life that came with war: 'La guerre est une vilaine chose Monsieur', she wrote to introduce the 'anecdote' that Orlov 'vit avec effroi que l'eau du port de Chesme qui n'est pas fort grand étoit teinte de sang tant il y étoit périt de Turks.'²¹ She and her subordinate thus embodied true Enlightenment heroism: even in the midst of their greatest triumph to date, they sympathised with the loss of life amongst their enemies. Other letters sent the same message that the Russians were both better soldiers and more humane than their adversaries: Catherine insisted that she wanted peace 'parce que je hait l'efusion du sang humain'.²² She depicted her soldiers as following her humane example, asserting that an extraordinary number of Ottoman soldiers were defecting to the Russians: 'Les déserteurs même prétendent qu'ils sont mieux traités chés nous qu'ils ne le sont chés eux.'²³ Catherine's letters were not the only eighteenth-century battle-related letters written to please Voltaire. In 1745, René Louis de Voyer de Paulmy, marquis d'Argenson, sent to Voltaire an account of the Battle of Fontenoy that extraordinarily introduced an awareness of the human costs into an image of the king's victory: 'Le triomfe est la plus belle chose du monde, les vives le Roy, [...] la joye, la gloire, la tendresse, mais le Plancher de tout cela est du sang humain, des Lambeaux de chaire humaine.'²⁴ The letter elicited an ecstatic response from Voltaire

²¹ 16/17 September 1770, D16670.

²² 9/20 October 1770, D16714; also 22 July/3 August 1771, D17322.

²³ 1/11[12] September 1770, D16643.

²⁴ D'Argenson to Voltaire, 15 May 1745 (NS), D3118.

(‘Je vous adore’), and in 1776 the patriarch printed d’Argenson’s letter in his *Commentaire historique sur les œuvres de l’auteur de La Henriade*.²⁵ Catherine wrote her letters about the Russo-Turkish War before Voltaire had published d’Argenson’s letter: she knew for herself how to write as a heroic leader whose sympathy for human suffering made her military exploits palatable to the Enlightenment reader. Her own display of humaneness and that of Orlov offered one more element in the well-known justification of Russian aggression as the spread of civilisation: their correct form of heroism once again demonstrated that they, and not the Turks, shared contemporary European values and therefore deserved victory.

It is a testament to the influence of writers like Voltaire that the images of the blood-averse but victorious, enlightened ruler and his antithesis, the bloodthirsty hero, figured in Catherine’s purely strategic dealings with fellow monarchs throughout her reign. She consistently projected the same image as the blood-averse peacemaker in all these contexts. For example, when she gleefully accepted Britain’s request for mediation in its war with France, she had many practical reasons to be pleased: as leader of the Neutral League, she could hope to increase her prominence in European diplomacy acting as mediator; it gave her a chance to collaborate with the Austrians, with whom she would soon enter into an alliance; and she could escape the possibility of being forced to enter the Franco-British war in support of the freshly-attacked Dutch.²⁶ Yet, when she wrote to Joseph II to thank him for forwarding the mediation request, she offered only a flourish of Enlightenment language: ‘Que Votre Majesté Impériale me permette de Lui témoigner ma joie et ma satisfaction de ce que conjointement avec Elle je pourrai travailler à un aussi essentiel service pour l’humanité

²⁵ Voltaire to d’Argenson, 20 May 1745 (NS), D3121; Voltaire, *Commentaire historique sur les œuvres de l’auteur de la Henriade, &c. Avec les Pièces originales & les preuves* (Basel: Duker, 1776), pp. 39-45.

²⁶ Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (London: Phoenix, 2002), pp. 384-85.

que le serait celui de faire finir l'effusion du sang humain.'²⁷ Twenty years previously, Palissot had skewered the *philosophes* for their disingenuous use of a term they had put in fashion, 'l'humanité'.²⁸ Catherine was well aware that such language formed an immediately-recognisable discourse that exhibited her will to be seen as 'enlightened', and she could take others to task for failing to live up to their own pretenses along the same lines. In one of her first letters to Frederick the Great, Catherine employed stinging irony about the contradiction between his enlightened image and his refusal to put an immediate end to the Seven Years War: 'je parle a un Prince éclairé, que j'estime, et que je ne puis croire, malgré tout ce qu'on me dit etre enclain a ne vouloir que le carnage, la ruine de Son propre pays et le malheur de tant de milliers d'homme.' Catherine explicitly stated that her words were clichés: 'Ce n'est point pour briller par des lieux communs a Vos yeux que je Vous parle'.²⁹ Her meaning was clear: if Frederick did not make peace, he would reduce his own enlightened image to mere empty language. More than twenty-five years later, she accused his successor Friedrich Wilhelm of following the old model of princes who destroyed their subjects through needless wars: in a letter to Johann Georg Zimmermann intended to reach the Berlin court through perustration and to dissuade them from hostile plans to acquire territory in Poland, she wrote of 'ces pieçes Sanglantes appellées guerres, dont les Princes d'un esprit fougueux ou menées par des Ministres de Se caractere ne Sentent le repentir que

²⁷ 22 January 1781 (OS), *Joseph II. und Katharina von Russland. Ihr Briefwechsel*, ed. by Alfred Ritter von Arneth (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1869), p. 39.

²⁸ 'Je ne sais, mais enfin dussé-je vous déplaire, / Ce mot d'*humanité* ne m'en impose guère, / Et par tant de fripons je l'entends répéter, / Que je les crois d'accord pour le faire adopter.' Charles Palissot, *La Comédie des Philosophes et autres textes*, ed. by Olivier Ferret (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2002), p. 53 (II. 5).

²⁹ 17 November 1762 (OS), Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, I. HA Rep. 96, Nr. 110 P Bd. 1, 10 recto; *SIRIO*, XX, p. 154.

lors que leurs Sujets en Sont les victimes.³⁰ Catherine knew well how to manipulate the now-dominant Enlightenment discourses about the ills of war: these discourses did not change the underlying interests of state, but they thoroughly infiltrated the way in which diplomacy was conducted. She played on her own and her correspondents' images as Enlightenment heroes or anti-heroes to achieve her ends in European Realpolitik.

Compensating for Military Heroism: Flourishing Provinces

The Enlightenment hero could compensate for his conquests by ensuring the prosperity of his territories old and new. This was Montesquieu's defence of one of Catherine's favourite heroes, Alexander the Great, in *De l'Esprit des Lois*: 'Les Romains conquièrent tout pour tout détruire: il voulut tout conquérir pour tout conserver; et quelque pays qu'il parcourût, ses premières idées, ses premiers desseins furent toujours de faire quelque chose qui pût en augmenter la prospérité et la puissance.'³¹ Voltaire offered the same defence of both Peter the Great and Alexander the Great in his *Histoire de l'Empire de Russie*, emphasising the foundation of cities, the encouragement of arts and commerce, and the attention to legislative reform: 'c'est en quoi j'oserais comparer Pierre le Grand à Alexandre; aussi actif, aussi ami des arts utiles, plus appliqué à la législation, il voulut changer comme lui le commerce du monde, et bâtit ou répara autant de villes qu'Alexandre.'³² On an even grander scale, in eighteenth-century Russian panegyric the ruler who built cities, cultivated gardens, and brought

³⁰ 23 May 1789 (OS), Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, 61 recto.

³¹ Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois*, I, p. 319 (X. 14).

³² Voltaire, *Histoire de l'empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand*, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, XLVI-VII: *Histoire de l'empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand*, ed. by Michel Mervaud (1999), XLVII, p. 923 (II. 16).

abundance to the nation was likened to God the Creator of paradise.³³ In her letters, Catherine presented to her contemporaries and to posterity precisely this grandiose image, although in a strictly human and often comical, rather than a divine and exalted mode: she displayed her role as a ruler whose imperial power brought material improvement and prosperity to all the lands she conquered, both on the day of her coup in 1762 and in the course of her subsequent wars and annexations. She employed this image not only in letters to Voltaire: it was a useful image in a multiplicity of contexts.

The precedent of Peter the Great's foundation of cities could serve both to advertise abroad and to encourage at home the development of conquered territories. Writing to Voltaire to justify her war on the Ottomans, Catherine flaunted the fact that she was building cities even in the midst of war and continuing Peter's foundational enterprise in the south: 'Depuis la guerre j'ai faite deux nouvelles entreprises, je bâtais Azoph et Taganrok, où il y a un port començé et ruiné par Pierre I.'³⁴ More than a decade later, she urged on Potemkin's southern development projects with a similar comparison to Peter, phrased in the Voltairean cliché of 'forcing nature': 'Петр Первый, принуждая натуру, в Балтических своих заведениях и строениях имел более препятствий, нежели мы в Херсоне.'³⁵ In both these situations, Catherine used the Petrine example as a kind of shorthand for the achievements that made conquest legitimate, such as building cities. Adopting that image herself had both an advertising and an exhortatory function, depending on the context.

³³ Stephen Lessing Baehr, *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 84-89.

³⁴ 14 July 1769 (OS), D15775.

³⁵ Catherine to Potemkin, 30 September 1782 (OS), *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin: Lichnaya perepiska 1769-1791*, ed. by V. S. Lopatin (Moscow: Nauka, 1997), p. 153. Compare with Voltaire's expression that Peter 'a forcé la nature en tout, dans ses sujets, dans lui-même, et sur la terre et sur les eaux; mais il l'a forcée pour l'embellir' (*Histoire de l'empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand*, XLVII, p. 940) and Jaucourt's in the article 'Petersbourg' in the *Encyclopédie*: 'le Czar se plaisait à vaincre les difficultés & à forcer la nature' (XII, p. 463).

The image was most important in Catherine's travel letters. Despite the difficulties of writing on the road, Catherine made a concerted effort to maintain her correspondences while traveling. Her letters served the important purpose of conveying to a range of correspondents the ambitions and successes of her development initiatives. Again, these letters were not just intended for Western audiences: many different audiences needed to be convinced of her embodiment of the prosperity-creating model of Enlightenment greatness, for a variety of reasons.

Her letters to her son and daughter-in-law, Paul and Mariya Fedorovna, constitute one such perhaps unexpected context. Yet she regularly sent back to them commentaries on what she saw during her journeys, both positive and negative: knowing that they were her successors, she needed to instruct them on the state of the empire and on the importance of making plans to improve it. On her journey to Finland in 1783, for example, she wrote home with complaints about the poor roads: 'Mais basta, quand ce gouvernement prendra la nouvelle forme ce chemin se raccourcira singulièrement et deviendra plus large, et sera fait du plus beau gravier possible avec une facilité, qui saute aux yeux.'³⁶ The interjection of her personal tone, 'Mais basta', marked her personal investment in the project of improving these lands, which, although not conquered militarily, had to be integrated into the empire through reforms. These reports home about reforming plans served, therefore, multiple purposes: Catherine received some personal ego satisfaction from proving her right to rule before those who might threaten it, while at the same time she demonstrated for them what the true road to glory ought to be.

³⁶ 18 June 1783 (OS), *SIRIO*, xv, p. 4.

Her trip to the Crimea in 1787 offered the best opportunity for her to show off the development that her conquests had brought to former Ottoman lands. Her most personal letters to her family and intimates allowed Catherine to express her genuine pleasure at her own achievements: she saw her plans for true Enlightenment greatness being realised. In her letters home, she employed the typical tropes of her personal style, like personification, to show how close these attainments were to her heart: ‘La ville de Cherson est très belle pour une adolescente de six ans, [...] on peut dire aussi, que tout y est bâti et planté au mieux, sans outrepasser la vérité.’³⁷ Even more extreme examples of her personal playful tone appeared in her letters to Potemkin during and after the journey as rewards and encouragement for his successes: ‘мы здесь чванимся ездою и Тавридою и тамошними Генерал-Губернаторскими распоряжениями, кои добры без конца и во всех частях.’³⁸ Her jocular circumlocution, referring to Potemkin in the third person in his official capacity as governor-general, confirmed her true pride; she also mocked her own pride (‘чванимся’ [‘we boast’]), ironising once again about the truth to demonstrate how important it was to her. These letters are the back-story to the image that she presented abroad: she needed Potemkin to make the image a reality on the ground, and her personal expressions of satisfaction like these were the highest reward she could offer.

Other letters advertised her achievements to audiences at home and abroad. She wrote weekly letters to the governor-general of Moscow, P. D. Eropkin, in which she provided him with the official version of her journey. It was not to be printed, but it was to be shared with official and elite circles in the old capital. On her arrival at Kremenchug, she wrote a particularly emphatic letter to disprove rumours that the

³⁷ Catherine to Paul and Mariya Fedorovna, 14 May 1787 (OS), *SIRIO*, xv, p. 105.

³⁸ 25 June 1787 (OS), *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, p. 217.

southern achievements were just a façade: ‘здесь Я нашла треть прекрасной лехгой конницы той про которой некоторые **незнающие** люди твердили до ныне будто она лишь числится на бумаге’. She also praised the governor-general’s palace with its pleasant orchards, as well as the people’s hard work to realise her ambitions: ‘В здешней Губернии труд и прилежность, везде очутительно, что Мне весьма приятно’.³⁹ The image of the Enlightenment great ruler, who brings prosperity after conquest, thus served Catherine at home as well as abroad. She had plenty of detractors in Moscow, and her epistolary intervention made the point that she still deserved to rule: her personal engagement and activity were bringing military and economic strength to the nation.

In her advertising letters for both home and foreign audiences, Catherine underscored not just the reality of her improvements, but also the religious toleration and respect for diversity that she wished to incorporate into her reforms. Montesquieu, for example, had called attention to this aspect of Alexander the Great’s justified conquests: ‘Il ne laissa pas seulement aux peuples vaincus leurs mœurs, il leur laissa encore leurs lois civiles’.⁴⁰ On almost the same day she wrote to Voltaire and to her primary minister, Nikita Panin, almost identical reflections on the difficulty of legislating for the diverse population she found in Kazan: ‘Ces lois dont on parle tant, au bout du compte ne sont point faites encore, et qui peut répondre de leur bontés? [...] Imaginé je Vous prie qu’elle doivent servir pour l’Asie et pour l’Europe, et qu’elle différence de climat, gens, d’habitude, d’idée même’; ‘столько разных объектов, достойных взгляду, idée же на десять лет здесь собрать можно; c’est un Empire à

³⁹ 30 April 1787 (OS), *Vysochaishiya sobstvennoruchnyya pisma i poveleniya blazhennoi i vechnoi slavy dostoinoi pamyati gosudarynya imperatritsy Ekateriny Velikiya, k pokoinomu Generalu Petru Dmitrievichu Erapkinu i vsepoddanneishiya ego doneseniya, v trekh Otdeleniyakh*, ed. by Yakov Rost (Moscow: V Universitetskoi Tipografii, 1808), pp. 235-36.

⁴⁰ Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des lois*, I, p. 318 (X. 14).

part et il n'y a qu'ici, où l'on peut voir ce, que c'est que l'immense entreprise de nos lois'.⁴¹ These two passages illustrate particularly effectively the multiple purposes that Catherine's correspondence fulfilled: essentially the same utterances could, in a letter to Voltaire, display Catherine's enlightened intentions for governing an empire, while in a letter to her minister they could be both a personal reflection and a tacit request for advice. In a letter to Zimmermann sent during her trip to the Crimea, she repeated the message that she had sent to Voltaire, but twenty years of reign had rendered her confident enough to treat the policy of religious toleration in her personal style, reducing government policy to a private headache. She complained of the Muslim call to prayer that took place outside her window five times a day: 'je ne Sais Si le Ciel est Sourd a leur priere mais je Sais bien qu'on voudroit l'etre pour ne pas entendre le train qu'ils font dans leurs Mosquée, il faut une grande coutume pour Suporter les hurlemens de cette force la.'⁴² It was through comments like these that Catherine turned the image of the imperial conqueror into that of the enlightened ruler. The letter to Panin showed her reflections on the difficulty of her task; the letter to Voltaire simply advertised the image; and the letter to Zimmermann realised it fully, treating in a charmingly sociable tone the reality of a multinational empire. Even at this late stage of her reign, Catherine's epistolary persona brought together disparate discourses available in her day: that of sociability and that of civilising but tolerant conquest. In so doing, she sought to win over her readers and convince them that she was a true 'great man' in the Enlightenment style.

⁴¹ Catherine to Voltaire, 29 May 1767 (OS), D14219; Catherine to Panin, 31 May 1767 (OS), *Pisma i zapiski imperatritsy Ekateriny Vtoroi k grafu Nikite Ivanovichu Paninu* (Moscow: V Universitetskoi tipografii, 1863), p. 26.

⁴² 1 July 1787 (OS), Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, 19 recto.

Patronage of the Arts and Sciences

The Enlightenment discourse of greatness demanded patronage of the arts and sciences as another supplement or even replacement for military glory: this is the face of Catherine that Voltaire placed under the sign of Apollo in his opening line to his *Épître*, ‘Elève d’Apollon, de Thémis, et de Mars’. His *Siècle de Louis XIV* postulated a kind of symbiosis between the greatness of kings and the natural development of the arts and sciences. In chapter XXXII, ‘Des beaux-arts’, for example, Voltaire pointed out in relation to the writers of the age that ‘Tous ces grands hommes furent connus et protégés de Louis XIV, excepté La Fontaine’, and that after Louis’s death, ‘la nature sembla se reposer’ and thus failed to produce more great men. The possible tension between the necessity for Louis’s patronage and the simple course of nature is at least ostensibly resolved at the end of the passage with reference to the abbé Dubos, who claimed that the only great epic subject in the history of France was ‘la destruction de la Ligue par Henri le Grand’. Following on from this observation, Voltaire concluded, ‘Si donc il se trouve jamais quelque artiste qui s’empare des seuls ornements convenables au temps, au sujet, à la nation, et qui exécute ce qu’on a tenté, ceux qui viendront après lui trouveront la carrière remplie.’⁴³ Voltaire thus made himself the culminating great man of France’s greatest age: born under the aegis of Louis XIV, France’s greatest patron of the arts, Voltaire, as the greatest artist, united in *La Henriade* the great deeds of a previous king with the ripened artistic capacities of his nation. The greatness of kings and of artists was to be mutually reinforcing.

Catherine’s accomplishments as a patron were and are well-known and well-celebrated: these included the purchases of the libraries of Diderot and Voltaire, the

⁴³ Voltaire, *Œuvres historiques*, pp. 1013-16.

foundation of the Hermitage, and extensive building projects in and around St. Petersburg, to name just the most famous examples. Yet only Catherine's letters can show how fully she participated in the eighteenth-century discourse of patronage and how skilfully she manipulated it for her own purposes. She shared Voltaire's insistence on naming the artist as a *grand homme* in his own right: in the 1760s and 1770s the majority of those to whom she referred as 'great men' had achieved their greatness in the arts and sciences. During this early period, she surpassed the *philosophes* in emphasising the independent greatness of scientists, artists, and men of letters. This usage served a specific, and perhaps unsurprising, rhetorical purpose: in calling attention to their independence from their current patrons and nations, Catherine could all the more easily convince such *grands hommes* to leave their present homes and travel to her court, where they could accordingly expect a continuation of such autonomy and respect. In 1765, in a letter to d'Alembert, she employed heavy irony to exhibit her superior understanding of the great men who went unappreciated by the French government: 'Vous devez avoir en France une profusion de grands hommes puisque le gouvernement ne se croit pas plus obligé à encourager ceux dont le génie est admiré dans les pays les plus lointains.'⁴⁴ This statement demonstrates her grasp of the Voltairean vision of the compact between great rulers and great writers: the great ruler must encourage great artists and scientists and understand their needs in order to ensure their flourishing. French rulers had violated their portion of the pact, leaving the *grands hommes* free to seek out a new patron-monarch who would uphold his or her side of the bargain.

⁴⁴ 21 November 1765 (OS), 'Correspondance avec Catherine II', in *Œuvres et correspondances inédites de d'Alembert*, ed. by Charles Henry (Paris: Perrin, 1887), pp. 193-261 (pp. 242-43).

This trade in great men appears again in a letter that Catherine wrote to her chancellor, Count M. I. Vorontsov, on the occasion of a letter to the latter from mathematician Leonhard Euler: ‘Je reconnais que mon Académie se relèvera de ses cendres par une acquisition aussi importante et je me félicite d’avoir rendu ce grand homme à la Russie.’⁴⁵ Soon Catherine successfully stole the prize great man from Frederick the Great. In a subsequent letter to Vorontsov negotiating the terms of Euler’s appointment, Catherine highlighted again the superiority of the mathematician’s personal glory over any kind of prestige he could attain in regular government service. She would give him the rank on the Petrine Table of Ranks that he desired, ‘si je ne craignais que ce titre ne le compromît avec quantité de gens qui ne le valent pas; mais en vérité sa réputation vaut mieux que ce titre pour s’attirer la considération qui lui est due.’⁴⁶ By this time, the discourse and values of the scientific and artistic ‘great man’ had entered the reasoning of Russian statecraft and scientific circles and was not merely a façade for Western benefit. For instance, Mikhail Lomonosov had already been striving for decades to establish his persona as a great Russian scientist in order to attract patrons and to garner posterity’s approval; this image was notably shaped by his autobiographical letters.⁴⁷ In recruiting Euler, Catherine played the necessary counterpoint to such a scientist’s persona: she displayed the great patron’s ability to recognise other forms of greatness, like illustrious scholarship.

At the same time, though, the respect implied in the second letter to Vorontsov can be read as a convenient excuse. Catherine was generally wary of giving titles to foreigners: in 1767 she held the failed advisor Pierre-Paul Lemercier de la Rivière at

⁴⁵ 6 January 1766 (OS), *SIRIO*, x, p. 59.

⁴⁶ (February?) 1766, *SIRIO*, x, p. 68.

⁴⁷ Steven A. Usitalo, *The Invention of Mikhail Lomonosov: A Russian National Myth* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), pp. 27-73.

bay, and in the 1790s she repeatedly refused the prospective historian Gabriel Sénac de Meilhan the titles that he insistently requested. While Euler was more successful in his field than these two aspiring political advisors, Catherine maintained a separation between direct government service and the honours associated with it, and the realm of artistic and scholarly reputation. It is possible that this separation resulted from Catherine's close reading of Montesquieu alongside the works of Voltaire and the *Encyclopédistes*. For Montesquieu, careful management of government honours plays an essential role in maintaining a monarchy. The monarch must encourage service by giving honours, but excessive rewards are an indication of a state of decay and a devaluation of honour itself.⁴⁸ By contrast, as emphasised in the *Encyclopédie* article 'Réputation, considération', drawn from a work by Madame de Lambert that reused many of Montesquieu's ideas, 'réputation' can be obtained only 'de ceux qui ne nous connaissent pas'; rather than pertaining to the monarch's careful management, 'la réputation est souvent donnée à une action faite au hasard'.⁴⁹ Therefore, Catherine likely felt the need to restrict government honours to those dedicated to long-term service of the state, while leaving foreign scientists and artists to win their reputations, and thus contribute to hers, in the uncertain field of European public renown.

Following the death of Voltaire in 1778, a new theme entered Catherine's discourse on great men: the hope that 'tous les grands hommes de notre siècle ne sont pas destinés à mourir avant l'an 1780.'⁵⁰ It is a constant motif in her personal exchange with Friedrich Melchior Grimm: she shared the widespread discourse that held Voltaire

⁴⁸ Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois*, I, pp. 122-24, 187-88 (III. 6-7; v. 18).

⁴⁹ Chevalier de Jaucourt, 'Réputation, considération', in *Encyclopédie*, XIV, p. 161; on Montesquieu's *De la considération et de la réputation* and Madame Lambert's *Discours sur la différence qu'il y a de la réputation à la considération*, that latter of which is the source for the *Encyclopédie* article, see Pierre Rétat, 'De la considération et de la réputation', in *Dictionnaire Montesquieu* <<http://dictionnaire-montesquieu.ens-lyon.fr/index.php?id=153>> [accessed 15 February 2013].

⁵⁰ *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 145.

to be the most significant *grand homme* of her age. It involved Catherine directly in a broader Parisian-based discourse that associated the death of Voltaire with the end of an epoch, equivalent in many ways to the death of Louis XIV. In his speech upon succeeding Voltaire at the Académie Française, for example, Jean-François Ducis stated that ‘c’est à la suite des siècles seule, à remplir le vide immense qu’ils [les grands hommes] ont laissé’.⁵¹ The above quotation from Catherine comes from a letter to Grimm of 20 June 1779 (OS); it refers to the painter Mengs, whose work Catherine was attempting to acquire and whose ill health caused Catherine reasonable concern, as he died on 29 June of that year. The example of Mengs ran parallel to that of Voltaire: in the following months, Catherine’s letters are scattered with discussions of the arrival in St. Petersburg of Voltaire’s secretary Jean-Louis Wagnière with Voltaire’s library, alongside Catherine’s attempts to continue her generosity to Mengs’ children and to acquire as much of his work as she could. In August of the same year, she asked Grimm to arrange for her agent to acquire the work of an artist who had independently acquired glory, in which she unapologetically hoped to obtain a share: ‘La gloire de Mengs est établie; dites à Reiffenstein que s’il me peut faire avoir de son ouvrage, qu’il en achète pour moi.’ She then repeated a variation on her worry about the loss of great men, which would accordingly lessen her own ability to acquire reputation and glory: ‘Mais écoutez donc, cette année est fatale au mérite, [...] tous mes partisans désertent; aber, mein Gott, was wird denn das werden?’⁵² Catherine deftly made use of the discourse through which glory and greatness were exchanged in the mid-century French Enlightenment: through the efforts of writers like Voltaire, appropriate understanding of

⁵¹ Quoted in Bonnet, *Naissance du Panthéon*, p. 89.

⁵² 23 August 1779 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 158.

and praise for artistic and literary glory had become a requirement for attaining glory as a monarch.

Ethical Greatness

Catherine would have encountered in her reading and in her correspondence another even more ubiquitous demand placed on the Enlightenment great man or woman: he or she was to adhere to a loosely Stoic ethic. He or she was to pursue worthy objectives singlemindedly but not stubbornly and to remain undaunted in times of tribulation and humble in moments of triumph. As usual for Catherine's performance of greatness in her letters, she did not pay any heed to her gender. She never cited female antecedents for her behaviour, and she did not noticeably draw on the seventeenth-century French figure of the 'femme forte', whose primary feature is heroic virtue or *fortitudo*, which encompasses not just courage but also generosity and Stoic constancy.⁵³ Yet these figures may well have figured in the long list of other more obvious sources for the ethical character that Catherine assumed in her letters.

She could have found this Stoic ethic as a requirement of greatness in several *Encyclopédie* articles: in 'Grandeur', for example, Marmontel lists 'fermeté' as the first trait of 'grandeur d'âme', which is a first step to achieving *grand homme* status: 'La *grandeur* d'ame, c'est-à-dire la fermeté, la droiture, l'élévation des sentimens, est la plus belle partie de la *grandeur* personnelle. Ajoutez-y un esprit vaste, lumineux, profond, & vous aurez un grand homme.'⁵⁴ In her memoirs, Catherine credited her childhood acquaintance and the addressee of her earliest surviving letters, the Swedish Count Gyllenborg, with reinforcing her inclination for such greatness of soul: he not

⁵³ Ian Maclean, *Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature 1610-1652* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), pp. 82-86.

⁵⁴ *Encyclopédie*, VII, pp. 855-57 (p. 855).

only recommended Plutarch, the life of Cicero, and Montesquieu's *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, but he also wrote for her twelve pages of 'réflexions qu'il avoit fait à mon sujet, par lesquelles il tâchoit de fortifier en moi tant l'élévation de l'âme et la fermeté que les autres qualités du coeur et de l'esprit.'⁵⁵ Three decades later, Catherine retained a heightened sensitivity to passages in her reading about the mental and spiritual character of the great man. Her only commentary on the abbé Galiani's *Dialogues sur le commerce des blés* concerned a short statement in the eighth dialogue about the qualities of the great man: 'Le grand homme doit réunir des qualités opposées, extrêmes, presque impossibles à accoupler [...] il doit avoir le desir ardent du bien qu'a l'homme vertueux, réuni au calme & pour ainsi-dire à l'indifférence qu'en ont les méchants.'⁵⁶ In a letter to Grimm, Catherine happily transferred this portrait of the great man's mind to her own mind: 'cet assemblage de contradictions trotte continuellement dans ma tête, et j'y vois tout, comme le père Malebranche voyait tout dans son système.'⁵⁷ Displaying her erudition along the way, Catherine thus humorously proclaimed her ambition to play the resolute, calm, Stoic great man in her dedication to the good of Russia: she would bring the pervasive Western model of greatness home to Russia.

Russian sources reinforced her ambition: Stoic themes and vocabulary figured prominently in eighteenth-century Russian literature, and the literary discourse around Catherine insistently called for a monarch with exemplary Stoic self-control.⁵⁸ Her own subordinates used that language to praise her in their letters, and their efforts met with

⁵⁵ *Sochineniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, XII, p. 216.

⁵⁶ [Ferdinando Galiani], *Dialogues sur le commerce des blés* (Londres: [n. pub.], 1770), p. 131.

⁵⁷ 25 November 1777 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 70.

⁵⁸ Andrew Kahn, "'Blazhenstvo ne v luchakh Porfira': histoire et fonction de la tranquillité (spokoystvie) dans la pensée et la poésie russes du XVIIIe siècle, de Kantemir au sentimentalisme", *Revue des études slaves*, 74, 4 (2002), 669-88 (pp. 669-72); Whittaker, *Russian Monarchy*, pp. 147-52.

her approval. When Russia annexed Crimea in 1783, Potemkin urged Catherine to cling to this acquisition in the face of any objections from foreign courts, exhorting her to display the Stoic resilience of the great man: ‘Облекись, матушка, твердостью на все попытки, а паче против внутренних и внешних бурбонцев’.⁵⁹ He cleverly put his exhortations not just in his own letters to her, but also in a letter to the *de facto* head of foreign affairs, Aleksandr Bezborodko, which Catherine would quite plausibly see.⁶⁰ This language was such a fixture of laudatory discourse amongst her highest-placed subordinates that even those less privy to Catherine’s private thoughts used it effectively. In 1791, the ambassador to England, S. R. Vorontsov, praised Catherine in a letter to Bezborodko for her resolution not to yield to the British and Prussian menace to attack Russia in the Baltic: Vorontsov had been instrumental in encouraging Catherine’s resistance and in convincing the British public not to support Pitt’s aggression. In applauding Catherine, he was also tacitly reminding her of his contribution to the heroic glory she had acquired: ‘Я не могу без утешения взирать на славу что приобрела она себе и своему государству твердостью своего духа [...]’. Твердость есть наипервейшее качество человека’.⁶¹ He duly received the Order of St. Vladimir, first class.⁶² Catherine’s correspondence thus formed a sort of echo chamber for her performance of the great man’s Stoic ethic.

This language had its tactical uses: it appears very frequently in Catherine’s exhortatory letters to her subordinates in wartime. It had obvious rhetorical utility when Catherine wanted to demonstrate her continued faith in her subordinates and to

⁵⁹ Potemkin to Catherine, 22 April 1783 (OS), *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, p. 164.

⁶⁰ Potemkin told Bezborodko: ‘надежда на твердость Ея Величества’ [‘our hope is in Her Majesty’s steadfastness’], cited in *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, pp. 730-31.

⁶¹ Vorontsov to Bezborodko, 8/19 August 1791, *Arkhiv knyazya Vorontsova*, ed. by P. I. Bartenev, 40 vols (Moscow: Tip. A. I. Mamontova and others, 1870-95), IX, p. 486.

⁶² M. L. Polovinkina and E. A. Shlyapnikova, ‘Istoricheskie portrety. SEMEN ROMANOVICH VORONTSOV, *Voprosy istorii*, 11 (2003), 62-83 (pp. 70-72).

convince them to keep trying despite setbacks; it accordingly traversed her wartime letters throughout her career. In an autograph draft letter to Field Marshal P. A. Rumyantsev in 1773, for example, she explained that leaders have a duty to exemplify the Stoic ethic for their subordinates: ‘уныние могло тем наипаче быть вреднее, что подобное расположение душевное предводительствующаго, какою бы он ревностью и усердием впрочем ни наполнен был, не может иного действия в подчиненных произвести, как упадок души и ослабление’.⁶³ Catherine thus stood at the head of a sort of chain of demonstrative Stoic determination that led from the monarch through the generals to the common soldiers and spurred them all on to heroism in service of the fatherland. Many years later, she held up Frederick II as a model of this ethic in a letter to convince the prince of Nassau-Siegen to continue fighting after a serious defeat at the Second Battle of Svensksund: ‘Le feu roi de Prusse n’était véritablement grand, qu’après un grand revers [...] planez sur les événements et allez de rechef à l’ennemi’.⁶⁴ She then reflected on her epistolary strategy in a letter to Potemkin: ‘Не унывая в сем нещастии и замыкая печаль горькую в сердце моем, я стараюсь, чтоб общему делу возратить поверхность, колико можно’.⁶⁵

Demanding Stoic restraint from the great man may have been an Enlightenment strategy for reining in rulers’ military ambitions, but monarchs like Catherine could reverse the rhetoric and use the language of Stoicism to orchestrate military success.

Stoic language was not just tactical, though: it was an essential feature of the persona that Catherine wanted to project in her letters. It spilled over from her more formal self-portraits into her court sociability and its epistolary manifestations, a fact which offers convincing evidence of the centrality of this language to Catherine’s

⁶³ 28 October 1773 (OS), *SIRIO*, XIII, p. 366.

⁶⁴ 9 July 1790 (OS), *SIRIO*, I, p. 210.

⁶⁵ Catherine to Potemkin, 17 July 1790 (OS), *Ekaterina II i G. A. Potemkin*, p. 422.

preferred image of herself. On the serious side, it appeared in some of her earliest self-presentations to the West: in a letter to Madame Geoffrin, for example, Catherine presented herself as steadfast in her reforming and legislating projects: ‘Vous n’etes pas Madame du nombre de mes envieux, Vous croyés que j’ai le courage d’entreprendre de grandes choses et la fermeté de persister dans mes projets.’⁶⁶ Similarly in the serious or even tragic mode, Catherine adopted from her early correspondent Sir Charles Hanbury-Williams a favourite tag-line from Racine’s *Athalie*, which highlighted her heroic resolution in a wide variety of contexts: ‘Je crains Dieu, cher Abner, et n’ai point d’autre crainte.’⁶⁷ But the Stoic ethic’s entry into the comic mode of her personal, sociable discourse marks its true importance to her. The prince de Ligne recounted in his portrait of the empress how, during a conversation at court about ‘qualités de l’âme’, he had flattered her by declaring ‘imperturbabilité’ to be her dominant quality.⁶⁸ The difficulty sonority of this word and Catherine’s delight with its meaning echoed not just in their subsequent conversations, but also in her letters: in 1789, for example, she informed de Ligne that ‘Si vous aviez vu l’imperturbabilité agir au moment où le roi de Suède passa avec tout ce qu’il avait de troupes en Finlande l’année passée, je me flatte que vous auriez été content de votre imperturbable’.⁶⁹ She remembered it a year later:

⁶⁶ 11/21 January 1765, *SIRIO*, I, p. 263.

⁶⁷ *Athalie*, I, 1; Racine, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Georges Forestier, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 1019; Hanbury-Williams to Catherine, 10 August 1756 (OS), *Correspondance de Catherine Alexéievna, grande-duchesse de Russie, et de Sir Charles H. Williams, ambassadeur d’Angleterre, 1756 et 1757*, ed. by Sergey M. Goryainov (Moscow: Société Impériale d’histoire et d’antiquités russes, 1909), p. 30; Catherine to Dashkova, [1762], ‘Lettres et billets de l’impératrice Catherine II à la princesse Dachkova’, in Princesse Dachkova, *Mon histoire: mémoires d’une femme de lettres russe à l’époque des lumières*, ed. by Alexandre Woronzoff-Dashkoff, Catherine Le Gouis, and Catherine Woronzoff-Dashkoff (Paris, Montréal: L’Harmattan, 1999), pp. 227-54 (p. 77); Catherine to Gustav, 14 August 1790 (OS), *Catherine II et Gustave III: une correspondance retrouvée*, ed. by Gunnar von Proschwitz (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1998), p. 260; Catherine to Grimm, 23 April 1791 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 514; Catherine to Otto Magnus von Stakelberg, 13 June 1791 (OS), ‘Pisma Ekateriny II k grafu Stakelbergu. 1773-1796’, *Russkaia Starina*, 3, 5 (May 1871), pp. 605-27 (p. 624).

⁶⁸ Prince Charles-Joseph de Ligne, *Correspondances russes*, ed. by Alexandre Stroeve and Jerroon Vercruysse, 2 vols (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), I, p. 106.

⁶⁹ 5 November 1789 (OS), *Correspondances russes*, I, p. 162.

on 5 August 1790 (OS), Catherine announced the signature of the peace of Värälä ending the war between Russia and Sweden, and in the last lines of the letter, she remarked that ‘Votre soi-disant imperturbable a eu cet été de quoi l’exercer’.⁷⁰ These jokes completed the integration of the Enlightenment discourse of Stoic ethical greatness into Catherine’s epistolary self-image. Finding these ideas in a huge range of sources from seventeenth-century tragedy to the *Encyclopédie* and Russian advice literature, she appropriated them in her letters both for tactical purposes and for the creation of an epistolary persona. This persona pervaded her letters: the sheer diversity of its manifestations—in instances of military tension, with reference to reform projects, and as an object of verbal play—rendered it a unifying leitmotif that Catherine left behind for posterity to discover as evidence of her ‘grandeur d’âme’.

The Legislator

Perhaps the most important face of the Enlightenment *grand homme* on the throne was his or her role as legislator. Voltaire constantly returned to this theme in his letters to Catherine: even during the Russo-Turkish War, ‘législatrice’ remained his primary fixed epithet for her, and he insisted repeatedly that the war had interrupted the important work of her Legislative Commission and that the fighting should end soon so that she could return to her primary task.⁷¹ The praise she received from other quarters repeated the same lesson: thanking her for a copy of her *Nakaz*, the most prominent crowned *grand homme* of the century, Frederick the Great, sounded just like Voltaire:

⁷⁰ *Correspondances russes*, I, p. 182.

⁷¹ For example, in his mock letter to Sultan Mustafa III, ‘J’ai été très fâchée [sic] que vous l’aiez forcée d’interrompre son beau code de loix pour vous battre. Elle aurait mieux aimé être Thémis que Bellone; mais grâce à vous elle est montée au temple de la gloire par tous les chemins’ (2 October 1771 (NS), D17391), or, a few months earlier, ‘Votre majesté va reprendre ses habits de législatrice après avoir quitté sa robe d’amazone’ (8 February 1771 (NS), D17008).

‘[L]es anciens Grecs, qui étaient de bons appréciateurs du mérite, divinisaient les grands hommes en réservant la première place aux législateurs qu’ils jugeaient les véritables bienfaiteurs du genre humain: ils auraient placé Votre Majesté Impériale entre Lycurgue et Solon.’⁷² Voltaire had said the same in the article ‘Superstition’ of the *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif* (1764), where he deemed legislators and mathematicians worthy of deification: ‘Il y a peut-être une superstition pardonnable et même encourageante à la vertu; c’est celle de placer parmi les dieux les grands hommes qui ont été les bienfaiteurs du genre humain. [...] Vénérez sans culte, un Solon, un Thalès, un Pythagore [...]’.⁷³ Within Russia, writers in the last years of Elizabeth’s reign had also been regularly expressing the need for legal reform; perhaps the most important of these writers for Catherine’s intellectual development was her future leading minister, Nikita Panin.⁷⁴ Upon her accession, Catherine and the writers around her both promoted the image of ‘a “legal monarch”—a central motif of political dialogue during her reign.’⁷⁵ The message from all quarters was clear: Catherine could obtain the necessary tactical support from her contemporaries as well as posthumous glory by performing the role of legislator.

Public manifestations of Catherine’s image took this role exceedingly seriously: as just one example, the frontispiece to her *Nakaz* displayed the empress clutching ‘holy law’ to her heart, bringing about good government in Russia under the guidance of God and of personified Justice.⁷⁶ In her letters, by contrast, when she portrayed herself as a legislator, Catherine almost inevitably adopted her personal, light tone, although with a

⁷² Frederick to Catherine, 26 November 1767 (NS), *SIRIO*, xx, p. 238.

⁷³ *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, xxxvi: *Dictionnaire philosophique (II): David-Vertu*, ed. by Christiane Mervaud (1994), p. 538.

⁷⁴ Whittaker, *Russian Monarchy*, p. 103; David L. Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia: The Panin Party* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 47-54.

⁷⁵ Whittaker, *Russian Monarchy*, p. 102.

⁷⁶ Andreas Schönle, *The Ruler in the Garden: Politics and Landscape Design in Imperial Russia* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 45-46.

larger dose of coquetry than usual. This was true whether the letters pertained to the actual work of legislation, to Catherine's reflections on it, or to her advertisements of it. There are several reasons for this tendency. As has already been observed, Catherine tended to adopt her personal tone for the people and topics most important to her: her enthusiasm for her projects suffuses her letters. However, as an intellectual accomplishment, the act of legislation was more personally hers than other glorious deeds, such as military conquest: as Voltaire observed, 'Il [le code de vos loix] vous donnera plus de gloire que dix batailles sur les bords du Danube, car enfin c'est vôtre ouvrage, vôtre génie l'a conçu, Vôtre belle main l'a écrit, et ce n'est pas vôtre main qui a tué des Turcs.'⁷⁷ This circumstance also called forth Catherine's coquetry: if unsuccessful, she could blame her failure on no one else, and, especially as a woman, she risked arousing the mockery of the European public sphere. Yet her pose of modesty also added charm and piquancy to her image as legislator: her readers present and future could admire all the more a simple and likeable human who also attained the highest form of greatness.

The sense of fun and personal engagement that she brought to the work of legislation can be seen from her surviving notes to her collaborator on the provincial reforms of 1775, Jakob Sievers. These notes have been read as straightforward evidence of her 'reliance' on Sievers in writing the reforms.⁷⁸ While they do reveal a close working relationship, the impression that Catherine gives of submission to Sievers's opinions should not be taken at face value. Rather, her tone reflects the charmingly casual attitude to power that Catherine so enjoyed and that she deployed to draw the most open advice possible from her advisor. In one such note, for example,

⁷⁷ Voltaire to Catherine, 19 June 1771 (OS), D17253.

⁷⁸ Robert E. Jones, *The Emancipation of the Russian Nobility, 1762-1785* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 215-16.

she made renovating a provincial government sound as simple as wanting to do so: ‘J’ai voulu Vous demander Primo combien Vous voulés de cercle dans une province [...] Secondement pourquoi Vous ne voulez point de chambre de finance provinciale [...]?’ She knew perfectly well how difficult implementing reforms could be, especially in Russia, but flaunting her power this way flattered her correspondent into thinking that he shared it. Similarly, her personal style with its abundance of proverbs and its joking use of official titles and Enlightenment or religious imagery dominates another note: ‘ma foi je suis au bout de mon Latin [...] un mot de Votre Excellence sur les matiere seroit un éclair d’ou partiroit la lumiere et du fond du Cahos chaque chose iroit ce ranger a Sa place comme lors de la creation du monde.’⁷⁹ Her style once again served the practical purpose of keeping discussion open and entertaining, helping her to manage the advisors who contributed to her legislative accomplishments. It also generated an image of the empress as a civilised as well as a civilising force: the ability to write fine, sociable letters showed her personal cultivation, even as she cultivated the natural potential of Russia.

She also seems to have considered her personal tone to be the best frame for promoting her image as legislator abroad: after all, the genre of the personal letter banned the pomposity of public rhetoric, formal odes, or allegorical engravings. Calling attention to the genre offered a convenient device for Catherine’s shows of modesty and of superficial consultation with Westerners. When she sent via Madame Geoffrin a short list of highly theoretical questions to d’Alembert, she could be certain that her elite readers in Paris would enjoy the game of informal consultation by sociable letter. But she could also use the genre as an excuse not to continue the discussion: she replied

⁷⁹ [n.d.], Karl Ludwig Blum, *Des Grafen Jakob Johann Sievers Denkwürdigkeiten zur Geschichte Rußlands*, 4 vols (Leipzig and Heidelberg: C.S. Winter, 1857-58), II, p. 547.

to his return essay, ‘Je m’attendais presque à cette réponse. Je la trouve très juste; il est impossible de parler par lettre et à une aussi grande distance comme l’on ferait dans une conversation.’⁸⁰ Likening letters to inferior imitations of conversation was a standard epistolary trope, but here it contained yet another jab at d’Alembert’s refusal to come to Russia; it moreover allowed Catherine to assert that, since she could predict the *philosophe*’s response, she hardly needed to consult him. Similarly her constant expressions of dissatisfaction and frustration with her legislative work were probably genuine, but they also displayed the image of a hardworking empress who personally drafted and redrafted the laws for her nation. They moreover allowed Catherine to assert that she was seeking the pinnacle of Enlightenment greatness, without appearing proud or self-satisfied. As she wrote to Madame Geoffrin: ‘Le cahier que je lui ai promis [the draft *Nakaz*, which she had promised to d’Alembert] devient volumineux, cela me fâche et il m’ennuyeroit, si le bien d’une bonne portion du genre humain n’y étoit lié’. Catherine’s ambiguous statements, both proud and humble at once, pointed out that her personal reputation and posthumous glory were at stake in this endeavour, more than in any other: ‘le cahier est la profession de foi de mon bon sens, le monde présent et avenir en doit juger, encore à cela il n’y aura que mon amour propre qui perdrait’.⁸¹ By admitting with seeming ingenuousness her anxiety about her accomplishment, Catherine also called attention to her high ambitions. She also thus embodied the true Enlightenment ‘great man’, willing to sacrifice her rest and even her reputation in the service of her nation and of humanity.

This slippage between the Sévigné-esque, self-ironising, sociable persona and the imperial *grand homme* was most prominent in the passages in the letters to Grimm

⁸⁰ Catherine to d’Alembert, 31 August 1766 (OS), *Œuvres et correspondances inédites de d’Alembert*, p. 246.

⁸¹ Catherine to Geoffrin, 15 January 1766, *SIRIO*, I, p. 283.

where Catherine reflected on her ‘législomanie’. Legislation was an illness, a ‘redoutable maladie’, but it left her image no worse for the wear: Catherine bragged that one such fit of ‘législomanie de cinq mois consécutifs’, also known as the provincial reform that she worked on with Sievers, ‘a été reçue avec satisfaction et contentement général.’ Catherine knew quite well that there was a fine line between glory and pride: she therefore trumpeted her own genius by comparing herself antiphrastically to mediocre writers, adding ‘or, satisfaction et contentement ne laissent pas que d’encourager de grands génies, comme Harpe, Dorat, Poinsinet, etc. etc., dont j’ignore les noms’.⁸² Toying with greatness only exaggerated its effect: she could treat legislative genius so casually only because she possessed it naturally. The same can be said of the odd relation between epistolary tidiness and legislative efforts that she established in another letter: ‘placez les virgules et les points dans mes lettres là où il convient pour l’intelligence du texte, car je commence à m’apercevoir que la législomanie et miss Mimi, de même que lady Azor m’ont rendue fort négligente sur ce point et sur celui de la propreté des lettres.’⁸³ Through the humdrum image of epistolary neatness, Catherine exalted herself almost to the level of the traditional epic hero, who could neglect the ordinary rules of morality and conduct because his unique capacities and accomplishments superseded them. Catherine humorously suggested that her own writing of laws surpassed the ordinary writer by so far that she could neglect the puny details, like punctuation, which preoccupy ordinary mortals.

In her epistolary realisation of her public image as a legislator, the highest manifestation of the Enlightenment *grand homme*, Catherine brought together most

⁸² 29 November 1775 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 37.

⁸³ 1 September 1776 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 59.

effectively her sociable personal tone and her magisterial image as one of the great rulers of the eighteenth century. Her rhetoric of the letter relied extensively on the contrast between those two facets of her epistolary persona. Her techniques for bringing them together and their rhetorical effects are manifold. A jovial presentation could sweeten the pill of an imperial order, or, quite the reverse, a sociable passage or even a series of sociable letters could conclude with an all-the-more hard-hitting assertion of imperial authority. An apparently casual attitude to greatness made it easier to brag about it; the constant presence of her grand persona made her sociability just one more accomplishment on the list. Her dual persona played to the aesthetic of diversity and surprise that the gallant letter and the eighteenth-century ‘goût moderne’ required; it also suited her personality, which combined great ambition with good humour and an intense desire for love and companionship. Catherine’s position, her extensive reading, and her literary skill allowed her to interweave grandeur and sociability into a unique epistolary *œuvre* that both served her day-to-day goals and prepared a monument to her extraordinary life and persona for readers present and future to discover.

Following many illustrious precedents ever since Augustus, Catherine publicly refused the titles of ‘Великая’ [‘the Great’], ‘Премудрая’ [‘most Wise’], and ‘Мать Отечества’ [‘Mother of the Fatherland’] when they were offered to her at her Legislative Commission of 1767.⁸⁴ Yet the entire event was clearly staged so as to earn her that title. The same can be said of her correspondence: Catherine arranged and promoted in her letters a portrait of herself as an Enlightenment *grand homme*. Her correspondents duly acknowledged this: countless panegyrics in Grimm’s letters, or de Ligne’s well-known epithet ‘Catherine le grand’, testify to their recognition of her

⁸⁴ See her autograph draft of a reply to the deputies of the commission who offered the titles, 12 August 1767 (OS), *SIRIO*, x, pp. 236-37.

intention.⁸⁵ And yet she prepared and illustrated her greatness through the exercise of a different ideal of the Enlightenment: sociability. Her personal tone, the play of authority in the structure of her letters, and her consistent attention to the criteria of greatness as articulated by her century all created the epistolary persona of Catherine the Great. The genre of the letter and her personal epistolary rhetoric prompted her to turn again to the mechanisms of sociability, rather than to those of government or of commercial print culture, to publicise this persona. She circulated her letters almost exclusively amongst the European elite circles who could best appreciate her sociable epistolary style: she sought through their eyes the reputation, fame, and glory that her literary-inspired persona of grandeur was designed to attract.

⁸⁵ De Ligne to Catherine, 30 November 1788 (NS), *Correspondances russes*, I, p. 153.

CHAPTER FOUR
EPISTOLARY PUBLICITY AND THE AUDIENCE FOR CATHERINE'S
WESTERN CORRESPONDENCES

The Enlightenment discourse of heroism and greatness cannot be separated from the problematics of glory. The contradiction in the *Encyclopédie*'s treatment of 'gloire' sums up the quandary. On the one hand, Jaucourt's article 'Temple de la Gloire, (*Morale*)' cites Cicero's authority to express the widespread notion that love of glory is an essential motivator of great actions, a sentiment that 'se trouve toujours la plus forte dans les ames sublimes'. According to Jaucourt's Cicero, a place in the temple of glory can be obtained not through the foolish opinion of the masses, but rather through 'l'approbation unanime des grandes actions, approbation donnée par tous les honnêtes-gens, & par le suffrage incorruptible de ceux qui peuvent juger de l'excellence du mérite'.¹ However, excessive love of glory leads to dangerous vanity: as Voltaire explained pointedly in his *Encyclopédie* article 'GLOIRE, GLOREIUX, GLORIEUSEMENT, GLORIFIER, (*Gramm.*)', 'On a vû des souverains qui ayant une gloire réelle, ont encore aimé la vaine gloire, en recherchant trop les louanges, en aimant trop l'appareil de la représentation.'² A monarch like Catherine had to be especially careful in navigating between the image of the great man driven by love of true glory and that of a vainglorious and therefore inglorious monarch. As these quotations also suggest, the issue was closely related to that of publicity: the sovereign could attain true glory by courting the right public by the right means—by honouring

¹ *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, ed. by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, 17 vols (Paris: Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1751-72), XVI, p. 86.

² *Encyclopédie*, VII, p. 716.

the opinion of ‘honnêtes gens’ and eschewing the false publicity of regal ‘représentation’.³

Ever since the eighteenth century, Catherine’s reputation has been caught in this trap to an exceptional extent. Frederick II’s letters to his brother Henry, for example, echo with the refrain that the primary motor of Catherine’s accomplishments is vanity and that one need only flatter her to get the better of her. Ignorant that Henry himself had requested the meeting, Frederick wrote to Henry on the occasion of Catherine’s invitation of the latter to St. Petersburg: ‘Vous concevez bien que c’est pour recueillir vos applaudissements et pour se montrer à vous dans toute sa gloire.’ He advised Henry ‘de la louer adroitement sur tout ce qui est possible, savoir ses grands desseins, ses sages mesures, ses succès dus à son vaste génie, la magnificence et la politesse de sa cour etc.’⁴ Two hundred years later, David Griffiths can still observe that Westerners read Catherine’s correspondence with Voltaire in terms of ‘ego satisfaction’.⁵ Griffiths helpfully restores to scholarly discussion the positive value that Catherine’s striving for glory held for many of her contemporaries; he argues that, in accordance with the eighteenth-century replacement of the Christian afterlife with posthumous fame, she needed the *philosophes* to write about her and thereby to pass on her image to posterity.

Here Griffith’s argument rejoins the well-established consensus that Catherine’s letters represented attempts to influence Western public opinion, present or future, via

³ Jaucourt and Voltaire are essentially asking for a restyling of glory: in Habermasian terms, the prospective great man should no longer aim to reproduce the now empty-seeming pomp of ‘representational culture’, but rather cater to the tastes of a reading, writing, and conversing public (T. C. W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660-1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 7-11).

⁴ 31 August 1770 (NS), *Politische Correspondenz Friedrichs des Großen*, ed. by Johann Gustav Droysen and others, 46 vols (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, Hobbing; Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1879-1939), xxx, p. 94 (No. 19245).

⁵ David Griffiths, ‘To Live Forever: Catherine II, Voltaire and the Pursuit of Immortality’ in *Russia and the World of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by R. P. Bartlett and others (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1988), pp. 446-68 (pp. 447-48).

her correspondents. To cite just a few examples, in the first half of the twentieth century, Otto Hoetzsch wrote of her letters to Grimm, Voltaire, and Diderot as ‘eine Art politischer Reklame für sich’ through which she hoped ‘die öffentliche Meinung Europas [zu] beeinflussen’; in the 1970s, Horst Röhling called her Western correspondents ‘Multiplikatoren’ [‘boosters’]; more recently, Alexandre Stroeve has pointed out some of the ways in which Catherine ensured publicity for the contents of her letters to Voltaire.⁶ Scholarship in the past few decades has called into question the fundamental assumptions on which these statements rest, especially the clear division between public and private that the Habermasian notion of the public sphere had rendered axiomatic in Enlightenment studies.⁷ Scholarship on letter writing in particular has shown that eighteenth-century letters tended to be neither public nor private, bearing out Clare Brant’s conclusion that the ‘varied and often unpredictable circulation of letters confounds the simple distinctions between public and private’. The term ‘private [...] is simply inaccurate for many eighteenth-century letters, which were composed in company, voluntarily circulated beyond the addressee and frequently found their way into print.’⁸ A new framework is necessary to understand Catherine’s letters as semi-private texts that circulated not in a Habermasian public sphere, but

⁶ Horst Röhling, ‘Katharina II. und J.G. Zimmermann: Bemerkungen zu ihrem Briefwechsel’, *Zeitschrift für slavische Philologie*, 40 (1978), 358-92 (pp. 358-59, where he also quotes Hoetzsch); Alexandre Stroeve, ‘L’impératrice et le patriarcat’, introduction to *Voltaire Catherine II: Correspondance 1763-1778*, ed. by Alexandre Stroeve (Paris: Non Lieu, 2006), pp. 7-29 (pp. 18-19).

⁷ See, for example, Lawrence E. Klein, ‘Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 29, 1 (Fall 1995), 97-109; Harold Mah, ‘Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 72, 1 (March 2000), 153-82; Sarah Maza, ‘Historians and eighteenth-century private life: an overview’, in *Representing Private Lives of the Enlightenment*, ed. by Andrew Kahn, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 2010:11 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010), pp. 21-33.

⁸ Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 5.

rather according to the codes and practices of more carefully defined and differentiated publics.

The work of the historian Antoine Lilti offers a useful framework for a reinterpretation of Catherine's Western correspondences in light of their circulation patterns and audiences. Lilti rejects Habermas's narrative that posits an idealised Enlightenment public sphere of print. Instead, he insists 'sur l'ambivalence constitutive de la publicité comme pratique'. Lilti distinguishes three kinds of notoriety that a public might bestow on an individual: reputation, celebrity, and glory. Individuals acquire reputations amongst their peers in a particular social group: reputations are contemporary and local, and they offer recognition for adherence to a set of shared values specific to the group in question. Celebrity, the eighteenth-century birth of which Lilti traces in his book, lies in curiosity about a given individual amongst a much broader public: it implies no approval or admiration; it feeds on an individual's singularity and particularity rather than on any sense of value, moral or otherwise; and it relies on media like print to allow people who have never met the individual in question nevertheless to feel intimately acquainted with him or her. Glory, by contrast, is almost exclusively posthumous: it is a community's unanimous admiration for an exemplary individual who embodies the community's values.⁹ One very exclusive group had the right to grant reputation in eighteenth-century French thinking: 'le monde', 'société', or high society. As Lilti points out in his earlier work on salons, this narrow community in which reputations were made and broken cannot be assimilated with the public sphere because it did not form 'une opinion éclairée, libérale, ou politiquement contestatrice', but rather designated 'un ensemble de pratiques sociales, liées à l'hospitalité mondaine,

⁹ Antoine Lilti, *Figures publiques: L'invention de la célébrité, 1750-1850* (Paris: Fayard, 2014), pp. 12-18.

structurées par des relations de protection et par la circulation des réputations.’

However, the Parisian *monde* fed into both print culture and court politics. One and the same elite passed judgments on individuals and texts, preparing their reception by the broader readership of print, and moved in influential circles at the French court as well.¹⁰ Letters formed ‘une part importante de la sociabilité mondaine et doivent donc être lues comme des actions d’écriture et comme des pratiques mondaines.’ Neither public nor intimate, ‘correspondances mondaines’ opened up ‘tout un espace de circulation différencié, où il est possible de négocier avec les usages et les règles.’ One had to know whom to trust and how to avoid unanticipated and unintended divulgations and publications. Such a mastery of worldly networks and their correspondence practices allowed one to manage one’s reputation and achieve one’s aims politically, socially, or otherwise.¹¹

Lilti’s categories of reputation, celebrity, and glory can help to excavate the multi-layered publics that Catherine sought to reach through her letters. She not only controlled every aspect of the epistolary production process and of the structure and tone of the letter: she also carefully monitored the transmission and circulation of her letters. As a general rule, she explicitly forbade publication. Her personal autograph letters were never directly addressed to the public sphere and were not to be printed until after her death. Rather, she exploited her chosen personal tone, her persona, and her understanding of epistolary circulation practices to cultivate a reputation for herself amongst the European elite. Focusing her attention on these circles had political advantages, and, at the same time, it freed Catherine to indulge more fully in the intellectual and literary games that characterised elite sociability. Yet befriending this

¹⁰ Antoine Lilti, *Le Monde des salons: Sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), pp. 404-405.

¹¹ Lilti, *Le Monde des salons*, pp. 287-95.

elite also allowed Catherine to manage indirectly her status as Europe-wide celebrity, to which she was not at all averse but which had to be handled delicately. She could not be seen to seek celebrity without damaging her reputation, and, moreover, the medium of the autograph letter in a sociable, gallant style was less effective in print. Finally, Catherine knew well that, in the discourse of her day, the opinion of *honnêtes gens* dovetailed nicely with that of posterity. The letters that were passed around in the salon would one day be printed and admired by posterity. According to the *philosophes*' dictates, letters that combined charming style and apparently careless play with grand ideas would not only gain applause from elite circles: posterity too would find in them an intimate yet glorious portrait of the letter writer.

The Injunction Against Publication

Within Russia, Catherine had absolute control over whether or not her letters were published: all printing presses belonged to official institutions until Catherine's decree allowing independent presses in 1783. Even afterward, state censorship and self-censorship by printers prevented any unwanted publications. Her truly personal autograph letters were never published in Russia; only some decrees (*ukazy*) in epistolary form were published, either in the newspapers or in frequently reprinted official collections of Catherine's *ukazy*.¹² It was only when writing abroad that Catherine needed to worry about uncontrolled publication of her letters. She accordingly almost always made non-publication of her letters an explicit term of her

¹² During her journey to the Crimea, the newspapers printed Catherine's official thank-you notes to local authorities for their welcome: for example, to the governor General of Polotsk and Mogilev, in *Moskovskie vedomosti*, supplement to No. 17 (27 February 1787), 168, and to the governor-general of Pskov and Smolensk under the heading 'Из Смоленска Января 20' ['From Smolensk, 20 January'] in *Moskovskie vedomosti*, 8 (27 January 1787), 67. *Ukazy vsepresvetleishei, derzhavneishei, velikoi gosudaryni imperatritsy, Ekateriny Alekseevny, samoderzhitsy vserossiiskoi, sostoyavshiesya s Genvarya po Iyul mesyats 1763 goda* (St. Petersburg: Senate Typography, 1764) is just one example of one of these collections of decrees.

epistolary pacts. Catherine's first ever letter to a *philosophe*, that of 13 November 1762 (OS) to convince Jean Le Rond d'Alembert to come to Russia as tutor to her son Paul, quickly ended up in print in the *Journal encyclopédique* and as a pamphlet.¹³

D'Alembert knew that publication without her permission was a fault of epistolary etiquette: he blamed the standard mechanisms of 'correspondances mondaines' for the leak, claiming that his 'friends' had pressed him for copies that then multiplied until one was printed. Nevertheless, the pressure that he simultaneously put on Catherine to allow the publication of her subsequent letter belies his excuse.¹⁴ Catherine remained firm in her refusal and later took pains to proscribe publication from the outset in all her subsequent interactions.

In the immediate aftermath of the d'Alembert publication, Catherine selected Madame Geoffrin as the ideal interlocutor in order to demonstrate that she preferred limited, oral, and perhaps manuscript circulation to publication. Her usual practice was to make initial contact with new correspondents indirectly, testing the waters and playing to the conventions of the salons, which demanded that new entrants be introduced by those already part of a given circle. She displayed additional caution at this initial stage since unwanted publicity might harm her image at home and open her up to mockery in the West. Accordingly, even when Madame Geoffrin took the first step in writing to Catherine, the latter refused initially to respond directly. Instead, she wrote a note to I. I. Betskoy, one of her close collaborators who was also a friend of both Geoffrin and of Catherine's late mother. Catherine stated that her silence resulted

¹³ *Journal encyclopédique*, 1, 3 (1 February 1763), 131-33; *Lettre de l'impératrice de Russie à M. d'Alembert* ([n.p.]: [n. pub.], [1763]).

¹⁴ D'Alembert to Catherine, 15 June 1764, 'Correspondance avec Catherine II', in *Œuvres et correspondances inédites de d'Alembert*, ed. by Charles Henry (Paris: Perrin, 1887), pp. 193-261 (p. 229): 'Quelques amis sensibles aux bontés de Votre Majesté Impériale à mon égard m'ont demandé des copies de cette lettre que je n'ai pu leur refuser et ces copies ont produit l'inconvénient que je n'avais pas prévu'. It is quite clear that in reality d'Alembert did all he could to spread public knowledge of the letter as a political victory for the *philosophes* as a group.

from her fear of appearing to seek publicity through her letters, yet the note was written for the circulation patterns typical of elite sociability. Although Catherine formulated her message as though she wished Betskoy to convey it orally ('Le cher général dira à Mad. Geoffrin que [...]'), Betskoy undoubtedly followed Catherine's wishes in passing the note to Geoffrin, who in turn kept it and labeled it as the first letter she had received from Catherine. Reassured by Geoffrin's reply, Catherine then wrote back directly with an additional 'éclaircissement' regarding her aversion to print: 'je craignai de Vous écrire une seconde fois, après l'avanture de la lettre imprimé, peur que Vous ne me croyés entiché de l'envie de briller par des lettres'.¹⁵ What Catherine meant was that her letters had to be controlled: she undoubtedly sought to obtain a favourable reputation amongst Geoffrin's friends and protégés. Yet blatant publicity would backfire, rendering her ridiculous and giving her a reputation only for vanity.

Both Geoffrin and Catherine understood that Catherine intended her letters for the limited circulation only, and these two letters also served to notify d'Alembert indirectly of Catherine's displeasure at the publication. In her immediate reply to the *philosophe*, she did not mention the publication and instead joked elegantly about the compliment paid to her by the Académie Française when they entered her letter in their manuscript registers.¹⁶ D'Alembert clearly got the message via Geoffrin, whose salon he frequented: he entered Catherine's second letter in the Académie registers 'come [sic] étant relative à la premiere', but kept it out of print.¹⁷ Over a year later, when it became clear that the two were striking up an epistolary exchange, Catherine explicitly

¹⁵ Two undated notes marked only '1763' by Geoffrin, *Sbornik imperatorskago russkago istoricheskago obshchestva* [henceforth *SIRIO*], 136 vols (St. Petersburg: Imp. Akademiya Nauk, 1874-1916), I, pp. 254-56.

¹⁶ *Les Registres de l'Académie française, 1672-1793*, 4 vols (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1895-1906), III (1895): 1751-1793, pp. 169-70; *Œuvres et correspondances inédites de d'Alembert*, pp. 215-16.

¹⁷ *Les Registres de l'Académie française*, III, pp. 179-80.

reminded d'Alembert that he should not print her letters: she concluded her letter of 12/23 April 1764, 'sauvez moi de l'imprimerie'.¹⁸ The warning was all the more important because she conceived the letter as a whole to reach other readers amongst the *philosophes*. A pronouncement like 'On devrait faire dans tout gouvernement éclairé, une loi qui défende aux citoyens de s'entrepersécuter de quelque façon que ce soit' was begging to be quoted, and, sure enough, d'Alembert quoted it in a letter to Voltaire on 9 July 1764 (NS).¹⁹ Oral circulation and sometimes manuscript circulation were thus permissible, even if publication was not.

Catherine similarly made her veto on publication an implicit condition of her correspondences with Voltaire and Friedrich Melchior Grimm. Again responding to d'Alembert's publication in her choice of circulation methods, Catherine added the condition of non-publication to the first of her letters to reach Voltaire, a copy of a *billet* to her secretary François-Pierre Pictet: 'Le Géant [...] surtout me sauvera le dégoût de relire cet admirable morceau à deux mois d'ici dans les Gazettes'.²⁰ In her first direct letter to the patriarch of Ferney, Catherine reiterated her fundamental rule of non-publication, even though she very much expected him to write in her favour for publication: 'Come ceci ne sera point admiré ni publié par conséquent [...]'.²¹ Her practice was constant throughout her reign: Catherine's addressees wrote official accounts of events for publication, while her letters cultivated the relationships that

¹⁸ *Œuvres et correspondances inédites de d'Alembert*, p. 225.

¹⁹ *Œuvres et correspondances inédites de d'Alembert*, p. 223; Voltaire, *Correspondence and related documents*, ed. by Theodore Besterman, 2nd edn, 51 vols (Geneva, Banbury, Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968-77), in *Electronic Enlightenment* <<http://www.e-enlightenment.com/index.html>>, D11979. D'Alembert told Voltaire that Catherine's letter 'devroit être imprimée et affichée dans la salle du conseil de tous les princes'.

²⁰ c. May 1763, D11210; Pictet's letter to Voltaire indicates that the note was Catherine's response to Voltaire's letter to d'Alembert about her letter of 13 November 1762 (OS) and that 'j'ai cru ne pouvoir mieux remplir ses intentions, qu'en vous envoyant la copie de ce qu'elle jetta sur le papié aussitôt après l'avoir lue, dont je garde soigneusement l'original' (29 April/10 May 1763, D11201).

²¹ Catherine to Voltaire, via François-Pierre Pictet, c. September 1763, D11421.

made such publications possible. Catherine expected Voltaire to publish in the *Journal encyclopédique* only Pictet's letter of 4/15 August 1762, in which Pictet recounted the approved story of Catherine's coup.²² Twenty-five years later, Catherine sent to Grimm, via the very same courier who bore her own private letters, two *lettres ostensibles* by the prince de Ligne, which were distributed and printed all over Europe to combat negative newspaper reports about the journey to the Crimea.²³ Her correspondents' writings had to bear the brunt of print controversies, not the empress's own letters. She could not be seen producing blatant propaganda: she had to be far more artful in her personal interventions in the making of her public persona.

In the case of Grimm, the initial epistolary pact was made orally, in the context of the elite sociability that defined Catherine's epistolary circulation practices. Grimm later noted in his 'Mémoire historique' on his relationship with Catherine that when he left St. Petersburg after his first visit in 1774, 'Sa Majesté m'ordonna de lui donner de mes nouvelles; me dit qu'elle serait exacte à répondre, et arrangea la manière dont je devais lui adresser et faire tenir mes lettres.'²⁴ There is no way to know whether Catherine uttered an explicit ban on publication. She may not have needed to, as their relations had already been established on terms of worldly sociability: Grimm's 'Mémoire' lavishes praise on Catherine's conversation, the art of the salon *par*

²² D10650; see also Georg Sacke, 'Entstehung des Briefwechsels zwischen der Kaiserin Katharina II. von Rußland und Voltaire', *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur*, 61, 5-6 (1938), 273-82. The authorship of this letter is disputed; even if Catherine did have a hand in writing it, it was nonetheless not to be presented publicly as her work.

²³ De Ligne to Grimm, 3 July 1787 (NS), Prince Charles-Joseph de Ligne, *Correspondances russes*, ed. by Alexandre Stroeve and Jerom Vercruysse, 2 vols (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), I, pp. 443-45, 448-53.

²⁴ Friedrich Melchior Grimm, 'Mémoire historique sur l'origine et les suites de mon attachement pour l'impératrice Catherine II jusqu'au décès de Sa Majesté Impériale, par Grimm, 1797', in *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique, par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister, Etc.*, ed. by Maurice Tourneux, 16 vols (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1877-1882; reprint Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1968), I, pp. 17-63 (p. 21).

excellence.²⁵ The early stages of the correspondence fully established the rule against publication. Grimm and Diderot both left St. Petersburg with copies of Diderot's detailed questionnaire about Russia, to which Catherine replied in her own hand. When Grimm passed through Prussia on his way home to France, Prince Henry of Prussia wrote to Catherine to request permission to make a copy, which she graciously granted.²⁶ By contrast, when Grimm wrote from Paris to ask if he could give a copy to the maréchal de Castries, Catherine used the standard language of salon circulation to refuse: 'mon mémoire passerait de main en main jusqu'aux imprimeurs; or, je crains l'impression comme le feu; ainsi, malgré ce que vous pourrez dire et mon ami le prince Henri encore, point de copie, s'il vous plaît, à âme qui vive'. She then ordered that Diderot place her replies 'dans notre bibliothèque commune en dépôt': they thereby remained in her possession even when in Paris.²⁷ Her words accurately represent her concern to maintain control of her texts at all times: allowing copies of her texts to circulate would have made it likely that one or another reader would seek to profit from her celebrity. This language also provides a convenient cover for more political concerns: Prussia was Russia's ally, but France was not. A high-ranking French military officer should not be in possession of the empress of Russia's own account of her nation's strengths and weaknesses. The limited circulation practices of elite sociability and the discourses surrounding them thus permitted Catherine to manage politically sensitive materials more elegantly and more exactly than in print.

²⁵ Grimm, 'Mémoire historique sur l'origine et les suites de mon attachement pour l'impératrice Catherine II', p. 20.

²⁶ Henry to Catherine, 29 June 1774 (NS); Catherine to Henry, 5 July 1774 (OS), *Briefwechsel zwischen Heinrich Prinz von Preußen und Katharina II. von Rußland*, ed. by R. Krauel (Berlin: Alexander Duncker, 1903), pp. 130-31.

²⁷ 27 February 1775 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, p. 18. The questions and answers were so well hidden that Catherine's answers were unknown until they were first published by Petr Bartenev, 'O sostoyanii Rossii pri Ekaterine velikoy: voprosy Diderota i otvety Ekateriny (1773)', *Russkii arkhiv*, 3 (1880), 1-29, and then by Maurice Tourneux, *Diderot et Catherine II* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1899), pp. 532-57.

She reconfirmed the epistolary non-publication pact after Grimm's second visit, this time in the comic mode of their running joke that likened letter writing and illness: 'Vous ne ferez point imprimer cette lettre par une raison de plus: c'est que c'est la production d'un malade qui griffonne pour s'amuser'.²⁸ Catherine's position was unequivocal: her letters were not written for immediate publication. Even copying was to be limited to prevent a repetition of d'Alembert's publication and his flimsy excuse. Each exception—and there were exceptions—required special pleading.

Catherine's correspondents took her injunction seriously, and no one viewed it as mere coquetry concealing a deeper desire for immediate publicity. D'Alembert, for instance, remembered the episode of 1763 when, several years later, he received a similarly flattering letter from Frederick II of Prussia. He entered it in the registers of the Académie Française and wrote to Voltaire the next day that he would give the letter 'toute la publicité qui dépendra de moi, à l'impression près que je vous prie surtout d'éviter'. He recalled Catherine's example as proof of how a monarch could be 'mécontent' with publication: 'Je me souviens que la Czarine me fit des reproches dans le temps d'avoir laissé imprimer [sic] la lettre qu'elle m'avoit adressée, et depuis ce temps j'ai fait vœu d'être extrêmement circonspect à cet égard.' Frederick's letter then circulated across Europe in manuscript, reaching, according to Theodore Besterman's annotations, the prince of Saxony via a literary correspondent in Paris, but it stayed out of print.²⁹ Catherine's correspondents understood that while they could use many intermediate forms of publicity between complete secrecy and print, the line of print was a significant barrier.

²⁸ 22 December 1777 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 74.

²⁹ 12 August 1770 (NS), D16578.

When Catherine's addressees defied the ban, they adopted various defensive tactics, resorting to literary mystifications or feigned manuscript copies. A case in point is Jean-François Marmontel's printing of Catherine's letter of support of 7 May 1767 (OS) alongside similar missives from Stanislas II August of Poland, Louisa Ulrike and Gustav III of Sweden, and others, as part of Marmontel's self-defence during the *Bélisaire* affair.³⁰ He forestalled any incriminations from his royal correspondents by printing an announcement in the *Petites Affiches* that he had lost his briefcase, before later declaring that the portfolio had been returned anonymously. As the *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la République des Lettres* of 12 December 1767 (NS) explained in a report on the subject, Marmontel 'met par-là sa modestie à couvert & se disculpe de tout reproche.'³¹ The ruse protected Marmontel in two senses: his readers could not accuse him of boasting about receiving letters from so many crowned heads, while the royal writers could not accuse him of indiscretion. Yet the tone of the *Mémoires secrets* report implies that no one was fooled: 'Avant la publicité de ce manuscrit,' they explain, 'M. de Marmontel a fait mettre prudemment dans les *petites Affiches* qu'il avoit perdu son porte-feuille'. Marmontel may have had even more devious motives: the announcement also advertised the publication in advance and prepared the public for the revelation of something that should have been kept hidden. This is an instance of the essential ambivalence of publicity at this time: the very transgression of the norms of semi-privacy added zest to the letters' revelation. While not writing specifically for print, the royal writers themselves undoubtedly knew that

³⁰ The *Lettres écrites à M. Marmontel au sujet de Bélisaire*, containing Catherine's letter, were first published in Paris in 1767; they then appeared in volume 2 of Voltaire's *Les Choses utiles et agréables* (1770). On the *Bélisaire* affair in general, see John Renwick, *Marmontel, Voltaire, and the Bélisaire Affair*, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 121 (Banbury: Voltaire Foundation, 1974).

³¹ *Mémoires secrets, pour servir à l'histoire de la République des Lettres en France, depuis MDCCLXII jusqu'à nos jours*, vol. 3 (London: John Adamson, 1777), p. 295.

their letters might be publicised to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the tactical exigencies of the evolving situation. The underlying standard of non-publication thus became part of the literary game that brought certain kinds of letters into the print sphere and fueled the celebrity of both writer and addressee.

Voltaire got away with far more publications of Catherine's letters than any other of her correspondents. His publications imitated salon conversation and manuscript circulation practices, allowing Voltaire slyly to feign obedience to Catherine's injunction that her texts remain within elite circles. At the same time, the publications gained the allure of exclusivity in the eyes of a broader readership. For example, Voltaire repeatedly extracted (and sometimes rewrote) short slogans from Catherine's letters, which he then circulated in his own letters before putting them into print. His treatment of her letters thus mimicked the circulation of *bons mots* in conversation and correspondence. Amongst *mondains*, the originator of a witty repartee stood to gain in reputation as his or her *bon mot* circulated by word of mouth, then in letters, and eventually in manuscript periodicals or print. The spreader of the witticism also acquired prestige because those who recognised and celebrated wit could thereby show off their own affiliation with the best society.³² Just as these circulating *bons mots* reinforced the group spirit of the *mondains*, Catherine's one-liners helped Voltaire in his quest to bind together his followers as appreciators of Catherine's merits.³³ The movement of the slogan 'Malheurs [sic] aux persécuteurs', which Catherine wrote to Voltaire on 9 January 1767 (OS), exemplifies this process. Voltaire immediately made

³² Lilti, *Le Monde des salons*, pp. 275-77.

³³ Christiane Mervaud has shown how Catherine's image became an 'emblème' to acquire honour for the philosophic group and to represent religious toleration. She adds: 'Catherine-Sémiramis sonne comme un slogan, ce tic de langage prétend être un signe de ralliement' ('Portraits de Catherine II dans la Correspondance de Voltaire', *Catherine II & l'Europe*, ed. by Anita Davidenkoff (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1997), pp. 163-70 (p. 169)).

it a catch-phrase, quoting it with more or less of its original context (which he sometimes edited or rewrote) in letters to Damilaville, to the lawyers Charles Frédéric Gabriel Christin and Élie de Beaumont, and twice to Marmontel.³⁴ The phrase then entered print in the concluding paragraph of the *Anecdote sur Bélisaire* (1767) as a motto for the cause of religious toleration: ‘L’auguste impératrice de Russie vient d’établir la tolérance dans deux mille lieues de pays. Elle a écrit de sa propre main, *malheur aux persécuteurs*.’ The final two lines of the *Anecdote* return to the question of publicity and the appropriate readership for Catherine’s letters. Voltaire specifies that the empress ‘permet qu’on lise les lettres qu’elle a écrites sur ce sujet important’: only the overwhelming importance of the cause could justify the indiscretion of publication. The last line of the *Anecdote* clarifies that only the man of letters truly understands how to read them: ‘Comme les choses changent selon le temps! dit le magistrat: Conformons-nous au temps, dit l’homme de lettres.’³⁵ When a letter or even a tiny extract appears in print, only the narrow public of ‘hommes de lettres’ can learn the proper lesson from Catherine’s letters and encourage the best tendencies of the times. Voltaire’s technique of quoting one-liners from Catherine’s letters, then, still assumed the narrow circulation practices of an elite readership. Yet these same conversation-like techniques also allowed fragments of Catherine’s letters to enter Voltaire’s polemics as slogans almost as powerful as ‘Ecrasez l’infâme’.

The circulation of manuscripts characterised elite circles almost as much as conversation did, and Voltaire mimicked the modes of manuscript circulation and the slipperiness of publicity in the eighteenth century to transfer Catherine’s letters into

³⁴ D13997, D14006, D.app.291, D13999, D14047.

³⁵ Voltaire, ‘Anecdote sur Bélisaire’, ed. by John Renwick, *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. by Theodore Besterman and others (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968-), LXIIIa: 1767 (1990), pp. 153-88 (p. 188).

print. He exceptionally published the full text of one of her letters amongst the ‘pièces curieuses détachées’ that followed the first authorised edition of *Les Lois de Minos*.³⁶ As Nicholas Cronk has observed, ‘Cet assemblage d’une pluralité d’auteurs, et la présence aussi d’un manuscrit clandestin (*Le Philosophe*), confèrent à l’ensemble l’allure d’un recueil de manuscrits plutôt que d’un véritable volume de mélanges où tout serait signé de la même main.’³⁷ The presentation of Catherine’s letter of 9 July 1766 (OS) in the collection corroborates the impression of a group of manuscripts rather than a publication for a broad audience: it is entitled ‘Lettre de l’impératrice de Russie, Catherine II. Dont elle a permis la publicité & dont nous avons recouvré une Copie fidèle.’ This title suggests that the empress had permitted manuscript ‘publicité’, resulting in the proliferation of copies. Moreover, in attributing the decision to print the letter to the editorial ‘nous’, Voltaire dodged responsibility for the printing. Catherine had not given permission for this letter to be printed: she had explicitly allowed publication only of the memorandum about the archbishop of Rostov that she had included in her letter of 28 November/9 December 1765.³⁸ When Voltaire proceeded to publish segments of her actual letters in the *Lettre sur les panégyriques*, she scolded him for quoting those ‘lambeaux de lettres’.³⁹ Yet Voltaire’s title for the published letter in *Les Lois de Minos* reflects the reality, since copies of several of Catherine’s

³⁶ Catherine to Voltaire, 9 July 1766 (OS), D13433, in Voltaire, *Les Lois de Minos, tragédie. Avec les notes de Mr. de Morza, et plusieurs pièces curieuses détachées* ([Geneva]: [Cramer], 1773), pp. 290-93.

³⁷ Nicholas Cronk, ‘Auteur et autorité dans les mélanges: l’exemple des *Lois de Minos, tragédie avec les notes de M. de Morza et plusieurs pièces curieuses détachées* (1773)’, *Revue Voltaire*, 6 (2006), 53-70 (p. 63).

³⁸ D13032 included the memorandum. Catherine’s permission appears in the letter printed with *Les Lois de Minos* (9 July 1766, D13433, ‘La mésaventure de l’Evêque de Rostof a été traité publiquement, et Vous en puvés communiquer Monsieur le mémoire à Votre gré’) and again on 9/20 January 1767 (D13868, ‘Je me souvient de Vous avoir écrit dans ma précédente ce que je pensai de la publication des pièces qui concerne l’Archevêque de Novogorod’). In the latter letter, she slightly misunderstood Voltaire’s vague request of 22 December 1766 (NS), which left room for the inclusion of not just the ‘mémoire’ but also her letters: ‘permettez moi de publier ce que vous avez daigné m’écrire au sujet de L’archevêque de Novogorod, et sur la Tolérance’ (D13756).

³⁹ D14219, 29 May/9 June 1767.

letters, including that of 9 July 1766 (OS), were obviously in circulation. Such copies can still be found among the papers of two salon hostesses, Madame Du Deffand and Julie de Lespinasse.⁴⁰ Voltaire's publication thus posed as a continuation of the real manuscript circulation practices in which Catherine implicitly sought to participate.

The transition to print was not always made with so few repercussions. Catherine consistently provided Voltaire with materials that could be used in his published writings, even if her texts were to remain in the semi-private sphere: the door to publicity was already ajar. Other letters, though, were written exclusively for limited sociable circulation, and they could be serious political liabilities if they escaped into print. A prime example can be found in the letter to the prince de Ligne of 6/17 November 1790, which appeared in French and German newspapers in the tense political atmosphere of Revolutionary Europe.⁴¹ The letter could not fail to succeed in Europe's elite circles: in it Catherine strung together one witticism after another in a motley portrait of the world's topsy-turvy political situation. It offered the mix of variety, entertainment, and power characteristic of salon conversation amongst literary and political elites. De Ligne's apology made it clear that he did not expect Catherine to object to the letter being read aloud: 'c'est à mon grand étonnement que deux ou trois mémoires trop excellentes ont retenu ce que je donne ma parole de n'avoir jamais été copié.'⁴² In print, though, it could discredit Catherine and provide a pretext for her numerous enemies to accuse her of insulting them. A royalist newspaper soon published a disavowal assuring the world that Catherine could not have written the letter

⁴⁰ D12631, D13433, D16286, D16426, D17833. Of these, only D12631 seems to have been copied for Du Deffand but not Lespinasse. The copies were clearly made in Voltaire's lifetime, since Lespinasse died in 1776, two years before he did.

⁴¹ *Correspondances russes*, I, pp. 183-84.

⁴² De Ligne to Catherine, 25 May 1791 (NS), *Correspondances russes*, I, p. 191.

because she was still in her right mind.⁴³ What was wit in elite conversation was madness in print. Catherine had good reason to monitor closely the circulation of her letters and always to write with the intended public(s) in mind.

Building Reputation through Networks of Epistolary Sociability

The eighteenth-century *monde* was both a social space inhabited by aristocrats, *nouveaux riches*, and intellectuals, and a set of practices of sociability. As a space, it was centred in Paris, particularly in the early years of Catherine's reign. Unlike Joseph II of Austria, Gustav III of Sweden, and Stanislas II August of Poland, Catherine could not travel to Paris before assuming power and cultivate connections in these spaces in person. Correspondence was therefore the only practice of sociability that could join her directly with this milieu. Elites from Paris to St. Petersburg were linked by shared habits like witty conversation, card-playing, and literary entertainments including letter writing. The aristocratic foundations of this society also shaped it as a sphere where individuals distinguished themselves as a group from outsiders and competed amongst themselves for reputation.⁴⁴ Catherine used the practice of sociability to situate herself and her court on the map of the European elite. Her letter writing in the 1760s and 1770s aimed not so much to put on a façade for the *philosophes*, as has been argued in the past; rather, Catherine sought to enter herself into the competition for reputation in *le monde*. When the members of her network in France passed away in the late 1770s and early 1780s, Catherine formed her own St. Petersburg-centred network on a much smaller scale, which nonetheless perpetuated the same set of practices. Her letters

⁴³ 'Sa majesté Czarienne se porte à merveille, sa tête est bonne, son courage toujours magnanime, son esprit juste, et sa raison n'est point encore perdue pour s'amuser à des inepties [...]', *Gazette des cours de l'Europe. Le royaliste, ami de l'humanité*, 47 (10 February 1791), p. 186.

⁴⁴ Lilti, *Le Monde des salons*, pp. 159-63.

throughout her career exhibit the epistolary sociability that assisted in her momentary tactical pursuits and furthered her overall desire to build a reputation and thus to situate herself and Russia within the pan-European elite.

Catherine and her Parisian correspondents shared a discourse that characterised them as part of a group of *gens de mérite*, *gens de bien*, or *honnêtes gens* who could be recognised as possessing reputation and judging reputations across Europe. This discourse derived from the seventeenth-century aristocratic practices described by Norbert Elias. By the eighteenth century, though, court etiquette had grown stale: more informal practices of sociability replaced etiquette as the true market for reputation.⁴⁵ The fiction of equality within *le monde* had an element of truth in it: both Catherine and her correspondents found satisfaction in granting and receiving recognition of their Europe-wide reputations. Catherine's authority validated the French cultural elite's sense of the breadth of their influence: she told Madame Geoffrin, 'Mon Dieu Madame puissai je meriter, que des gens de bien et de merite, souhaitassent ou enviassent ce titre [of Catherine's friendship]; mes desirs n'irai pas plus loin', and Voltaire, 'Par tout autre que Vous et Vos dignes Amis dont Vous me parlés, je ne voudrais point être mise au rang de ceux que le genre humain a adorée pendant si longtemps.'⁴⁶ Diderot described his trip to Russia as a sort of embassy on behalf of France's *honnêtes gens*: 'On m'a traité comme le représentant des honnêtes gens et des habiles gens de mon pays. C'est sous ce titre que je me regarde, lorsque je compare les marques de distinction dont on

⁴⁵ Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon, 1983), p. 101. The most prominent example of an eighteenth-century court figure seeking instead the pleasures of aristocratic sociability is Marie-Antoinette (Lilti, *Figures publiques*, pp. 229-30).

⁴⁶ Catherine to Geoffrin, 20 February 1765, *SIRIO*, I, pp. 265-66; Catherine to Voltaire, 9 January 1767 (OS), D13868.

m'a comblé, avec ce que j'étais en droit d'en attendre pour mon compte.'⁴⁷ In return, Catherine received recognition of the extent of her reputation far beyond her own court. Diderot aptly described the approval of his circle of cultural elites as an alternative court. Apostrophising Catherine in a letter to I. I. Betskoy also intended for the empress's eyes, Diderot wrote that in Paris she had 'une cour et vos courtisans', whose 'caractère principal est de ne l'être que des héros et de vous.' These judges of greatness formed the very circle of friends which Catherine sought to join by letter: Diderot went on to add that 'Ce sont tous nos habiles gens; ce sont tous nos honnêtes gens; ce sont tous mes amis.'⁴⁸ The usual royal techniques for obtaining status, like court etiquette and ceremonial representation, could not reach quite as far as Paris. Catherine's main tool for extending her reputation was therefore her letters.

Accordingly, Catherine called as much attention as possible to her embeddedness in the crisscrossing networks of writers and political elites and to the continuities between practices of sociability in Paris and St. Petersburg. She enumerated her correspondents in her letters, emphasising the overlap between her network and theirs. Writing to Voltaire, for instance, she jokingly insisted that she preferred to remain on earth rather than in heaven because 'j'y serai mieux à porté de recevoir Vos lettres, celles de Vos Amis les d'Alembert, les Diderot'.⁴⁹ The role of Voltaire's own correspondences can be usefully compared with Catherine's: the intensive epistolary activity from Ferney maintained his presence in the elite circles of the capital as much as if not more than his published works. The geography of the European elite was very much at stake. Catherine listed off her correspondents to

⁴⁷ Diderot to the Vollands, Late April/Early May 1774, Denis Diderot, *Correspondance*, ed. by Georges Roth and Jean Varloot, 16 vols (Paris: Minuit, 1955-1970), XIV, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁸ Diderot, *Correspondance*, VI, p. 356.

⁴⁹ 9 January 1767 (OS), D13868.

Madame Geoffrin in order to advertise her success in attracting an illustrious member of the Parisian cultural scene to St. Petersburg: 'M. Voltaire m'écrit quelquefois M-r Diderot se sert du Truchemens Betzki pour repandre la sensibilité de son coeur a quelque centaine de lieue de son habitation, il nous recommande ses Amis [...] s'est Falconet'.⁵⁰ Catherine's point was simple: she and Geoffrin shared the same practices of sociability that distinguished merit wherever it could be found, from Paris to St. Petersburg. Only a few months later, Falconet was in St. Petersburg reading the letters that Catherine had received from d'Alembert and Voltaire: her very first letter to Falconet used those letters to instruct the sculptor on how to correspond with an empress. He was not to use lots of epithets of praise: 'Vous en avez vu de pareilles dans les lettres de M-r d'Alembert,' she concluded, 'renvoyez-moi quand vous n'en aurez plus que faire les lettres de M-r de Voltaire.'⁵¹ The sharing of letters did not establish intimacy between the sculptor and the empress: it set the tone of their relationship as 'worldly'. Falconet may have thought he was coming to a barbarous backwater: instead, Catherine's correspondences allowed her to greet him with precisely the forms of epistolary sociability that he thought he had left behind.

Epistolary sociability was also essential for courting people who were not (yet) Catherine's correspondents in Paris. Some of her targets were cultural figures: since Friedrich Melchior Grimm had the ear of many crowned heads in Europe, Catherine had good cause to cultivate him at a distance until she had a chance to become better acquainted. The empress could rely on Geoffrin not to conceal her praise for the author of the *Correspondance littéraire* and of a 'lettre charmante sur l'Histoire de Diderot'.⁵² The blend of cultural and political elites in spaces like Geoffrin's salon allowed

⁵⁰ 21 October 1766, *SIRIO*, I, p. 289.

⁵¹ 18 February 1767 (OS), *SIRIO*, XVII, p. 3.

⁵² 17 May 1765, *SIRIO*, I, p. 271.

Catherine to exploit practices like reading letters aloud to reach diplomats as well as writers. Catherine had known Louis Auguste Le Tonnelier de Breteuil when he was ambassador to Russia from the last few years of Elizabeth's reign into the first days of Catherine's. Since the conventions of court life and of elite sociability both demanded that the potential hostilities of diplomatic commerce be smoothed over with polite conversation and shared entertainments, Catherine could try via sociable correspondence to sweeten Breteuil before his impending mission to Sweden, where the French and the Russians were engaged in a long-standing struggle for political domination.⁵³ Writing as though she were merely perpetuating sociability by letter, Catherine instructed Geoffrin: 'Si M-r de Breteuil se trouve chés Vous quand Vous recevrés ceci, je Vous prie Madame de lui faire bien mes compliments', before alluding to Breteuil's refusal to dance at court entertainments in Russia.⁵⁴ Naturally, Catherine meant for this section of the letter to be read to Breteuil: the hypothetical 'Si M-r de Breteuil se trouve chés Vous' simply used a common fictional situation to veil the desire for limited publicity. Catherine could also use the regular sharing of letters to send less amiable messages: she did not object to Geoffrin sharing her very negative comments about the former French ambassador, the marquis de l'Hôpital. She expressed only bemusement that such criticism could win her the favour of the marquis's own in-laws: 'Je ne me doutois pas que j'obligerai la famille de Madame de l'Hopital, en disant du mal de leur gendre; voilà de ses effets qu'on ne prévois pas.'⁵⁵ In fact, this little incident was a triumph of Catherine's reputation over de l'Hôpital's: even his in-laws recognised her merits over his. As these examples illustrate, epistolary

⁵³ 4 October 1764, *SIRIO*, I, p. 259.

⁵⁴ 1763, *SIRIO*, I, pp. 256-57.

⁵⁵ 4 April 1766, *SIRIO*, I, p. 286. Catherine also passed judgment on M. de Conflans, 16 October 1765, *SIRIO*, I, p. 278.

sociability suited Catherine's dual purposes in her correspondence: she pursued minor strategic ends even as she built a reputation for herself amongst the readers and listeners who counted.

It was both a political aim and a matter of Catherine's own prestige that she join Russian and French elites into one network of which she would be the central hub: this would convince the French court that Russia was a civilised force to be reckoned with and would help Catherine to cultivate her own elite. Catherine's allusions to the Russian elite and her own epistolary habits called attention to their shared practices of sociability. She thanked Madame Geoffrin for welcoming visiting Russian nobles into her salon: 'Je reconnois bien ma bonne Amie parceque Vous me dites du plaisir que Vous recentés, lorsque Vous voyés quelqu'un d'ici, je ne puis assés Vous remercier Madame de l'accueil que Vous leurs faites'. Catherine learned of this welcome through typical circulation patterns: Geoffrin had given a 'charmant petit billet' to a visiting Russian, Ya. A. Bruce, to be handed on to Catherine via another mutual friend, I. I. Betskoy.⁵⁶ Each individual involved in the exchange confirmed thereby their participation in a social sphere that posed as a mere circle of friends but which in reality made reputations for all involved. When Catherine thus portrayed her own reception of others' letters, she often displayed the parallels between her own epistolary habits and theirs. Just as Catherine expected Geoffrin to read her letters aloud to chosen friends in Paris, Catherine portrayed herself reading Geoffrin's letters to her favourites: she quoted Grigory Orlov's oral response to one of them, for example, using the familiar literary trope of pretending that Orlov just happened to be in her room when Geoffrin's letter arrived.⁵⁷ Just as Geoffrin replied to Catherine's letters to Betskoy, Catherine

⁵⁶ 20 February 1765, *SIRIO*, I, pp. 265-66.

⁵⁷ 6 April 1766, *SIRIO*, I, p. 288.

replied to Geoffrin's letters to the same, claiming to divide the work of a reply between herself and her courtier: 'ceci remplira ce que la paresse ou les occupations du General l'empêchera de Vous dire, je ne me gênerai donc point en répondant, point par point à la belle et longue lettre que Vous lui écrivîtes'.⁵⁸ Catherine's practices, both in reality and as depicted in the letters themselves, give the impression of open correspondences weaving together a small circle of initiates across Europe.

Catherine therefore carefully chose the intermediaries for her correspondence. In addition to his official roles as head of the Academy of Arts and as Catherine's primary advisor in matters of education, I. I. Betskoy knew Geoffrin and her circle personally from his time in Paris. He was accordingly the ideal go-between for interactions with Geoffrin, Diderot, and Falconet. Sociable ties allowed Catherine to adopt the Sévigné-esque habit of using code-names for mutual friends when writing to Geoffrin: he became the 'cher Général' or, antiphrastically, 'ce méchant Général', or, in a version presumably picked up from Geoffrin, '*le vilain General*'.⁵⁹ Betskoy continued to convey letters between Catherine and Falconet even after the artist arrived in St. Petersburg. The concordant assumption that Betskoy should therefore behave in accordance with the rules of sociability and good taste helps to explain Falconet's extreme sense of betrayal when he later perceived Betskoy's behaviour as insufficiently cultivated, excessively bureaucratic, and too concerned with defending Russian national pride.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ 16 October 1765, *SIRIO*, I, p. 277.

⁵⁹ *SIRIO*, I, pp. 254, 256, 261. Sévigné refers to her son-in-law's brother as 'Seigneur Corbeau' and one of her personal enemies, Madame de Marans, as 'Merlusine', for example.

⁶⁰ Catherine mentioned to Falconet on 16 May 1768 (OS), 'M-r Betzki m'a rendu votre lettre'; in that very letter, Falconet protested Betskoy's demand that he write a commentary on a Spanish statue of Philip II, reflecting Betskoy's overall disapproval of Falconet's artistic project (*SIRIO*, XVII, pp. 34-35).

Similarly, the intermediaries for Catherine's correspondence with Voltaire were numerous and important in building Franco-Russian sociable ties: they included the diplomat D. A. Golitsyn and other Russians who had visited him at Ferney like I. I. and A. P. Shuvalov. Prince F. A. Kozlovsky brought many gifts and a substantial letter from the empress to Ferney, as well as a short note of recommendation for the bearer from the empress.⁶¹ In this Catherine followed both diplomatic and sociable practice: monarchs wrote recommendation letters for illustrious courtiers sent as official envoys to other courts, just as visitors to Paris required recommendation letters for access to the salons. Memorable intermediaries generated additional ties of affection between correspondents: Voltaire responded with sympathy to Kozlovsky's death; Zimmermann a few times noted the name of the courier on the envelopes he preserved; and Grimm turned the couriers into veritable characters in his correspondence with Catherine.

The friendship that sprang up between Diderot and D. A. Golitsyn and the cordial relations between Voltaire, Diderot, and Princess Dashkova can also to a large degree be credited to Catherine. When in St. Petersburg, Diderot employed the usual *mondain* trope of proving appurtenance to the same circles by relaying flattering conversations, with the added benefit that these conversations doubled as paying court to the monarch: 'Votre nom s'est présenté souvent dans notre conversation', he wrote to Dashkova on 24 December 1773, 'et, si c'étoit pour moi un plaisir de le prononcer, je dois dire aussi franchement qu'il a toujours été entendu avec satisfaction.' He went on to compare his conversations with Catherine to the practices of sociability that had brought him together with Dashkova in Paris: 'Vous n'avez pas oublié sans doute avec quelle liberté vous me permettiez de vous parler dans la rue de Grenelle. Eh bien, je

⁶¹ Catherine to Voltaire, 19/30 December 1768, D15398; Catherine informed Voltaire of Kozlovsky's death in a naval battle in a postscript on 16/27 September 1770, D16670; and Voltaire expressed his deep regret on 25 October 1770 (NS), D16726.

jouis de la même liberté dans le palais de Sa Majesté Impériale.’⁶² Despite her rocky relations with Dashkova, the Shuvalovs, and others, Catherine nonetheless succeeded in establishing a network that involved her nobility and her foreign correspondents in a single set of sociable and epistolary practices: she thus brought the Enlightenment into Russia and Russia into the Enlightenment in a very concrete way.

Such an integration of elites was all the more attainable because there already existed in Russia a culture of passing around, copying, and discussing letters in this fashion. For example, copies of Catherine’s letter to A. P. Sumarokov of 15 February 1770 (OS) circulated widely in manuscript: the letter can be found in Russian eighteenth-century manuscript collections, and it even made its way to Paris, whence it was passed on to the crowned heads of Europe in the *Correspondance littéraire* of 15 December 1770 (NS).⁶³ Moreover, readers in Moscow understood the letter as part of a competition for reputation and recognition of merit. In his epigram on the subject, G. R. Derzhavin explained the letter as a put-down of Sumarokov and a recognition of the merits of P. S. Saltykov, who was Sumarokov’s opponent in the theatrical spat that gave rise to the letter: ‘Но мужество Орла [Салтыкова] Диана [Екатерина] почитает, / И весь пернатый свет его заслуги знает.’⁶⁴ In the Russian context, Catherine herself could not compete for reputation: she was rather the arbiter of her subjects’ reputations. Nonetheless, the circulation of her letter illustrates the degree to which Russian elite networks blended with those in the West. From this evidence of trans-European

⁶² Diderot, *Correspondance*, XIII, pp. 135-36.

⁶³ *Pisma russkikh pisatelei XVIII veka*, ed. by G. P. Makogonenko (Leningrad: Nauka, 1980), p. 212; *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*, IX, pp. 186-88. On the episode in Sumarokov’s life that gave rise to this letter, see Marcus Levitt, ‘The Illegal Staging of Sumarokov’s *Sinav and Truvor* in 1770 and the Problem of Authorial Status in Eighteenth-Century Russia’, in *Early Modern Russian Letters: Texts and Contexts*, Studies in Russian and Slavic Literatures, Cultures and History (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2009), pp. 190-217.

⁶⁴ G. R. Derzhavin, ‘Na Soroku v zashchishchenie Kukushek’, in *Sochineniya Derzhavina s obyasnitelnymi primechaniyami Ya. Grot*, ed. by Ya. K. Grot, 9 vols (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskaya Akademiya Nauk, 1864-83), III (1864), pp. 249-50 (p. 250).

epistolary circulation, it is reasonable to deduce that Russian aristocrats in Europe could not only share Catherine's letters that they had seen in Russia, like that to Sumarokov, but also that they would have encountered some of their empress's letters circulating in Geoffrin's salon or amongst Voltaire's friends. Russian readers thus participated in the circulation of letters that generated Catherine's reputation amongst the European elite.

The end of Catherine's France-centred sociable correspondences should not be attributed entirely to supposed mutual disaffection between Catherine and the *philosophes*. Rather, many members of her network were simply passing away. Letters circulating in the Parisian *monde* upon Diderot's return from Russia show a great deal of enthusiasm about her personally. Even as he gave a very honestly negative assessment of Russia as a nation, Diderot did his best to continue building Catherine's reputation and achieved some success. For example, a letter from Julie de Lespinasse to her beloved comte de Guibert continued by epistolary means the spread of Catherine's *bons mots*, one of the essential building-blocks of reputation: 'A propos d'esprit, je veux vous dire un mot de la Czarine à Diderot. [...] cela est doux, cela est poli'.⁶⁵ Although Catherine had stopped corresponding with Geoffrin in 1766 when the latter pointedly avoided St. Petersburg on her trip to Poland, they remained on good enough terms for Catherine to send her a gift of furs in 1770.⁶⁶ D'Alembert was disillusioned by Catherine's refusal to free French prisoners taken in Poland, yet she could hardly have been expected to sacrifice Russia's political interests to those of the *philosophes*. These were not sufficient causes for her interactions with French elites to end. Rather, the society that Catherine knew was literally dying out: Geoffrin died in 1777; Voltaire

⁶⁵ Lespinasse to Guibert, 30 October 1774 (NS), Diderot, *Correspondance*, XIV, p. 105.

⁶⁶ The gift was noted in the correspondence sent by Gottlieb Schütze to Christian VII of Denmark on 7 June 1770 (NS) (François Moureau, *Répertoire des nouvelles à la main: Dictionnaire de la presse manuscrite clandestine XVIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Voltaire Foundation: Oxford, 1999), p. 333).

died in 1778; Diderot was ageing, ailing, and in general sending far fewer letters during the period from 1774 until his death in 1784; and d'Alembert too died in 1783.

Catherine's network of the 1760s and early 1770s no longer existed, and so it could no longer constitute the intellectual and social heart of Europe in general and of Catherine's correspondences more specifically.

Catherine instead began to write as though her court, or more specifically her Hermitage, were a centre of European sociability. Her letters to Grimm and de Ligne differ significantly from her earlier correspondences because they were founded on initial, face-to-face contact, whereas the earlier exchanges began by letter. Rather than seeking to display the breadth of her acquaintance in a foreign city, Catherine could keep her correspondents up-to-date on the changing personnel and the new and often literary entertainments at the Hermitage. Catherine sent to Grimm copies of the society literature produced on her journey to Moscow in 1785, for example, and she demanded from him a contribution to her collection of proverbs plays and comedies written by her courtiers and printed in the *Recueil des pièces de l'Hermitage*.⁶⁷ She encouraged her favourites, especially Aleksandr Lanskoy, to enter into epistolary commerce with Grimm: this contact allowed Lanskoy to become a patron of the arts in his own right and made him a participant in European epistolary sociability. When Catherine wrote five letters to Grimm as Lanskoy's mischievous secretary, her interposition enlivened the otherwise rather formal correspondence between the two men.⁶⁸ She also indulged thereby in a bit more of the stylistic variety and verve that characterised her own sociable style. She had already used this technique previously in a letter to de Ligne,

⁶⁷ June 1785 and 13 January 1789 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, pp. 347-57, 468.

⁶⁸ 5 January, 1 March, 10 May, 20 May, and 28 May 1784 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, pp. 294-97 309-310, 314-15; compare with a far more mundane letter in Lanskoy's own hand, 31 May 1784 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, pp. 315-16.

which she wrote in the name of her courtier Lev Naryshkin, who typically played the fool in her inner circle and was the target of many of her jokes. The letter was a virtuoso demonstration and parody of the place of letters in eighteenth-century sociability: almost the entire first half of the letter contained nothing but an account of the reception of de Ligne's letter, Naryshkin's sharing of the letter with his circle, and the collective decision that the empress herself should act as secretary. Whereas a more serious society letter might contain the latest impromptu by a literary-minded denizen of a salon, Catherine's included a terrible mockery of verses. The final lines added the genuine regards passed on from de Ligne's various acquaintances at court: they were humorous because they were delivered in a voice other than the expected one.⁶⁹

Coming early in the de Ligne exchange, this letter in a certain sense declared Catherine's mastery of epistolary sociability: her court so well exemplified European sociability that the empress herself could demonstrate and parody it at once. Catherine predicated her letters of the 1780s on the confident assumption that her reputation was so well established that she could replace her deceased network in France with her own equally witty circle in St. Petersburg.

Managing Celebrity through Epistolary Circulation

Catherine was a celebrity from the moment she took power: her dramatic usurpation of a throne to which she had no legitimate claim and her obvious ambitions were enough to attract constant and intense public attention. Immediately following her coup d'état and continuing to the present day, images of the empress proliferated in a wide variety of print media, including journalism, fiction, and engravings. These

⁶⁹ Early March 1781, *Correspondances russes*, I, pp. 125-27.

images were often generated by fantasy as much as reality and delighted in lascivious representations of a female ruler.⁷⁰ For her part, Catherine worked in a variety of media to counterbalance undesirable depictions with images of her own. Many official media promoted her initiatives to make a name for herself as a reforming and powerful ruler: ceremonial and pageantry, official publications like manifestos, official portraits, medallions, coins, and engravings all created an image of the empress without the direct intervention of her pen. She skilfully exercised her pen in print: the quadrilingual edition of the *Nakaz* and the anonymous *Antidote* testify in two very different genres to her ambition and strategies in this regard. Presented in Russian, French, Latin, and German, the multilingual *Nakaz* displayed the empress's text as a fitting addition to professional and scholarly legal discourses carried on in the three Western European languages. By contrast, her overtly and even petulantly polemical *Antidote* adopted the modalities of anonymous print controversy in hopes of correcting the unfavourable image of Russia given in Chappe d'Auteroche's *Voyage en Sibérie* (1768).⁷¹

Catherine's sensitivity to the potential of different genres also guided her use of the epistolary form: the personalised style and the conventions of semi-private circulation made letters particularly helpful for managing celebrity behind the scenes. The texts of Catherine's letters did not contribute directly to her status as a celebrity. Rather, she

⁷⁰ John T. Alexander, *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 329-41; Ruth P. Dawson, 'Perilous Royal Biography: Representations of Catherine II Immediately after Her Seizure of the Throne', *Biography*, 27, 3 (Summer 2004), 517-34; Ruth P. Dawson, 'Catherine the Great's Visitors, Virtual and Real, from her German Homeland', *Friends of Germanic Studies at the IMLR Newsletter* (2014), 6-11.

⁷¹ *Nakaz Eya Imperatorskago Velichestva Ekateriny Vtoryya, Samoderzhitsy Vserossiiskaya dannyi Kommissii o sochinenii proekta novago ulozheniya* (St. Petersburg: Pri Imp. Akademii nauk, 1770); *Sochineniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II: na osnovanii podlinnykh rukopisei*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, 12 vols (St. Petersburg: Tip. Imp. Akademii nauk, 1901-1908), VII; Marcus C. Levitt, 'An Antidote to Nervous Juice: Catherine the Great's Debate with Chappe d'Auteroche over Russian Culture', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 32, 1 (Fall 1998), 49-63; Chappe d'Auteroche, *Voyage en Sibérie fait par ordre du roi en 1761*, ed. by Michel Mervaud, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 2004:03-2004:04 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2004).

manipulated the limited circulation of her letters and the reputation she gained thereby to shape indirectly her image as it appeared in print.

The suppression of Claude Carloman de Rulhière's *Anecdotes sur la révolution de Russie en l'année 1762* exemplifies the power of Catherine's epistolary networks and reputation against the hazards of print celebrity. What appears to modern eyes as a case of inexcusable censorship was in fact the effective functioning of elite networks. While no *Vie privée de Catherine II* was published in her lifetime, Rulhière's *Anecdotes* approach this genre of more or less satirical narrations of the lives of politically influential or otherwise prominent individuals.⁷² Like the most famous example of the genre, the *Vie privée de Louis XV*, Rulhière's account of Catherine's coup drew on oral rumours and used manuscript networks to record and eventually to publish an image of the monarchy that could undermine its dignity and legitimacy.⁷³ Rulhière's story of Catherine's life and coup d'état had some politically risky elements: it unequivocally pointed out her son Paul's illegitimacy, and it gave an account of her coup highly sympathetic to Ekaterina Dashkova, a version of events that Catherine worked hard to discredit. Unlike many *Vies privées*, it contained little overtly scurrilous material, even if it did exaggerate the number of Catherine's lovers. Perhaps the greatest potential for damage, though, lay in its far-from-glorious presentation of Catherine: she appeared as

⁷² Olivier Ferret, 'Inventing private lives: the representation of private lives in French *Vies privées*, in *Representing Private Lives of the Enlightenment*, ed. by Andrew Kahn, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 2010:11 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010), pp. 53-75 (p. 53); in the introduction to the *Dictionnaire des Vies privées (1722-1842)*, Rulhière's 'passionnant témoignage sur la prise de pouvoir par Catherine de Russie' is cited as exemplifying the requirement that the historian/author of a *vie privée* tell the whole truth and pass judgment on his subject (*Dictionnaire des Vies privées (1722-1842)*, ed. by Olivier Ferret, Anne-Marie Mercier-Faivre, and Chantal Thomas, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 2011:02 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2011), p. 54). After Catherine's death, two other works that might fit the genre were published: Jean-Henri Castéra's *Vie de Catherine II, impératrice de Russie* (1797) and Jean-Charles Thibault de Laveaux's *Histoire secrète des amours et des principaux amans de Catherine II, impératrice de Russie* (1799).

⁷³ See Robert Darnton, 'M^{lle} Bonafon et "La Vie privée de Louis XV"', *Dix-huitième siècle*, 35 (2003), 369-91.

a scheming woman who sought out multiple lovers and who suffered such very human indignities as a breakout of spots that put her out of action for a few days after the coup.⁷⁴ As Rulhière himself affirmed, the work was not openly hostile to the empress, but its avowed semi-comic tone brought Catherine down from the rank of a glorious monarch to that of an ordinary human being with a talent for intrigue who took advantage of extraordinary circumstances.⁷⁵ Neither the *grand homme* nor the sociable writer and conversationalist, this image did not fit within Catherine's persona and therefore required correction.

Catherine's epistolary connections to the French *monde* made a remedy possible. Before the scandalous work could make it to press, Diderot alerted Falconet of its existence, with the clear intention that Falconet should show his letter to the empress. Diderot prompted Catherine to deal with the matter within the framework of *le monde* and thereby prevent any further publicity. Rulhière himself insisted that he had written his text only for friends and patrons like the Countess of Egmont, and Diderot asserted that if the manuscript really did remain within that circle, there could be no problem with it. Rulhière's introduction stressed that the light tone reflected not the scurrilous interest of celebrity-mongering, but rather the conversational salon setting in which the work developed. Diderot claimed that d'Alembert, Madame Geoffrin, and the duc de La Rochefoucauld all concurred in admiring the literary image of 'une maîtresse femme' and 'un *gran cervello di principessa*' ['a great mind of princess'].⁷⁶ The

⁷⁴ Claude Carloman de Rulhière, *Histoire, ou anecdotes sur la révolution de Russie; en l'année 1762* (Paris: Desenne, 1797), pp. 12, 137.

⁷⁵ 'L'importance des différens intérêts, puisqu'il s'agit ici d'un Empire, la singularité de l'action, l'horreur de la catastrophe, le nom de Catherine II^e donnent, il est vrai, à cette révolution, de la grandeur & de la célébrité; mais la frivolité des intrigues qui en ont été les ressorts, la licence des mœurs Russes, & les puérilités qui ont perdu le malheureux empereur Pierre III, ne pouvaient être racontées d'un style sérieux & soutenu' (Rulhière, *Histoire, ou anecdotes sur la révolution de Russie*, pp. ix-x).

⁷⁶ Diderot to Falconet, [May 1768], Diderot, *Correspondance*, VIII, p. 33. 'Un gran cervello di principessa' was Pope Pius V's characterisation of Queen Elizabeth I of England, cited by Voltaire in the

company of witnesses that Diderot chose to cite is important: it includes both literary figures and aristocrats, i.e. the very definition of the Parisian *monde*. Catherine read Diderot's letter to Falconet and responded by ordering her chargé d'affaires in Paris, N. K. Khotinsky, to cooperate with Diderot in acquiring the manuscript. Diderot later recounted to Falconet how he used the tools of *mondanité* to lead to an agreement between Rulhière and Khotinsky: 'J'accompagnai M^r Chotensky à sa seconde visite, et je tâchai de réparer par beaucoup de gaieté le ridicule de la première. [...] On n'a aucun dessein de la publier; on en fera lecture à M^r Chotensky, [...] et on n'a nulle répugnance à en faire passer une copie à Pétersbourg'.⁷⁷ Although a great deal of diplomatic pressure and attempted bribery were also employed to keep Rulhière and his heirs from publishing the manuscript until after Catherine's death, without the epistolary exchange between Diderot, Falconet, and Catherine, she would not have known about the manuscript until it was too late to manage the public that received it. By corresponding with Diderot and Falconet, Catherine gained access to non-official as well as official channels of information and communication.

In her reply to Diderot via Falconet, though, Catherine disagreed with him about the kind of heroine she wished to be. She did not want a reputation as a 'gran cervello di principessa': it was too close to the fascination exerted on the public by criminals, stage heroines, and other kinds of common celebrities. Instead, she presented herself as a heroine in the Enlightenment spirit, an instrument of the public will rather than an intriguer: 'M-r Diderot dit qu'il y a de la maîtresse femme et de la *cervello di principessa*; or dans cet événement, ce n'était point tout cela, mais il s'agissait ou de

notes to the third canto of the *Henriade* (Voltaire, *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, II: *La Henriade*, ed. by O. R. Taylor, 2nd edn (Les Délices, Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1970), p. 439). Diderot's quotation calls on the shared literary culture that he presumed common to *le monde* and that made this group capable of judging Catherine's reputation.

⁷⁷ Diderot to Falconet, 6 September 1768 (NS), Diderot, *Correspondance*, VIII, p. 137.

périr avec un fou ou de se sauver avec la multitude qui prétendait s'en délivrer.⁷⁸ As always, Catherine sought a reputation as a *grand homme* as defined in the *Encyclopédie*: 'Le grand homme [...] n'écoute que le bien public, la gloire de son prince, la prospérité de l'état, & le bonheur des peuples.'⁷⁹ As the 'prince' herself, Catherine had to represent her greatness as inseparable from the will of her people and from her competence as a stateswoman, not as celebrity acquired for her unique personality. Her epistolary networks provided a space where she could elaborate her desired image within a congenial, semi-private circle; she could maintain her imperial dignity by pushing others to manage her public image for her.

However, Catherine's attempts on this front did not always work. For instance, when she tried to present the murder of Ivan VI during the Mirovich affair as an 'incartade, dont le fanatisme le plus singulier étoit le mobile', Geoffrin remained unconvinced and joined the storm of disapproval that raged in France, both in elite circles and in the press.⁸⁰ Both milieus criticised Catherine for her official manifesto on the subject, in which she cited Ivan's mental incapacitation as the reason for his exclusion from the throne and gave an account of the failed attempt to free him from Schlüsselberg fortress. This storm exemplified the dangers to which Catherine's writings could be exposed when the press got hold of them: the 'Remarques d'un Anglois libre, Sur le Manifeste de l'Imperatrice de *Russie* en date du 17. Août 1764' turned from an almost literary analysis of the implausibility of the manifesto's account to a direct accusation of Catherine, asking 'S' imagine-t-Elle, que la tranquillité & la

⁷⁸ Catherine to Falconet, 14 June 1768 (OS), *SIRIO*, xvii, p. 44.

⁷⁹ Chevalier de Jaucourt, 'Héros', in *Encyclopédie*, viii, p. 182.

⁸⁰ 4 October 1764, *SIRIO*, i, p. 257. Geoffrin told Stanislas Poniatowski: 'on trouve qu'elle a fait des manifestes ridicules, surtout celui sur la mort d'Iwan: elle n'était point obligée de rien dire là-dessus; le procès de Merowiez suffisait et rendait le fait simple et clair' (*Correspondance inédite du roi Stanislas-Auguste Poniatowski et de Madame Geoffrin (1764-1777)*, ed. by Charles De Mouÿ (Paris: E. Plon, 1975), p. 122). As Catherine's letter to Geoffrin of 11/21 January 1765 shows, Geoffrin was not afraid to critique the manifesto to Catherine's face (*SIRIO*, i, p. 264).

sureté puissent l'accompagner sur un trône où Elle est montée par des marches si terribles[?]'⁸¹ In the end, Catherine fell back on asking Geoffrin to spread the excuse that the manifesto was not aimed at the Western audience at all and that Western readers had misinterpreted it.⁸² The public commentaries on the manifesto echoed the general Western sense in the early years of Catherine's reign that she could not remain long on the throne: the murders of Peter III and Ivan VI were too glaring, and it was believed that her son Paul would soon take her place. Catherine's strategy was to use her letters to detach elite opinion from that of the broader public: if she could not control the 'gloseries' in the Western press the way she could in Russia, she could try to make friends where it counted. These circles could help her to convince the French government that she could not be pushed off the throne or off the European stage as easily as some expected.

Catherine's own letters could not suffice to manage her public persona: she needed her correspondents to use their networks to reach those who would otherwise encounter her only in print or through the very negative views of the French government. Voltaire was one of Catherine's best resources in this respect. He obviously contributed to shaping her public image with printed texts that drew on her letters, from his publications of her war news in the Bern newspaper *Nouvelles de divers endroits* to his propagandistic pamphlets like the *Tocsin des rois* and the *Lettre sur les panégyriques* and some quotations of her letters in the *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*.⁸³ He also exploited his extensive correspondence network in her favour, reaching both the

⁸¹ *Recueil de pieces, concernant la mort du Prince Iwan, Fils aîné Du Duc Antoine Ulric de Brunswic-Lunebourg, second Frère du Duc-Regnant de ce nom, & De la Princesse Anne de Mecklenbourg-Schwerin, Petite-Fille de Pierre le Grand, Empereur de Russie* (Londres: Au Depens de la Compagnie, 1765), p. 15.

⁸² 11/21 January 1765, *SIRIO*, I, p. 264.

⁸³ Georg Sacke, 'Die Kaiserin Katharina II., Voltaire und die "Gazette de Berne"', *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Geschichte*, 18 (1938), 305-14.

French court and the Parisian *monde*. He sent paraphrases and short excerpts from Catherine's letters to Louis XV's advisor, Louis François Armand Du Plessis, duc de Richelieu, conveying Catherine's desired message that Russia had resources enough to sustain the war against the Ottomans and that France consequently could not force Russia to back down.⁸⁴ Similarly he argued in Catherine's favour in letters to the highly sceptical duchesse de Choiseul, appropriately casting the duchess's distaste for Catherine as a rivalry between two socialites: 'On m'a mandé, madame, que vous étiez jalouse d'une dame qui a je crois cinq pieds deux pouces de haut [...]'.⁸⁵ Correspondence networks thus offered Catherine a very important supplement to any messages distributed to wider audiences: they ensured that the information reached the people who counted along with a suitably positive gloss.

Perhaps most importantly for Catherine's reputation in *le monde*, Voltaire could cite Catherine's letters against the view that Catherine wanted to be a celebrity. Unconvinced by the copies of Catherine's letters that she had seen, Madame Du Deffand saw Catherine as angling for celebrity, the false and tawdry kind of admiration that could be acquired through the newspapers: she wrote to Voltaire that 'Cette Czarine est une héroïne de gazettes' and that 'Je ne sçaurois admirer votre Cathérine, elle est tout ostentation'.⁸⁶ Voltaire countered with evidence drawn from his privileged relationship with the empress, asserting that her epistolary style showed on the contrary that she was part of the cultural elite who deserved Du Deffand's support: 'Vous souviendrait il, madame, que vous m'écrivîtes une fois que Catherine n'était qu'une

⁸⁴ Voltaire to Richelieu, 20 April and 11 July 1770, 30 May, 8 June, 13 July, 16 September, and 21 November 1772, and 4 June 1773 (NS), D16304, D16508, D17763, D17774, D17826, D17915, D18035, D18412.

⁸⁵ Voltaire to the duchesse de Choiseul, 5 October 1770 (NS), D16684; also 8 October 1770 (NS), D16691.

⁸⁶ Du Deffand to Voltaire, 5 October 1770 (NS), D16687, and 24 August 1772 (NS), D17884.

héroïne de gazette? [...] Pour Catherine elle ne fait point de vers mais elle s’y connaît fort bien, et d’ailleurs elle fait de très bonnes plaisanteries sur ce cosaque qui s’est mis en tête de la détrôner.’⁸⁷ Catherine’s wit demonstrated that she conformed to the norms that could win reputations in society. A ridiculous celebrity-seeker would lack such humour about herself and her affairs and would be incapable of writing such satisfactory letters. Although Voltaire passed on copies of only a few of Catherine’s letters, his commentaries on them reinforced Catherine’s efforts to use epistolary sociability as an antidote to the less controllable forces of celebrity in print.

In her later years, when her France-centred epistolary network had vanished, Catherine still used her letters to stage-manage her appearances in print. In the 1780s she more overtly pursued print celebrity: her writings for her grandsons and her anti-Masonic plays were published under the quite transparent abbreviation ‘J. K. M. d. K. a. R.’ (Ihre Kaiserliche Majestät die Kaiserin aller Reußen [Her Imperial Majesty the Empress of All Russias]).⁸⁸ Yet the practices of epistolary circulation and relatively private discussions of her image helped to manage this print publicity; the correspondence with Johann Georg Zimmermann particularly resembled her earlier exchanges with French cultural figures. He acted as an intermediary for her in several regards, recruiting medical staff for Russian provinces and connecting her to the blossoming German literary world. For example, her publisher Friedrich Nicolai’s ineptitude in writing letters in French prevented a correspondence from springing up between him and the empress: her courtiers ridiculed expressions like ‘je Vous *adore*,

⁸⁷ Voltaire to Du Deffand, 26 March 1774 (NS), D18872.

⁸⁸ For example, *Erzählungen und Gespräche. Von J. K. M. d. K. a. R.* (Berlin and Stettin: Nicolai, 1783) and *Drey Lustspiele wider Schwärmerey und Aberglauben* (Berlin and Stettin: Friedrich Nicolai, 1788).

Madame' in Nicolai's one letter to her.⁸⁹ Rather than correspond with Nicolai directly, therefore, Catherine communicated with him on business matters through the German publisher in St. Petersburg, J. J. Weitbrecht, and more sociably through Zimmermann. The latter arranged for positive reviews of the empress's writings that Nicolai published, and he regularly filled his letters to Nicolai with summaries of and extracts from his correspondence with Catherine.⁹⁰ Zimmermann also talked about Catherine's letters frequently in elite circles: the writer and sister of the duchess of Courland, Elisa von der Recke, complained of his vanity in bragging about this illustrious correspondence.⁹¹ Although in her interactions with the German Enlighteners Catherine more readily put other texts like history and children's stories into print, she wrote her letters for a limited public in more or less the same way as before. She expected her letters to writers to be discussed in conversation and in other letters within a network that joined writers and nobles. Catherine's personal, witty tone was somewhat less suited to this new milieu, where not all participants were familiar enough with French to appreciate her style and where other literary trends like Sentimentalism were more popular than Voltairean irony. Nonetheless, the circulation and discussion of her letters continued to shape her image amongst cultural elites and thereby to direct the publication of works that promoted her as a celebrity.

⁸⁹ His draft letter, as well as J.J. Weitbrecht's account of its reception at court, are preserved in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Nachlass Nicolai, vol. 81, 302 recto, 305 recto-306 recto; Pamela E. Selwyn, *Everyday Life in the German Book Trade: Friedrich Nicolai as Bookseller and Publisher in the Age of Enlightenment, 1750-1810* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), pp. 149-50.

⁹⁰ Röhling, 'Katharina II. und J.G. Zimmermann: Bemerkungen zu ihrem Briefwechsel', pp. 372-91; Zimmermann to Nicolai, 30 May, 6 June, 16 June, and 5 September 1787, 16 January and 19 March 1788 (NS), Sigrid Habersaat, *Verteidigung der Aufklärung: Friedrich Nicolai in religiösen und politischen Debatten*, 2 vols (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), pp. 130-35, 142-43, 153-54.

⁹¹ She described in her diary on 23 November 1791 (NS) a conversation at the Polish court with Sénac de Meilhan and compared his vanity in this regard with Zimmermann's: 'Diesen Abend war Meilhan unterhaltender, aber seine eitle Selbstgenügsamkeit war in jedem Worte, in jeder Gebärde sichtbar. Er sprach von seinem Briefwechsel mit der Kaiserin, wie Zimmermann von dem seinigen mit dieser Monarchin spricht' (Elisa von der Recke, *Tagebücher und Selbstzeugnisse*, ed. by Christine Träger (München: C.H. Beck, 1984), p. 184).

From Reputation to Glory: Writing for Posterity via ‘gens de mérite’

In addition to the limited public of elite networks and the broader public of the print sphere, Catherine always had a third audience to consider: the future generations of readers who would grant or refuse her glory. Contemporary discourse held that the pursuit of posthumous glory was not vanity, but rather a valuable motivator of true greatness.⁹² Since classical times, historians and poets had been responsible for passing judgment on prominent individuals and thereby guiding, if not dictating, posterity’s verdict. Enlightenment writers vociferously assumed this mantle. Yet the degree to which French writers especially were embedded in *le monde* meant that authors were just one subset of a broader collectivity of *gens de mérite*, *honnêtes gens*, or *gens de bien* who had the authority to speak in advance for posterity. Although Catherine could hardly have missed this discourse in print sources, she also learned of it from her own participation in epistolary circles. In 1767, Falconet, who was in St. Petersburg working on the Bronze Horseman, submitted to Catherine a manuscript copy of his correspondence with Diderot about the relative importance of the opinion of contemporaries and that of posterity. Catherine could read in this manuscript Diderot’s insistence that ‘habiles gens’ and ‘honnêtes gens’ (the mixture of writers and other cultivated, distinguished individuals found in these exclusive circles) were ‘les représentants du présent et les députés de l’avenir’ because the opinion of ‘honnêtes et habiles gens’ would be the same now and in the future. Diderot even marked out epistolary exchange as the medium by which the voice of posterity could be heard in the present: ‘je porte encore aux oreilles de Voltaire la douceur du concert à venir.

⁹² As just one example, Marmontel’s *Encyclopédie* article ‘Gloire, (*Philosop. Morale.*)’ concluded: ‘Le desir d’éterniser sa *gloire* est un enthousiasme qui nous aggrandit, qui nous élève au-dessus de nous-mêmes & de notre siècle’ (VII, p. 721).

Combien de fois ne lui ai-je pas écrit, laissez brailler maître Aliboron et écoutez dans ma bouche ce que disent et pensent de vous les habiles gens, les honnêtes gens vos contemporains, et avec eux ce qu'en diront et penseront tous les honnêtes et habiles gens des siècles à venir?'⁹³ In reality, Diderot corresponded very little with Voltaire: his invention only underscores the power that he attributed to the letter in his general concept of posterity's voice. The discourse of the time thus declared that the right sort of epistolary exchange with a cultivated elite could lead in a straight line to posterity, which would convert reputation into glory. In cultivating Diderot and his friends, Catherine knowingly courted the public that the rhetoric of her time exalted as the best qualified to judge good and evil: reputation in *le monde* ought to translate into posthumous glory.

Catherine conformed to this set of ideas by refusing monuments and excessive praise in her day, even as she wrote to prepare a monument to herself after her death. Although there were notable busts made by sculptors like Marie-Anne Collot and Fedor Shubin, Catherine permitted no public statues to herself during her lifetime because they would have flouted the rule that only posterity may award glory. She said as much in her reply to the deputies who thanked her for the *Nakaz* and offered her the title of 'the Great': 'о моих делах оставляю времени и потомкам безпристрастно судить.'⁹⁴ The same rule applied to histories and panegyrics in her lifetime: as she wrote to Voltaire about the *Lettre sur les panégyriques*, 'Je Vous prie Monsieur d'employer Votre crédit auprès du savant du Canton d'Urie [Voltaire's pseudonym], pour qu'il ne perde pas son tems à faire le mien jusqu'à mon décès. [...] S'est la postérité et pas nous

⁹³ Diderot to Falconet, 15 February 1766 (NS), in Denis Diderot and Etienne-Maurice Falconet, *Le Pour et le contre: Correspondance polémique sur le respect de la postérité, Plin et les anciens*, ed. by Yves Benot (Paris: Editeurs Français Réunis, 1958), p. 74.

⁹⁴ Autograph draft reply to the deputies of the Legislative Commission, 12 August 1767 (OS), *SIRIO*, x, p. 237.

en vérité qui seront à portée de décider cette question.’⁹⁵ Twenty years later, she sent the same message with her characteristic irony in a letter addressed to her representative in Venice and intended to be shared with the prospective historian Gabriel Sénac de Meilhan: ‘Pour ce qui regarde l’histoire particulière de mon règne, je pense qu’il en est de l’histoire des princes de leur vivant comme des statues qu’on leur dresse avant leur mort: on ne sait pas trop si c’est l’ornement d’une ville ou bien un monument mérité’.⁹⁶ She sided with Diderot in the dispute over posterity, emphasising in her admonition to Falconet the continuity between the present judgment of the cultural elite and that of later generations: ‘Votre âme fière et vraie en veut à l’approbation du petit nombre des connaisseurs, et pourquoi serait-ce à celle de ceux de votre siècle?’⁹⁷ This was precisely Catherine’s strategy in her letters: in courting during her lifetime the approval of a small number of privileged readers, she knowingly laid the foundations for her future glory. The letters’ ability to please a small group of readers in the present offered her a foretaste of their future status as monuments to be discovered by posterity.

On very rare occasions, Catherine explicitly indicated her intent to deposit her letters in the historical archive. In December 1773, she sent her recent correspondence with Field Marshal P. A. Rumyantsev-Zadunaïsky to the historian M. M. Shcherbatov, asking him to take an exact copy of the manuscripts, return the originals, and preserve the copies for posterity. In a gesture not dissimilar to Cicero’s in asking Lucceius to write a flattering history of his deeds, Catherine wanted the letters to go down in history as proof of her strength of character: ‘Для будущих времен сии письма будут

⁹⁵ 29 May 1767 (OS), D14219.

⁹⁶ Catherine to A. Mordvinov, to be shown to Sénac de Meilhan, 4 October 1790 (OS), *SIRIO*, XLII, p. 115.

⁹⁷ Catherine to Falconet, 7 June 1767 (OS), *SIRIO*, XVII, p. 11. Catherine’s letter shows an awareness that it will be shared, and it was included as a final judgment of sorts in one of the manuscripts that Falconet prepared for possible circulation and publication (Yves Benot, ‘Introduction’, in Diderot and Falconet, *Le Pour et le contre*, pp. 7-46 (p. 42)). This statement therefore overtly participates in the semi-private, semi-public discussion of the transition from reputation to glory carried on by Diderot and his circle.

любопытны [...] думаю, что не Моя сторона останется слабейшая.⁹⁸ In the exchange with Rumyantsev, the ageing general reported a Russian retreat north of the Danube, complained of the small size and exhaustion of his forces, and, citing his own physical and mental collapse, asked to be relieved of his command. As so often, Catherine refused to replace him, launching instead an epistolary campaign to restore the general's resolve and that of her troops. Her serious handling of these letters matched the serious image of greatness that she thought the letters displayed: this was the great ruler whose mastery of her pen coincided with the Stoic resilience that she summoned forth in her subordinates. Her firmness of will brought her nation glory in her lifetime; future generations would render her due credit when they discovered in her letters the admirable traits of the individual whose hand guided such grand actions.

Yet the letters to Rumyantsev and Shcherbatov were unusually earnest and direct in their pursuit of greatness. More frequently, Catherine wrote letters in her personal style, designed to please readers both in present sociable exchange and in future historians' searches for traces of greatness. Her use of the anecdote best illustrates this manner of writing so that reputation would blend seamlessly into glory. Although examples of such anecdotes can be found in various correspondences, such that with Zimmermann, they are most numerous and calculated in the exchange with Voltaire.⁹⁹ Skill in telling anecdotes was a great asset in salon conversation, just as a new fascination with anecdotes from private life contributed to the formation of

⁹⁸ Cicero to L. Lucceius, c. 12 April 55 BCE, Cicero, *Letters to Friends*, ed. and trans. by D.R. Shackleton Bailey, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), I, pp. 154-67 (v. 12); Catherine to Shcherbatov, received 10 December 1773 (OS), *Perepiska imperatritsy Ekateriny II, s grafom Rumyantsovym-Zadunaiskim* (Moscow: V privilegirovannoi Tipografii Kryazheva i Meya, 1805), p. [3].

⁹⁹ For example, the story of the peasants near Tsarskoe Selo donating to the war effort against Finland without any official prompting, recounted to Zimmermann in a letter of 29 January 1789 (OS), Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XLII, 1933, AI, 5a, 53 verso-54 recto.

celebrity images in the eighteenth-century press.¹⁰⁰ Voltaire theorised about and artfully deployed the genre of the anecdote in history: well-chosen and well-applied tidbits about illustrious individuals could be revealing, instructive, and effective as literature.¹⁰¹ In writing to Voltaire, Catherine carefully chose and presented episodes that would be both entertainingly piquant and instructive, either in their messages about toleration or in their demonstrations of historical greatness. In her early letters, she sought to win his allegiance with outstanding expressions of belief in toleration. This effort often took the form of zesty anecdotes, like that of Abraham Chaumeix, the former persecutor of the *Encyclopédie*, now supporting toleration or of the metropolitan of Novgorod's acknowledgement of the power of state over church.¹⁰² Begging Catherine to allow him to publish the latter anecdotes, Voltaire stated what Catherine knew already: 'Ce que vous écrivez est un monument de votre gloire.'¹⁰³ Catherine nonetheless chided him for publishing the excerpt of her letter: she sought the future glory that Voltaire's approval promised, and immediate publication threatened that process.

Her masterpiece in the genre of the entertainingly told historical anecdote, however, was her account of the crucial Battle of Chesme: she made the most of an ideal opportunity to write a touchingly personal monument to her own status as a cultivator of Russian heroism. Catherine's letter of 16/27 September 1770 did not stick

¹⁰⁰ Lilti, *Le Monde des salons*, pp. 281-84; *Figures publiques*, pp. 106-21.

¹⁰¹ Catherine Volpilhac-Augier, 'L'Historien et ses masques: Voltaire théoricien de l'anecdote', in *L'Histoire en miettes: Anecdotes et témoignages dans l'écriture de l'histoire (XVI^e-XIX^e siècle)*, ed. by Carole Dornier and Claudine Poulouin, special issue of *Elseneur*, 19 (October 2004), 215-30. Catherine the Great's aim was clearly to resemble Louis XIV, who 'mit dans sa cour, comme dans son règne, tant d'éclat et de magnificence, que les moindres détails de sa vie semblent intéresser la postérité, ainsi qu'ils étaient l'objet de la curiosité de toutes le cours de l'Europe et de tous les contemporains' (Voltaire, *Œuvres historiques*, ed. by René Pomeau (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 890 (chapter 25 of the *Siècle de Louis XIV*)).

¹⁰² 22 August and 28 November 1765 (OS), D12865 and D13032.

¹⁰³ 22 December 1766 (NS), D13756.

to the dry details extracted from official reports, which she often passed on almost verbatim to correspondents like Voltaire, Grimm, and Zimmermann. Instead, Catherine transmitted to Voltaire the most individualised account of the battle possible, translating and adapting personal letters that she had received from Alexey Orlov.¹⁰⁴ Catherine's letter distinguished Voltaire by making him privy to the personal correspondence of an empress and to the personal impressions of her victorious general: this was flattery for the present. At the same time, Catherine transformed her letter into a set of historical anecdotes fit to appear in a collection like chapters 25-28 of the *Siècle de Louis XIV* ('Particularités et anecdotes'). Her skill as letter reader and letter writer was to transmit the historical import of the particular emotions expressed in letters and to cast them in the appropriate language of glory, even as she made them engaging and personal. She related dramatic tales from the battle and presented Orlov as a hero worthy of a place in history ('Je l'ai toujours dit, ses Héros sont né pour les grands événemens'). She focused particularly on Orlov's display of Stoic self-control when he continued to fight after seeing his brother's ship explode: 'Il sentit alors qu'il étoit home. Il s'évanouit, mais reprenant un moment après ses esprits, il ordona de lever toutes les voiles et ce jetta avec son Vaisseaux entre les Enemis.' Victory in the battle and the news that Fedor Orlov had survived came together: Catherine highlighted this connection because of its dramatic potential and its implication that heroic steadfastness brings both public and private rewards. Her language was simple and conversational ('La guerre est une vilaine chose Monsieur'), but the letter was unmistakably meant as a document that

¹⁰⁴ D16670. The account of the opening of the battle and Orlov's hope that he could prevent the Turkish flotilla from joining up with its reinforcements seem to have come from Orlov's official report (*SIRIO*, I, pp. 54-57). But the details of Orlov's feelings when he thought his brother had died, or the blood-tinted port and the drowning men fighting in the water, do not appear in the official report and so must come from a more personal letter. Catherine indicates that she is relating Orlov's words: 'Le Cte: Orlov me dit que [...]'.

would later testify to her sense of history in the making. Even though Voltaire does not seem to have distributed copies of this letter, his reply nods to Catherine's rhetorical tactics. He perceived the historical sublime contained in her letter: it made him 'tressaillir de joie et frémir d'horreur', and he agreed that 'Tous ces Comtes Orloff sont des héros, et je vous vois la plus heureuse ainsi que la première princesse de l'univers.'¹⁰⁵ Catherine's epistolary performance did not just transmit facts: it transmuted a war report into an effective literary portrayal of a historical event that elicited the first echoes of posterity's appreciation.

Catherine knew full well that even her purportedly most extemporaneous and private Western correspondence, that with Friedrich Melchior Grimm, would one day be left to posterity. Although Grimm was indeed more discreet with Catherine's letters than any other of her correspondents, this correspondence too was subject to similar codes of circulation and the eventual assumption of publication for posterity to read. Especially before 1781, when the two correspondents definitively agreed to send their letters by courier rather than post, the letters were subject to a certain amount of circulation in intellectual and elite circles.¹⁰⁶ Exalting as 'sublime et du meilleur goût' Catherine's comparison between the mediocrity of Joseph II in political matters and of Voltaire's disciple Jean-François de La Harpe in the literary sphere, Grimm suggested that he would have shared it with Madame Geoffrin had she been alive. Instead, he claimed he would consider annotating all Catherine's letters for posterity.¹⁰⁷ Catherine objected to neither of these intentions, coquettishly dismissing the commentary for

¹⁰⁵ 25 October 1770 (NS), D16726.

¹⁰⁶ Catherine asked Grimm make a final choice between letters that would arrive 'fréquemment et un peu sèches, ou bien longues et remplies comme par le passé, mais plus rares et par des courriers' on 22 June 1781 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 206-207.

¹⁰⁷ Catherine to Grimm, 11 August 1778 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 96; Grimm to Catherine, 1778, *SIRIO*, XLII, pp. 22-23.

posterity as a mere frivolous entertainment: ‘Faites cela, commentez mes lettres si vous croyez qu’il en vaille la peine, cela peut faire l’ouvrage le plus bouffon qu’il y eût jamais.’¹⁰⁸ Later on in the correspondence, Grimm again contemplated collecting and annotating the letters. Some fragments survive, which suggest the usual dual function of Catherine’s letters: some fragments were clearly written out, with Catherine’s permission, for communication to individuals concerned.¹⁰⁹ These instances of manuscript circulation fulfilled tactical aims of Catherine’s letters. If Grimm really had gone through with the full annotation plan, though, the same letters would have served to establish Catherine’s general image with posterity.

Ultimately, Catherine knew and approved of Grimm’s eventual decision to bequeath the letters to future generations via her grandson Alexander. She asked insistently in later years that the letters be burned for fear of excessive publicity in her lifetime: the publication of her correspondence with Voltaire prompted her alarmed objection, ‘brûlez mes lettres, afin qu’elles ne soient pas imprimées de mon vivant’.¹¹⁰ Later on, she feared that they would fall into the hands of French Revolutionaries, who would similarly give them unfriendly publicity.¹¹¹ In the end, though, she recognised Grimm’s reliability and agreed to his plan to save the letters: he had exhibited extraordinary discretion in successfully keeping twenty-two-years’ worth of letters out of print and obeying her wishes exactly when other forms of circulation were required.¹¹² Throughout the correspondence, therefore, Catherine knew that the letters

¹⁰⁸ 30 November 1778 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, p. 113.

¹⁰⁹ Véronique Otto, ‘Grimm correcteur de Catherine II: sur un “fonds Grimm” inconnu’, *Dix-huitième siècle*, 31 (1999), 395-406.

¹¹⁰ 26 November 1787 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, pp. 421-422.

¹¹¹ 25 December 1795 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, p. 666: ‘il y a longtemps que je vous prie de brûler vos lettres, afin que tous ces jacobins ne s’avisent de s’en emparer un beau jour’. She repeated the suggestion as late as 2 July 1796 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, p. 681.

¹¹² Grimm, ‘Mémoire historique sur l’origine et les suites de mon attachement pour l’impératrice Catherine II’, pp. 52-53.

could and eventually would be read by future generations. Thus even her apparently intimate, casual, completely playful letters must be read as texts prepared to a certain degree for posterity. Hence the accounts that Catherine gave to Grimm of her accomplishments were only partially jocular. For example, her ironic presentation of a tally of her activities in the past 19 years in 1781 in no way undermined the shining image of Enlightenment greatness that the list painted: it included, amongst other items, 144 newly constructed cities and 123 'Edits pour soulager le peuple'.¹¹³ In this instance more than ever, the approval granted by her select correspondent prepared and echoed posterity's applause.

Catherine was very attentive to the circulation patterns of her letters and to the identities of those who would read and discuss them. In various ways, her letters were a means of obtaining reputation amongst a narrow, elite readership; of orchestrating behind the scenes a positive public image to be transmitted in print and to counterbalance the sometimes dangerous effects of a burgeoning celebrity culture; and of preparing an epistolary monument that would fix once and for all her glory in the eyes of posterity. Inevitably lurking in Catherine's mind as she put pen to paper, the shadowy or even obvious presence of these multiple publics helps to explain how she conjoined her personal, sociable style with the image of greatness that she purveyed in her letters. The sociable, apparently natural tone charmed and cajoled her elite recipients, but it also pretended to certain extent to offer the intimate glimpse of a famous person's inner life that celebrity culture covets. It also flattered posterity: in the *Encyclopédie*, Jaucourt (via Middleton) extolled Cicero's letters because 'nous y

¹¹³ The form itself, a sum or 'résultat laconique', made the list seem humorous, as did her German commentary 'Nu, mein Herr, wie sind Sie mit uns zufrieden? Sind wir nicht faul gewesen?' (11 July 1781 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 216).

trouvons l'homme au naturel, sans déguisement & sans affectation'.¹¹⁴ The chatty, personal tone could also serve to convince posterity that the grand image scattered through the correspondence was the 'real' Catherine.

However, Catherine's insistence that Grimm burn her letters when faced with Revolutionary readers hints at the danger that she sensed for her mode of correspondence. The French Revolution threatened all her assumptions about the nature of greatness and the ability of readers to understand her letters as she expected. Unlike other enlightened monarchs such as Frederick II, she survived well into the Revolutionary years and had time to respond in her correspondence to these challenges. Her letters therefore offer a unique vision of a dying model, the last of the great letter-writer monarchs responding to the end of an era.

¹¹⁴ Chevalier de Jaucourt, 'Lettres des Sciences', in *Encyclopédie*, IX, p. 411.

CHAPTER FIVE

GREATNESS CHALLENGED: CATHERINE'S EPISTOLARY RESPONSE TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Historians have long debated the seriousness of Catherine's opposition to the French Revolution, the severity of her reaction against the Enlightenment, and the extent of her intellectual, governmental, and personal decline in her later years. In the late nineteenth century, Charles de Larivière used Catherine's correspondence to back up his condemnation of her attitude to the Revolution: 'L'Impératrice combattit donc la Révolution française, mais par la parole plus que par des actes'; 'elle joua si bien de la Révolution et de la cause des rois, que l'Europe dût courber la tête et accepter le fait acquis quand retentit le cri douloureux: *Finis Poloniae*'.¹ Later accounts have revised this harsh judgement. The Soviet scholar K. E. Dzhezdzhula placed Catherine at the centre of a pan-European counter-revolutionary conspiracy in order to defend Russia against the charge of orchestrating the second and third partitions of Poland.² More modestly, James W. Marcum has argued on the basis of S. R. Vorontsov's correspondence that Catherine's counter-revolutionary intentions were restrained only by a lack of support from the other powers.³ Isabel de Madariaga provides a more balanced assessment on this score. Fighting the French Revolution was not Catherine's main foreign policy aim, as she focused on fighting revolutionary movements primarily in Poland. However, Catherine constantly advertised her anti-Revolutionary sentiments

¹ Charles de Larivière, *Catherine le Grand d'après sa correspondance: Catherine II et la Révolution française d'après de nouveaux documents* (Paris: H. Le Soudier, 1895), pp. 221, 216.

² K. E. Dzhezdzhula, *Rossiia i velikaya frantsuzskaya burzhuanaya revoliutsiia kontsa XVIII veka* (Kiev: Izdatelstvo kievskogo universiteta, 1972); see Isabel de Madariaga's assessment of his work in *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (London: Phoenix, 2002), p. 640, n. 34.

³ James W. Marcum, 'Catherine II and the French Revolution: A Reappraisal', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 16, 2 (Summer 1974), 187-201.

in order to encourage other powers to intervene more directly in France, exhortations which she backed up with limited financial support.⁴

As for her reaction against Enlightenment, the evidence appears thoroughly damning, but only if examined without comparisons to other European nations. Indictments against Catherine include the death sentence, commuted to exile, of A. N. Radishchev for his book *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu* [*A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, 1790]; the imprisonment of journalist, publisher, and Freemason N. I. Novikov; the burning of 67 works by Voltaire in 1793-1794; severe restrictions on imported literature; and the revocation of the right to private printing presses in October 1796.⁵ Yet her actions in this regard match the general trend across Europe and remain on the moderate side, in fact. The Enlightenment's ideal of a free nation, Great Britain, underwent systematic repression in the 1790s: William Pitt's government exploited the French unrest to crack down on British radicals, issuing a royal proclamation against subversive writings in 1792, suspending habeas corpus in 1794-1795, and obtaining some 200 convictions and a few executions of Scottish and English radicals. The bloody suppression of the Irish Rebellion of 1798 might well be compared to the massacres in Poland in 1794.⁶ Catherine's government reacted to the Revolution quite in the same manner as the rest of Europe and could hardly have been expected to do otherwise.

Catherine's letters afford the most detailed account of the continuities and changes in her intellectual, governmental, and personal activities in the last years of her

⁴ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, pp. 442-43, 451.

⁵ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, pp. 543-48; Simon Dixon, *Catherine the Great* (London: Profile, 2009), p. 310.

⁶ H. T. Dickinson, 'The Political Context', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1-15 (pp. 10-15).

reign. To the very end of her life, she used her letters exactly as she always had: she wrote in her personal voice to intervene in the present political situation and to project a strong image of Russia and of herself. She continued reading texts old and new and kept them in mind as she adapted her messages and image to changing circumstances. Her letters still fulfilled multiple aims at once: by projecting in these texts the confident belief that she embodied the true path of order and civilisation, Catherine defied her enemies at home and abroad, encouraged others to follow her example (preferably by taking up arms against France so that she did not have to), and sought one last time to leave a historical legacy of true grandeur as she understood it. Too preoccupied with conflicts closer to home to devote very substantial resources to counter-revolution, Catherine turned to the epistolary realm to encourage other people to take military action against the Revolutionaries. Her methods were the same as ever: she carefully managed the publicity of her letters and the image of grandeur that she projected for maximal effect.

Yet the intertwining of continuity and change in Catherine's response to the Revolution can be best observed in her style, her use of literary texts, and her redesigned image of the *grand homme* or hero. Her personal style remained the same, but she now rendered explicit its pre-existing functions as a marker of elite, indeed aristocratic, status and as a means of excluding those who did not conform to the behaviours of that elite group. In her letters, she joined in the pan-European struggle over possession of the Enlightenment's literary legacy, but after 1793 the Revolutionaries' victory was clear: their reassessment of eighteenth-century texts and ideas meant that Catherine could no longer quote even Voltaire without seeming to endorse regicide. Her repertoire of literary references had been contaminated by these

later discourses and could never be used in the same way again. Nonetheless, Catherine continued to the end of her life to present herself as a great figure of historical stature, in keeping with a familiar literary and historical tradition. Catherine had never slavishly followed Enlightenment writers nor even pretended to do so: she had always decided for herself what the nature of greatness was and which elements of Enlightenment discourse she required to achieve her aims. She had always written for a circle of elites, and in her last years her favourite image of a strong monarch backed by an ideal nobility reinterpreted this alliance of elites as a response to new and threatening political realities. She turned in particular to medieval chivalry, a historical vision of valour and glory which had been on her intellectual horizons since her childhood but which now helped her to grapple with the Revolution's challenge to eighteenth-century ideas of greatness. Catherine's idea of chivalry refashioned standard Enlightenment notions of greatness to assert once again Russia's strength and cultural potential, as well as her own exalted image. As always, Catherine wrote her letters to convince her contemporaries and future generations that she deserved a privileged place in history, even as events seemed to banish the very possibility of privilege. It was not so much Catherine who changed as the environment around her, and she was well aware that her old modes of self-presentation by letter held new meanings in Revolutionary Europe. She rejected what she saw as the barbarism of the Revolution and, although she could no longer profess an affinity with the writers of the Enlightenment, her claim to write as a representative of true culture, order, and glory became more urgent than ever.

Catherine's Epistolary Tactics in Fighting the Revolution

Catherine was naturally horrified by the Revolution as a menace to the world as she knew it and even to her life: as she put it, 'par métier et par devoir d'ailleurs, je suis royaliste'.⁷ Yet her primary aim in the years 1788-1796 was the same as ever: to strengthen Russia and its interests, as well as her own reputation and glory along with them. Fighting the Revolution was a secondary foreign policy aim, but it was a primary epistolary one: the letter was a convenient way to exhibit opposition to the Revolution, a position which she held to be a 'devoir', and to get others to do something about it. Catherine's letters from the Revolutionary years demonstrate just how late any decline in her intellectual powers really occurred. Through the year 1791, she continued to write as frequently and powerfully in her own hand as ever, exhibiting her enduring talent for calculating and controlling the effects of tone, persona, and circulation patterns. After the death of Potemkin in October 1791, she began to rely more on her incompetent young favourite, Platon Zubov.⁸ Nonetheless, she remained in control of affairs, taking significant epistolary (if not military) action against the French Revolution. The chronology of her letter writing follows closely the complex international situation with which she was dealing.

It is unquestionably the case that Catherine was quite busy with conflicts on Russia's borders and had few resources to expend on a large undertaking against France. In the early years of the French Revolution, Russia faced war on two fronts: the second Russo-Turkish War lasted from late 1787 until the start of 1792, and the Russo-Swedish War stretched from 1788 until 1790. As soon as those two wars ended, Catherine had to handle an uprising in Poland in summer 1792, leading to the second

⁷ Catherine to Grimm, 10 May 1791 (OS), *Sbornik imperatorskago russkago istoricheskago obshchestva* [henceforth *SIRIO*], 136 vols (St. Petersburg: Imp. Akademiya Nauk, 1874-1916), xxiii, p. 535.

⁸ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, pp. 566-67.

partition in 1793. March 1794 brought the Kosciuszko Uprising in Poland. The year 1796 saw the short-lived expedition against Persia. Throughout these diverse military manoeuvres, certain actions against the French Revolution fit within Catherine's overall guiding policy principle, namely the interests of the Russian Empire. Her promise to support Gustav III's planned military operations against France (with 8,000 troops and some ships or 300,000 rubles per year for eight years) fulfilled this double strategic aim.⁹ She similarly gave financial, but not military, backing to the French émigré princes in 1791-1792.¹⁰ In 1793, she dispatched the comte d'Artois from St. Petersburg to Great Britain, where she asked her ambassador Semen Vorontsov to provide d'Artois with 300,000 rubles and where the government of Great Britain was requested to furnish d'Artois with ships to carry him with a corps of émigrés to land in Normandy or Brittany. The British refused to help, though, until 1795, when d'Artois made his abortive landing in the Vendée.¹¹ Moreover, from 1793, Catherine not only had 25 ships in the Baltic to enforce a blockade against France, but she also lent a squadron of ships for the same purpose to Britain, with whom she contracted a commercial treaty and a treaty against France in 1793, followed by a full alliance in 1795.¹² While she was, as always, primarily concerned with Russia's immediate interests, she contributed a small amount of funding to fighting the Revolution and seems to have been planning a larger-scale military intervention at the time of her death.¹³ The prior commitments of her troops, though, rendered her letter writing by comparison more significant: although she could not and probably did not want to send large armed contingents, she could and

⁹ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, p. 422, 427-28.

¹⁰ She provided upkeep for 13,000 Austrian troops and 250,000 rubles to the émigré princes in mid-1792 ('Ekaterina II i graf N. P. Rumyantsov', ed. by V. A. Bilbasov, *Russkaya starina*, 25, 3-4, (March-April 1894), 94-112, 157-78 (pp. 100, 159)).

¹¹ *Arkhiv knyazya Vorontsova*, ed. by P. I. Bartenev, 40 vols (Moscow: Tip. A. I. Mamontova and others, 1870-95), xxviii, pp. 129, 133-34.

¹² Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, pp. 442-43, 449.

¹³ Marcum, 'Catherine II and the French Revolution: A Reappraisal', p. 199; also, see below, pp. 276-77.

did use her mastery of epistolary circulation patterns to make tactical interventions in the counter-revolutionary movement.

Her epistolary campaign in 1791 is an outstanding example in the entire corpus of her ability to manage different kinds of circulation and publicity to achieve specific aims. In early 1791, Britain and Prussia threatened an armed onslaught against Russia by land and sea; Catherine's strategy throughout the year was to push all the powers in Europe, including and especially those hostile to her, to set their sights on Revolutionary France. If successful, this policy would kill two birds with one stone: Catherine would have the time and space to win the war against the Ottomans and keep her conquests, while the other powers would deal with the nagging worry of Revolutionary tumult in Western Europe. This approach required exhortations and rhetoric to replace troops in her dealings with the Western powers and publics. Catherine accompanied her diplomats' actions with her own epistolary tactics and strategic choice of publicity methods. She relied on the skills and techniques that had served her well in previous years: circulation of news and indirect communications through sociable exchange; staged persuasion and flattery by letter; and highly selective use of print publicity.

Especially in the earlier years of the Revolution, Catherine used her letters exactly as she always had to spread positive news about Russia in wartime. She sent news reports by post rather than by courier to Zimmermann and Grimm, hoping that Prussian postal officials would open them and pass the contents on to the government. She expressly managed the exchange with Zimmermann as a replay of her successful strategy in writing to the French *cabinet noir* in letters to Voltaire. In February 1791, when sending her letter of 26 January 1791 (OS) by post via Berlin to Zimmermann in

Hannover, Catherine observed to her secretary Aleksandr Khrapovitsky: ‘Я таким образом сменила Шуазеля, переписываясь с Вольтером.’¹⁴ Later in the year, on hearing that Catherine’s *bête noire*, the Prussian minister Ewald Friedrich von Hertzberg, had resigned, Khrapovitsky flatteringly reminded her of her double success: just as she had gotten rid of Choiseul via Voltaire, ‘ныне по корреспонденции с Циммерманном сменили Герцберга.’ Catherine approved of her secretary’s reading of her strategy, feigning humility on the matter: ‘И впрям так, я и забыла.’¹⁵ The correspondences with Grimm and Zimmermann thus perpetuated Catherine’s long-standing ruse, by which her seemingly simple, friendly letters to writers in fact addressed a hostile government spying on her letters.

The correspondence with Grimm also remained as ever a hub for indirect communications with a wide range of cultural and political elites. Catherine continued to provide Grimm with draft responses to letters from a whole range of third parties; Grimm either fleshed out the empress’s replies in letters of his own or showed her words directly to the persons concerned. Just as she had done when sending messages for the duc de Breteuil or Grimm via Madame Geoffrin, Catherine during the Revolution could interact through Grimm with those whom time or etiquette did not allow her to address directly. In April-May 1791 alone, Catherine sent or received messages via Grimm to/from some fourteen people: Prince Henry of Prussia; the *maréchal de Castries*; the *comte de Schomberg*; the duchess of Saxony-Gotha; the Saxon ambassador to the Imperial Diet in Frankfurt, Riaucour; Catherine’s own ambassador in Frankfurt Nikolay Rumyantsev; Louis-Philippe, *comte de Ségur*, former French ambassador in St. Petersburg; a minor author named Reichard from Gotha;

¹⁴ A. V. Khrapovitsky, *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskogo, 1782-1793*, ed. by Nikolay Barsukov (St. Petersburg: A. F. Bazunov, 1874), p. 257.

¹⁵ 6 August 1791 (OS), *Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskogo*, p. 370.

Johann Friedrich Reiffenstein, Catherine's art agent in Rome; Voltaire's former secretary, Wagnière; Grimm's ward, Madame de Bueil; Captain John Paul Jones; Emperor Leopold II; and even Marie-Antoinette. Grimm especially took on the role of managing Catherine's monetary protection of French émigrés.¹⁶ In this period Catherine accordingly played the 'commentateur' more than ever before: she pretended not to be writing letters at all, but merely commenting on letters of others, jokingly labelling sections of her letters 'Commentarium Epistolarum', for example.¹⁷ In this respect, the French Revolution simply reinforced the latent realities of Catherine's sociable correspondences: they were always embedded in a network of social and cultural elites, written for the circulation patterns of this network rather than for one-on-one exchange or for a more diverse public. But only with the onset of the Revolution did Catherine have to reflect explicitly on her correspondents' primarily noble status or their support for the principle of monarchy. The previous forms of epistolary exchange continued as before amongst the survivors of this elite group, but suddenly participation in these exclusive interactions took on an ideological colouring.

Catherine also deployed in 1791 her lifelong skill in staging epistolary gestures that would flatter and influence her readers even as they enhanced her prestigious image. Such, for example, was her letter of 28 September 1791 (OS), which she sent to King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia. Following the Declaration of Pillnitz, signed by Friedrich Wilhelm and Leopold II on 27 August 1791 (OS), Catherine knew the declaration to be essentially empty, but she wanted to push the two powers to fulfil their apparent promise. She sent parallel letters therefore to the two signatories, exhorting

¹⁶ Alexandre Stroeve, 'Friedrich Melchior Grimm et ses correspondants d'après ses papiers conservés dans les archives russes, 1755-1804', in *La Culture française et les archives russes: Une image de l'Europe au XVIII^e siècle*, ed. by Georges Dulac and others (Ferney-Voltaire: Centre International d'Etude du XVIII^e Siècle, 2004), pp. 55-81 (p. 70).

¹⁷ 3 May 1791 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 523.

them to seek glory by real military intervention against France. In her letter to Friedrich Wilhelm, she relied with particular insistence on the eighteenth-century rhetoric of heroism: while remaining vague about the specifics of her contributions to any war efforts, she portrayed herself and her royal colleagues as forming an alliance in pursuit of glory. The word itself echoed in her honeyed description of the Declaration of Pillnitz: ‘j’ai vû avec plaisir se former, sous des auspices aussi glorieux, ce commencement de liaisons entre deux Princes, faites [sic] sans doute pour être unis, puisqu’ils aiment également leur gloire, et la mettent à défendre la dignité de leurs pareils.’ She cast her own refusal to commit troops as a demonstration of the Enlightenment hero’s disinterested and selfless motives: her distance from France and her prior commitments only highlighted, she claimed, ‘la pureté et le désintéressement des motifs qui me font agir’, such as ‘l’amour de la tranquillité générale qui m’anime’.¹⁸ Just as she did so often in letters to her subordinates, she depicted herself as leading other great men to glory and heroism. The staging of the letter’s arrival contributed to her persuasive effort: she was not in regular correspondence with her near-enemy in Berlin, so the arrival of a courier direct from the empress was a memorable occurrence. The heated atmosphere of the 1790s made the letter’s reception even more dramatic than Catherine could have planned: while the Prussian king initially saw through her rhetoric, his favourite Hans Rudolf von Bischoffwerder promptly arranged a séance to consult the spirits on the appropriate response. Whereas Friedrich Wilhelm was inclined to keep his eye on Poland, the ‘spirits’ commanded him to fight ‘for the good of humanity’ against the French, leading Prussia one step closer to the unsuccessful war

¹⁸ The letters to Leopold (dated 29 September) and to Friedrich Wilhelm II (dated the 28th) are printed alongside each other in *Leopold II., Franz II. und Catharina. Ihre Correspondenz*, ed. by Adolf Beer (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1874), pp. 156-59.

of the First Coalition.¹⁹ A letter in these circumstances could be a veritable action against the French Revolution, and Catherine did her best to play on her long-standing image of grandeur for such ends.

Yet during the Revolution, just as in previous years, Catherine needed an overwhelming political motive to stage the publication of one of her autograph letters. One such instance occurred as part of the same campaign to mobilise Europe against France in autumn 1791: her letter of 29 October to the commander of the counter-Revolutionary army of the exiled French princes in Koblenz, the duc de Broglie. An earlier letter addressed to one of her intermediaries for communication with the French princes, the Prince of Nassau-Siegen, makes clear that the staged letter to Broglie was the culmination of a campaign to lend the princes the authority of her name: towards the end of August, she wrote, ‘Mais puisque les Princes croient que mon nom leur peut être de quelque utilité, j’ai commencé par ordonner au marquis de Traversai de faire à M. de Castries, qui nous l’avoit envoyé, mes compliments, et de lui dire que tout serviteur fidèle du Roi trouveroit en moi un ami et un appui.’²⁰ The last clause of that sentence was circulated in a Voltaire-style, slightly-modified one-liner and found its way into print, for example in the *Journal de Paris*, which pointed out that the émigré princes built great hopes on ‘l’intérêt extraordinaire que paroît mettre à leur cause l’Impératrice de Russie’ and cited her generous monetary gifts as well as her letter (‘elle écrit à M. de Nassau: *Les François qui sont restés fidèles à leur Roi, trouveront en moi une amie & un appui*’).²¹ The theatrics continued at the end of September when Catherine accredited Count N. P. Rumyantsev as her official envoy to the princes: as the *Journal*

¹⁹ Elisa von der Recke, *Tagebücher und Selbstzeugnisse*, ed. by Christine Träger (München: C.H. Beck, 1984), pp. 167-68.

²⁰ Félix-Sébastien Feuillet de Conches, *Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette et Madame Élisabeth: Lettes et documents inédits*, 6 vols (Paris: Plon, 1864-73), II, p. 249.

²¹ *Journal de Paris*, 273 (30 September 1791), p. 1114.

de Paris explained, Catherine thereby took an important symbolic step, becoming the first power to recognise the princes' 'existence politique'.²² The émigrés quickly saw to the publication in the newspapers and in pamphlet form of the duc de Broglie's address to Rumyantsev, his answer, and, crucially, the French nobility's letter to Catherine of 26 September (NS).²³

Catherine's letter to Broglie, and through him to the French nobility *en corps*, put the final seal on her gift of her hard-earned reputation and celebrity, gained in part through her letters. It was public from the start, since she openly addressed her letter to the 'thousands' of noble signatories of the letter of 26 September. She began her letter, 'Monsieur le maréchal duc de Broglie. C'est à vous que je m'adresse pour faire parvenir à la noblesse française expatriée, mais fidèle à son monarque, à son roi, à son souverain l'expression de mes remerciements pour les sentiments que cette noblesse a bien voulu me témoigner par sa lettre du 28 [sic] Septembre.'²⁴ Copies of the letter proliferated in manuscript, in the newspapers, and as a pamphlet.²⁵ The content of the letter seemed to matter little: the mere gesture of writing publicly to the princes was a sufficient symbolic gesture. The political tumult of the Revolution only heightened the risks of releasing imperial letters into print, even as the entire effect of the letter relied

²² *Journal de Paris*, 296 (23 October 1791), p. 1205.

²³ *Discours adressé à M. le comte de Romanzow, ministre de l'impératrice de Russie, par M. le maréchal de Broglie, à la tête de la noblesse française. Réponse de M. le comte de Romanzow à M. le maréchal de Broglie. Lettre de la noblesse française à l'impératrice de Russie, souscrite par des milliers de gentilshommes* ([Neuwied, or Koblenz [Brussels]]: [n. pub.], 1791); *Lettre de la noblesse française à l'impératrice de Russie, souscrite par des milliers de gentilshommes* ([n.p.]: [n. pub.], [1791]) (<http://www.sudoc.fr/114306486>). The *Journal encyclopédique* of October 1791 announced that the émigrés had printed the speeches and the letter; the newspaper then reproduced the nobles' letter to Catherine (pp. 139-41).

²⁴ Catherine's autograph draft, [October 1791], *SIRIO*, XLII, pp. 205-206.

²⁵ It appeared in the *Correspondance littéraire* of November 1791 (Ulla Kölvig and Jeanne Carriat, *Inventaire de la Correspondance littéraire de Grimm et Meister*, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 225-227 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1984), II, p. 183); the *Journal de Paris*, 338 (4 December 1791), 1373-74; the *Gazette universelle*, 339 (4 December 1791), 1349; the *Courrier de l'Europe*, 30 (16 December 1791), 399; and, as a pamphlet, *Lettre de l'impératrice de Russie, à M. le maréchal de Broglie* ([n.p.]: [n. pub.], [1791]) (<<http://catalog.nypl.org/record=b11772233~S1>>).

on that publicity. A letter from Russian diplomat V. P. Kochubey in Paris to Count S. R. Vorontsov, the Russian ambassador in London, summed up this phenomenon: ‘La lettre de l’Impératrice au maréchal de Broglie a produit une satisfaction bien grande sur tous ceux qui tiennent à l’ordre de la noblesse; le parti opposé s’en amuse, par contre, de la manière la plus étendue. C’est en vérité une chose terrible, pour un Russe, que d’entendre tout ce que disent ces derniers.’²⁶ Nonetheless, Catherine’s gamble was at least in part successful: the description of her political conduct in the *Journal de Paris* accepted her epistolary persona as a reality: ‘on se rappellera que dans toute sa conduite politique elle n’a guères reculé d’un pas dans les vues & les mesures qu’elle avoit une fois embrassées.’²⁷ Her image as a steadfast, leading great man of her age was acknowledged, and the rhetorical effect of her apparent support stood in for more concrete military contributions to the émigré cause.

Her epistolary tactics in 1791 thus were a culmination of, not a deviation from, her strategies for circulating her letters in Europe. She exploited sociable networks to reach a much broader audience indirectly; she demonstrated her diplomatic mastery through personal letters to her fellow monarchs; and she calculated the effects of a published letter. All these performances still relied on the self-image that Catherine had long been cultivating in her letters as both a sociable letter writer and an eighteenth-century ‘great man’. Yet her letters from the Revolutionary years seek to resolve a possible crisis in this self-image: in her letters, she fought against the tide to preserve the dying world of the Enlightenment elite and to insist one last time on the image of greatness that she wished to leave behind to posterity.

²⁶ *Arkhiv knyazya Vorontsova*, 4 December 1791, XVIII, pp. 19-20.

²⁷ See Chapter Three.

Old and New in Catherine's Personal Style

Catherine's epistolary voice remained essentially unchanged through her very last letters: she retained the same key features of wit, variety, and irony, and she continued to incorporate old and new literary influences. Nonetheless, the Revolution placed this style in a new and hostile environment. Literary styles had moved on with the times: early Romanticism and sentimentalism had already displaced Voltairean wit as the height of fashion, and Revolutionary discourse sought to vanquish aristocratic frivolity with the 'grand goût' of solemn Republican oratory. Catherine flaunted her old style, and her *persiflage* of Revolutionary language offered her personal satisfaction in the letters to Grimm and demonstrated her loyalties before the elite in her letters to de Ligne. Like the true aristocrat mocking a George Dandin or a *bourgeois gentilhomme* for errors of conduct, Catherine linguistically distanced herself from the Revolutionaries to prove her superiority over them. At the same time, as the writers and ideas of the Enlightenment became ever more contaminated by Revolutionary appropriations, Catherine struggled to retain ownership over the literary tradition within which she saw herself. Until the execution of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793 (NS), she did not yet react forcefully against her former intellectual interlocutors. Even then, she repeatedly asked Grimm to justify Voltaire and the *philosophes*: her mind remained open to new evidence that would allow her to reclaim the texts that had once nourished the epistolary art that she still practiced.

With the Revolution, Catherine's sociable tone and the network in which her letters circulated became marked as aristocratic and monarchist, features which until that time had been present but never particularly prominent. After 1791, Catherine had few people with whom she could correspond in her former manner. The Russians of

her generation who made up her social circle were passing away one by one, and increasing mistrust and confusion reigned between Catherine and the budding Russian intelligentsia. Many of the Western writers and aristocrats with whom she was in contact no longer met the necessary ideological requirements. Johann Georg Zimmermann plunged into hysterical anti-Revolutionary conspiracy theories while, on the other end of the scale, Catherine suspected Gabriel Sénac de Meilhan of not just remarkable arrogance, but also excessive sympathy with the Revolutionary cause.²⁸ Formerly the life of the Hermitage, Louis-Philippe de Ségur too was banned from Catherine's network when the Revolution clarified the hierarchical assumptions that underpinned that sociability. Explaining to Grimm her refusal to answer Ségur's letters, Catherine reinterpreted their former interactions as a form of indoctrination: 'en partant d'ici après qu'on lui avait frotté sous le nez tous les axiomes de l'ancienne chevalerie française, après l'avoir fait convenir qu'il était au désespoir de ce qui arrivait, venu à Paris que fait-il?'²⁹ The answer is that he went to Rome as a representative of the National Assembly, thus putting into action the Revolutionary enthusiasm that Catherine had already spied in his perlustrated letters from 1789.³⁰ Again explicating her ideologically-motivated silence, Catherine cast herself again as the defender of

²⁸ In one of his last letters, Zimmermann sent to Catherine the plan of his *Mémoire* containing a rabid denunciation of Enlightenment and recommending a stern clampdown on the press as well as an international association of princes and a heavy anti-Revolutionary propaganda effort (Zimmermann to Catherine, 29 October 1791 (NS), *Der Briefwechsel zwischen der Kaiserin Katharina II. von Russland und Joh. Georg Zimmermann*, ed. by Eduard Bodemann (Hannover and Leipzig: Hahn, 1906), p. 155). The memoir has been published in Johann Georg Zimmermann, *Mémoire an Seine Kaiserlichkönigliche Majestät Leopold den Zweiten über den Wahnwitz unsers Zeitalters und die Mordbrenner, welche Deutschland und ganz Europa aufklären wollen*, ed. by Christoph Weiß (St. Ingbert: Röhrig, 1995). As she explained to her envoy to the French émigré princes in Koblenz, N. P. Rumyantsev, she had wanted to learn more about the counter-revolutionary potential of the comte d'Artois from Meilhan, but, upon the latter's arrival in Russia, she discovered that Meilhan had been 'le premier Matador de la société démocrate de la Comtesse de Tessé', but that he and his patroness had been forced to leave France 'parce qu'on ne les trouvait pas assez enragés' (4 July 1792 (OS), 'Ekaterina II i graf N. P. Rumyantsov', ed. by V. A. Bilbasov, *Russkaya starina*, 25, 3 (March 1894), pp. 94-112 (pp. 94-95)).

²⁹ 2 May 1791 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 523.

³⁰ The Russians intercepted a compromising letter from the marquis de La Fayette to Ségur, which Catherine read on 2 August 1789 (OS) (*Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskogo*, p. 301).

civility: ‘Or donc, pour ne pas lui dire ce qu’il mérite, il faut que ce ne soit pas moi, mais un autre qui lui réponde pour moi.’³¹ The codes of civility and sociability were designed to avoid open confrontation, so Catherine could present her silence as civilised rather than spiteful. Ultimately, only Grimm and de Ligne remained of her former sociable network. Even writing to Grimm, Catherine expressed distress at the dissonance created in formerly close epistolary relationships by new and muddled ideological divisions: ‘Ecoutez, souffre-douleur: la confusion générale de l’Europe en met beaucoup dans notre correspondance. Vous me dites continuellement des choses qui n’ont pas le sens commun, et moi je me tais pour ne pas vous contredire’.³² It is unsurprising, therefore, that her correspondences thinned in her later years: she had few interlocutors left who would appreciate her personal style and converse with her as before.

Catherine in fact began to question whether her style could be used at all, given the present condition of Europe. In 1795, she offered an excuse for her failure to answer the prince de Ligne’s letters that was not to be found in any epistolary manual. Her ‘parfait mécontentement de tout ce qui se passait’ prevented her from writing: the Revolution would have caused her to write ‘des lettres avec de la bouillie dans la bouche’, but that would have been incompatible with Catherine’s habitual manner. If the French monarchy were restored under Louis XVIII, former count of Provence, and if the émigrés were allowed to return home, the old conditions of society would be reinstated and Catherine could resume her preferred tone: ‘nous nous écrirons des lettres aussi gaies que ci-devant.’³³ There was a pun hiding in this apparently simple

³¹ 3 May 1791 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 523.

³² 4 September 1796 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 693.

³³ 3/14 July 1795, Prince Charles-Joseph de Ligne, *Correspondances russes*, ed. by Alexandre Stroev and Jeroom Vercruysse, 2 vols (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), I, pp. 250-51.

statement: ‘ci-devant’ was the term applied to the former French nobility (on the pattern ‘le ci-devant duc de...’). With the Revolution, Catherine saw the gaiety of sociability return to its origins as an attribute of the nobility, rather than a tone and a practice that united francophone writers and social elites.³⁴ While Catherine’s comment on the impossibility of writing sociable letters in a time of Revolution was an artful conceit to fuse an excuse with a political statement, it also reflected to a certain extent a real problem for Catherine’s epistolary practice. The Revolution destroyed both the French elite and the literary sociability in which Catherine’s personal style was grounded.

Catherine’s attitude towards epistolary basics like etiquette changed in the Revolution: whereas she had previously enjoyed the playful laying aside of etiquette, titles and formalities now took on essential value as markers of opposition to the new Revolutionary innovations. In a remarkable passage of a letter to Grimm in 1791, Catherine replied to a letter from Grimm’s ward, Madame d’Epinay’s granddaughter Emilie de Bueil, by recounting the process of reading it. Catherine started with the seal, noting with pleasure that it still bore the Bueil family arms, and moved on to the signature, which remained unchanged despite the abolition of the nobility and their titles on 19 June 1790 (NS). The materiality and conventions of letter writing, like seals and signatures, had always signified hierarchy: now, though, conforming to hierarchy indicated loyalty to a particular ideology. Only then did Catherine move on to the text of the letter, of which Catherine similarly approved because it reflected their shared royalist beliefs. In her response, Catherine emphatically returned to the etiquette of

³⁴ On the aristocratic origins and associations of gaiety, see Fritz Nies, *Les Lettres de Madame de Sévigné: Conventions du genre et sociologie des publics*, trans. by Michèle Creff (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001), p. 118. Catherine was not alone in finding sociability incompatible with Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary culture: according to Daniel Gordon, the abbé Morellet believed that sociability was a ‘*nonrevolutionary*’ language that idealized civility rather than citizenship’, but which was nonetheless ‘not an effective *antirevolutionary* language.’ In Gordon’s view, sociability simply could no longer exist in the contestatory post-Revolutionary world (*Citizens without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670-1789* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 240-45).

address, which she normally left out in her letters to Grimm. Back in 1775, they had banished all but ironical uses of the address ‘Monsieur’ from their correspondence, and Catherine habitually referred to third parties by affectionate or sarcastic nicknames.³⁵ Now she restored such formality to demonstrate her approval of the old hierarchical culture: ‘Madame de Bueil me nomme sa bienfaitrice, mais ce titre vous convient plus qu’à moi, mon cher monsieur.’³⁶ Invoking hierarchies of address thus brought with it a recollection of a world in which Catherine played the imperial benefactress and gracefully demurred at the paeans that she earned in return. At this very time, French writers were rejecting her former patronage and even returning her tokens of favour.³⁷ Catherine elsewhere designated de Bueil’s letter as her ‘compliments’: it was a formal letter to a superior in a genre recognisable from epistolary manuals and conventions.³⁸ Catherine’s pleasure at the formulaic praise that she found in de Bueil’s letter reflected the degree to which it employed old discourses that were once taken for granted, but which now had become a mark of political allegiances. Epistolary formalities were akin to the formalities of dress and symbolism that Catherine recommended as part of the restoration of the monarchy in France. In a *mémoire* of 1792, she wrote that as monarchist troops advanced, the communes would have to renounce their Revolutionary symbols and restore the monarchist ones: they would have to abandon ‘la cocarde et tous les autres hochets républicains, rétablir les couleurs du roi, la cocarde blanche, le

³⁵ ‘Vous n’aurez plus de *Monsieur*, puisque vous n’en voulez point’, 20 September 1775 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 35; see the discussion in Chapter Two above, pp. 110-11.

³⁶ 10 May 1791 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 535.

³⁷ For example, the Orientalist Constantin-François Chassebœuf, comte de Volney, returned to Grimm a gold medal that Catherine had awarded him. Volney’s letter to Grimm of 4 December 1791 (NS) was printed in the *Journal de Paris*, 343 (9 December 1791), 1396; it was reprinted with Grimm’s purported reply in the *Lettre de M. de Volney à M. le baron de Grimm* (Paris: Potey, 1823).

³⁸ ‘Le S^r Machkof m’a porté les compliments de madame de Bueil’, 2 May 1791 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 522.

pavillon du roi, abolir les dénominations haineuses de démocrates et aristocrates etc.’³⁹

Doing away with the new symbols and new vocabulary would get rid of the ideological divisions that now made etiquette in Catherine’s correspondence so meaningful too.

Catherine’s literary references and vocabulary also underwent important transformations in the Revolutionary period. A wealth of allusions to literary works, which allowed the writer and addressee to exchange a wink of connivance based on their shared cultivation, had always been a fundamental element of the Sévigné-esque, ideal eighteenth-century letter. During the Revolution, though, Catherine had to reassess the entire repertoire of texts that had fed into her use of the French language and French-style sociability especially. Once again discovering the hierarchical assumptions that underlay her former discourses, through 1791 Catherine repeatedly insisted to Grimm that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French literary culture could not be understood under the present circumstances: ‘Il faudra que l’assemblée nationale fasse jeter au feu tous les meilleurs auteurs français et tout ce qui a répandu leur langue en Europe, car tout cela dépose contre l’abominable grabuge qu’ils font.’⁴⁰ Her letters were a space for reassessing the ‘meilleurs auteurs français’ and for making sense of the ‘abominable grabuge’ that the Revolutionaries made in using Enlightenment authors for their own propaganda and in producing a new and unfamiliar Revolutionary discourse.

In 1790-1791, Catherine revisited and invoked a number of classic Enlightenment authors in opposition to the Revolution, suggesting a more or less conscious struggle for possession of these texts and a will to fight Revolutionary discourse on its own turf. At the same time as the French Revolutionaries were beginning to hail Rousseau as one of their leading lights, Catherine too called on this

³⁹ ‘Zapiska imperatritsy Ekateriny II o merakh k vozstanovleniyu vo Frantsii korolevskago pravitelstva’, *Russkii arkhiv*, 3 (March 1866), columns 399-422 (column 413).

⁴⁰ 25 June 1790 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 488; see also 29 April 1791 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 520.

Enlightenment writer for whom she had long expressed distaste.⁴¹ Just as the Revolutionaries brandished Rousseau's name even though their policies often diverged from his thought, Catherine twisted his words to suit her own rhetorical purposes. Whereas nearly thirty years before, Catherine had sought to form an epistolary bond with Voltaire by advertising her will to belie 'la prophétie de Jean Jacques Rousseau' in chapter 8 of Book 2 of *Du Contrat social*, now she uttered an almost identical prophecy herself.⁴² Rousseau had declared that Russia's insufficient development of its own civilisation would allow the Tartars to overwhelm it and, thence, the rest of Europe: he concluded, 'Cette révolution me paroît infaillible. Tous les Rois de l'Europe travaillent de concert à l'accélérer'.⁴³ Catherine now reinvented this prophecy as part of her effort to push other powers into war on France: if the kings of Europe did not fight against the new French barbarism, the Turks would take them over.⁴⁴ She conveyed this message to Grimm by letter and again orally through her envoy N. P. Rumyantsev, and Grimm duly conveyed it to the new Holy Roman Emperor Leopold II: Rousseau's prophecy now became a rhetorical tool for turning the European powers against France.⁴⁵

Catherine was also clearly rereading Rousseau's *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne*, probably as she contemplated the increasingly convoluted situation in that republic. She manipulated it too for her own purposes, citing a passage from memory

⁴¹ Bernard Manin, 'Rousseau', *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution Française*, ed. by François Furet et Mona Ozouf (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), pp. 872-87 (p. 873).

⁴² Catherine to Voltaire, c. September 1763, Voltaire, *Correspondence and related documents*, ed. by Theodore Besterman, 2nd edn, 51 vols (Geneva, Banbury, Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968-77), in *Electronic Enlightenment* <<http://www.e-enlightenment.com/index.html>>, D11421.

⁴³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Du Contrat social', ed. by Robert Derathé, in *Œuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 5 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-95), III (1964), pp. 347-470 (p. 386).

⁴⁴ Catherine to Grimm, 26 June 1790 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 490: 'sachez que si les abominables principes de vos enragés par épidémie gagnent l'Europe, il faudra en féliciter les Turcs, auxquels alors la conquête de l'Europe deviendra une chose aisée et facile; voilà ce que votre très humble servante prophétise'. Catherine's labelling of this statement as a 'prophecy' confirms the Rousseauian allusion, especially as Grimm was quite familiar with Catherine's correspondence with Voltaire.

⁴⁵ Grimm to Catherine, 20/31 December 1790, *SIRIO*, XLIV, pp. 392-93.

and then copying it out in her own hand in a letter to Grimm as a denunciation of the French Revolutionaries' misunderstanding of the nature of liberty. Since Grimm did not circulate this passage to any further readers, Catherine was simply thinking out for herself a response to the Revolution through the Revolutionaries' own rhetorical tools. Catherine's original autograph draft of her published letter to the émigré princes cited Montesquieu ('Point de noblesse, point de monarque'), which was all the easier to do since the most radical Revolutionaries found him too moderate for their liking.⁴⁶ Often it was a matter of choosing texts. The Revolutionaries promoted texts like Voltaire's *Brutus*, the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, and his writings on behalf of the Calas family; Catherine, meanwhile, continually returned to Voltaire's *Henriade* in her public and private letters, as will be discussed below.⁴⁷ Through 1791, then, Catherine was engaged in a battle for ownership of the Enlightenment's textual heritage, albeit in the miniature form of small quotations in letters. Only after that date did the Revolutionaries succeed in definitively marking these authors and texts as ideologically coloured and therefore antipathetic to a monarch.

Yet Catherine never let go of the literary sources that fed her sociable tone. Her favourite characters and expressions like Chah Baham's 'je m'entends bien moi' and Tristram Shandy's 'halte-là' pervade her last letters to Grimm just as in previous years: literary sociability by letter continued to define Catherine's preferred personal style.⁴⁸ Molière and the Cardinal de Retz appeared in her very last letter to the prince de

⁴⁶ The phrase was left out of the final sent and printed version (October 1791, *SIRIO*, XLII, pp. 205-207). It is from Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des lois* (II. 4), where he speaks of 'la monarchie, dont la maxime fondamentale est: *point de monarque, point de noblesse; point de noblesse, point de monarque*; mais on a un despote' (Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois*, ed. by Laurent Versini, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), I, p. 109). On the distance at which the Revolutionaries held Montesquieu, Bernard Manin, 'Montesquieu', *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution Française*, pp. 786-800.

⁴⁷ See below, pp. 272-73; Mona Ozouf, 'Voltaire', *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution Française*, pp. 913-23 (pp. 915-17).

⁴⁸ For example, allusions to Chah Baham on 21 April and 15 December 1794 (OS), and to Shandy on 27 August and 4 September 1794 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 603, 617, 606, 611.

Ligne.⁴⁹ In 1796, Catherine still made the sort of comparisons ‘sublimes et du meilleur goût’ that joined literature with politics and earned Grimm’s praise: she wittily yoked together Buffon with the king of Sweden’s desire to marry her granddaughter, asserting that, if given the chance, Gustav IV would fly to Petersburg to meet his prospective fiancée, although ‘ceci n’est qu’une hypothèse, comme celle de M. Buffon sur la création du monde.’⁵⁰ Even Voltaire, whom Catherine blamed but wanted to see exonerated, continued to be a common reference point in the correspondence with Grimm. She had long been wary of signs of Jacobinism, especially at home in Russia, but until 1793 she defended Voltaire as a sure opponent of the Revolution. She wrote to Grimm on 14 April 1792 (OS): ‘A la fin du 18-ème siècle, c’est donc un mérite apparemment d’assassiner les gens, et puis on vient me dire que c’est Voltaire qui prêchait cela; voilà comme on ose calomnier les gens’. But by 31 March 1794 (OS), the tone had changed: ‘Vous me dites que vous vengerez un jour Voltaire de l’imputation qu’il a contribué à préparer la révolution et que vous en indiquerez les vrais auteurs. Je vous prie, nommez-les moi, et dites-moi ce que vous en savez.’⁵¹ Nonetheless, his *œuvre* remained present in her letters to the very end: Voltaire remained the ‘dieu de l’agrément’, furnishing jocular epithets just as he always had. For example, a correspondent of the duke of Brunswick was the ‘Huron’ of Voltaire’s *Ingénu* in 1794, and Grimm himself was ‘Memnon II’ from *Memnon, ou la sagesse humaine* in 1796.⁵² Importantly, these two texts by Voltaire contain reflections on barbarism as opposed to civilisation and on the perversity of human life and human weakness, appropriate

⁴⁹ 10 May 1796 (OS), *Correspondances russes*, I, p. 255.

⁵⁰ Catherine to Grimm, 14 July 1796 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 683; on Catherine’s ‘sublime’ comparison between Joseph II and La Harpe, see above p. 240.

⁵¹ *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 565, 599.

⁵² Catherine to Grimm, 3 April 1794 and 13 May 1796 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 602, 675; Grimm to Catherine, 30 December 1795/10 January 1796, *SIRIO*, XLIV, pp. 687-96.

enough meditations given the Revolutionary mess in Europe. Without these texts, Catherine and Grimm would have lacked a cultural and textual framework in which to discuss their situation: they clung to their status as representatives of true civilisation by perpetuating their old habits of sociability through letters imbued with literary references.

But the diversity of vocabulary characteristic of Catherine's Sévigné-esque, light style also made it a flexible vehicle for integrating new words and literary allusions. Despite her assertions that she had no more time to read, she continued to discuss new texts in her letters, including Burke and Gibbon in the early 1790s, and to keep up to date on cultural developments via the *Correspondance littéraire* through the final year of her life.⁵³ Her own literary pursuits also proceeded apace, including work on her memoirs and on her history writing. She was most certainly well informed about events and vocabulary changes in the West through regular reading of the press and of various official and unofficial correspondences: she even asserted that the Jacobins' true aim was to 'répandre partout la confusion des langues'.⁵⁴ In her letters, she creatively and playfully wielded this new jargon, showing both sensitivity to new developments and the persistence of the Sévigné-esque style of lexical variety. As ever, irony came to her aid as a technique for reappropriating and denigrating the new inventions. She continued to add suffixes to new terminology to produce new epithets: refusing to allow Grimm to give her portrait to Jean Sylvain Bailly, Catherine wrote: 'ce serait mettre et le maire du palais démonarchiseur et l'impératrice aristocratissime en contradiction avec eux-mêmes et leurs fonctions passées, présentes et futures.'⁵⁵ She also enjoyed

⁵³ On 12 January 1791 (OS), she called Edmund Burke 'le Démosthène de l'Angleterre' (*SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 502, 563, 683).

⁵⁴ 9 May 1792 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 566-67.

⁵⁵ 22 June 1790 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 482-83.

highlighting the irony inherent in some of the new Revolutionary vocabulary: in writing of ‘la régénération qui fait ressembler tout le pays à un grand bois rempli de l’espèce sauvage’, she used the botanical metaphor and the notion of rebirth to suggest instead a retreat to the most barbarous of times.⁵⁶ She could use the slipperiness of the new vocabulary to make political points: she asked Grimm, for instance, ‘Et vous voulez que je plante là mes intérêts et ceux de mon alliée la république et mes amis républicains, pour ne m’occuper que de la jacobinière de Paris?’⁵⁷ The French Revolutionaries may claim to be ‘républicains’, but for Catherine they could be labeled only with what in her mind was a derogatory term, ‘jacobins’. Catherine much preferred to see Poland as the only republic, i.e. a weak state undermined by internal divisions and therefore easily manipulated by its stronger neighbours. For Catherine, there were Jacobins in both republics, and she would fight them at home while encouraging others to fight those in Paris. Paradoxically, Catherine made order out of the Jacobins’ ‘confusion des langues’ by mixing their words with her other vocabularies. By incorporating Revolutionary discourse into the diversity of her personal style, she reasserted the power of her form of culture over the Revolutionaries’ barbarism, as reflected in their rebarbative language. Until this terminology could be done away with, she resorted to the old literary mode of mockery and *persiflage* to diminish its stature.

Catherine thus maintained her mode of sociable correspondence to the end of her life, if on a smaller scale than before due to the lack of an available network and readership for her letters. Maintaining her fine personal style became in itself a political statement: as Grimm put it, ‘le bon ton de l’ère de la liberté serait bien fâché de

⁵⁶ 12 February 1790 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, p. 480.

⁵⁷ 9 May 1792 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, p. 567.

ressembler au bon ton et à l'urbanité de l'ère du despotisme.'⁵⁸ It shows the continuity of her intellectual activity and literary engagement throughout her life, as well as the sense of alienation in a world where her epistolary style no longer held its former charm and meaning. The same phenomenon can be observed in her attitude toward her persona as an eighteenth-century *grand homme*: Catherine's letters in the last several years of her life show intensive reexamination of this notion. As she searched more intently than ever for models of greatness in her contemporaries and in history, she traced *en filigrane* her own final image as an upholder of a bygone ideal.

Greatness Challenged

The Revolution's transformations of vocabulary and ideology also challenged one of the fundamental premises of Catherine's epistolary persona: the image and the definition of the great man. The Panthéon in Paris epitomises the Revolutionary campaign to redefine greatness in terms entirely foreign to Catherine.⁵⁹ Already in 1790, she wrote to Grimm that she would 'laisser bavarder les grands hommes, à la grandeur desquels je ne comprends rien', referring to the journalists who claimed that she was on her deathbed.⁶⁰ Suddenly a collectivity of commoners was claiming skill in the domains previously reserved for the solitary great man, most especially in legislation: 'Je ne saurais croire non plus aux grands talents de savetiers et cordonniers pour le gouvernement et la législation'. Aptly, Catherine compared the process of legislation to that of writing a letter: 'faites écrire une seule lettre par mille personnes,

⁵⁸ Grimm to Catherine, 22 March/2 April 1791, *SIRIO*, XLIV, p. 416.

⁵⁹ Jean-Claude Bonnet, *Naissance du Panthéon: essai sur le culte des grands hommes* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), pp. 269-71.

⁶⁰ 12 February 1790 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 480.

donnez-leur à mâcher chaque terme, et vous verrez ce qui en arrivera.’⁶¹ The analogy implies that the French Revolution was not just a practical political menace for Catherine: it also called into question her entire self-image. Her letters of the Revolutionary years therefore became a space where she searched for historical and literary precedents and reasserted one last time her own image of greatness.

Whereas in previous years her assumptions about what made a great individual were essentially implicit and the sources of his or her image were assumed to be commonplaces known to all, in the Revolutionary years Catherine actively sought out and reexamined available literary and historical models of greatness. Sometimes she picked up on texts that reinforced her former image of the great man. For example, she looked more intently than ever to the classics, translating Plutarch with Platon Zubov in 1790 within earshot of the Swedish bombardment. Plutarch merely fortified her self-image as the ‘imperturbable’, which she projected in her sociable letters to de Ligne and her exhortatory letter to Nassau-Siegen at this time: she saw the Stoic ethical model at work in Plutarch’s *Lives*: ‘Les anciens mettaient la plus grande valeur à supporter, à réparer les malheurs [...] Les héros modernes devraient les imiter’.⁶² She herself, of course, was performing the role of that ‘héros moderne’ in calmly translating classical literature to the sound of cannon fire. Literature thus once again came to her aid in illustrating the image of timeless grandeur that she had long sought to project.

But she had to look to more recent history to find models that would resolve the aspect of the Revolution that, judging from her letters, troubled her most: the betrayal of the monarch by the elite. Her concern on this count helps to explain her interest in Sénac de Meilhan, who was one of the first analysts to identify the revolt of the nobility

⁶¹ 15 November 1789 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 479.

⁶² 14 September 1790 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 496.

as one of the key causes of the Revolution.⁶³ This anxiety is all the more understandable in light of Catherine's political situation within Russia: she relied heavily on the support of a ruling group comprised of a nonetheless diverse and increasingly independent and opposition-minded elite.⁶⁴ The sallies of writers like A. N. Radishchev hinted at the possibility of the Russian nobility too turning against the monarch. In response, Catherine compiled from a range of literary and historical sources a reassuring and coherent image of a great monarch leading an elite to victory over disorder and barbarism, even though such an idealised relationship between the monarch and the (in reality perennially splintered) nobility never existed in France or in Russia. Although few of Catherine's epistolary performances during the French Revolution were addressed specifically to Russian readers, this confident image could serve as well at home as abroad. As ever, her persona not only served psychological, tactical, and literary ends, but it also left behind a final vision of her grandeur for posterity to discover in her letters.

Catherine's search for literary models of a loyal alliance between monarch and nobility led her to rather idiosyncratic readings of French history. When she referred to 'l'ancienne chevalerie française' in these years, she meant to advertise such an alliance in opposition to the Revolution.⁶⁵ The theme of chivalry had been present in Catherine's intellectual and epistolary world from her earliest days. In her memoirs, the first text she mentions reading is Joanot Martorell's *Tirant le Blanc*, presumably in the

⁶³ Jacques Godechot, *La Contre-Révolution, doctrine et action, 1789-1804* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), p. 45.

⁶⁴ Robert E. Jones, *The Emancipation of the Russian Nobility, 1762-1785* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973); John P. LeDonne, 'The Eighteenth-Century Russian Nobility: Bureaucracy or ruling class?', *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, 34, 1-2 (January-June 1993), 139-48; Marc Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), pp. 11-12; E. N. Marasina, *Psikhologia elity rossiiskogo dvoryanstva poslednei treti XVIII veka (Po materialam perepiski)* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1999), pp. 23-24.

⁶⁵ Catherine to Grimm, 2 May 1791 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, p. 523.

1737 adaptation by the comte de Caylus.⁶⁶ Michael Schippan has rightly suggested that Catherine's first readings of chivalric romances probably had more influence on her later thinking than is usually acknowledged: the tale of a perfect knight who, amongst other adventures, leads a flotilla against the Turks and nearly becomes emperor in Constantinople could not but stick in the memory of the ambitious creator of the Greek Project.⁶⁷ In Catherine's correspondences before the Revolutionary period, chivalry typically appeared in a comic or mock-heroic vein. Voltaire and Catherine ironically labeled the French volunteers fighting against the Russians in Poland 'chevaliers errants'.⁶⁸ Similarly, with tongue firmly in cheek, Catherine inverted Gustav III's promises of his knightly services by proclaiming herself to be his knight; images of Gustav as a quixotic failed knight in the correspondence with Grimm prefigured and accompanied Catherine's comic portrayal of him onstage in 1788-1789, *Opera komicheskaya: Gorebogatyř Kosometovich* [*A Comic Opera: The Woe-Ridden Knight Kosometovich*].⁶⁹ With the onset of the Revolution, though, the appeal to 'chevalerie' became a constant motif, applied both as an exhortation to action against the Revolution and simply as an outburst in letters to Grimm and de Ligne. It had multiple origins, but the message was always the same: the ethic and vocabulary of greatness all boiled down

⁶⁶ *Sochineniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II: na osnovanii podlinnykh rukopisei*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, 12 vols (St. Petersburg: Tip. Imp. Akademii nauk, 1901-1908), XII, p. 75.

⁶⁷ Michael Schippan, *Die Aufklärung in Russland im 18. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), pp. 118-19.

⁶⁸ Catherine to Voltaire, 23 May/4 June 1771, D17224; Voltaire to Catherine, 1 January and 29 May 1772, 20 April 1773 (NS), D17539, D17762, D18326. Voltaire also signed himself 'votre vieux et inutile chevalier' or just 'votre vieux chevalier' (for example, 12 August and 2 September 1769 (NS), D15817, D15865).

⁶⁹ Writing of herself in the third person, Catherine closed a letter to Gustav, 'Vous Vous déclarez son chevalier, Vous trouverez son nom sur la liste des Vôtres et la réciprocité de son amitié en toute occasion' (*Catherine II et Gustave III: une correspondance retrouvée*, ed. by Gunnar von Proschwitz (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1998), p. 123). Mockeries of Gustav as a 'mauvais écuyer' and as a Quixotic anti-hero ('don Gustave', 'Falstaff') abound in the correspondence with Grimm, for example 7 June 1783, 8 May 1784, 19 May 1784, 21 June 1788 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 280, 304-305, 314, 450-51.

to support of monarchy and order over Revolution and what Catherine saw as barbarism.

The primary sources of this literary image did not go quite as far back as the Middle Ages: one of her favourite motifs presented Henri IV and Louis XIV the ‘premiers gentilshommes du royaume’, leading a small band of faithful knights in defense of the legitimate monarchy. It originated in 1789 as a continuation in epistolary form of a sociable conversation: Catherine added a postscript to a letter to Grimm conveying this image, which must have pleased her especially when she came up with it in a chat at court with the French ambassador Ségur the previous day.⁷⁰ Two years later, it became the guiding motif of her public epistolary exhortation to the émigré princes in October 1791: ‘Henri IV se disait le premier gentilhomme de son royaume; personne de vous n’ignore ces principes ineffaçables; ils sont imprégnés dans vos coeurs.’⁷¹ Catherine had read widely on the subject of Henri IV, and her letters and notes indicate that in the early years of the Revolution she was rereading Voltaire’s *Henriade*, the multivolume document collection *Mémoires de la Ligue*, and the *Mémoires du duc de Sully*.⁷² She might have found in the *Henriade*, for example, the list of ‘Ces braves chevaliers, les Givrys, les d’Aumonts, / Les grands Montmorencys, les Sancy, les Crillon’ who swore to Henri IV ‘de le suivre aux deux bouts de la terre’. Catherine was perhaps remembering this list when, on 27 September 1790 (OS), she

⁷⁰ Khrapovitsky noted on 25 September 1789 (OS) that Catherine said, ‘Я сказала вчера Сегюру [I said yesterday to Ségur] que Henry IV se nommait le premier gentilhomme, et que Louis XIV dans les moments de détresses disait qu’il se mettrait à la tête de la noblesse. Он отвечал вздохом [He answered with a sigh].’ The next day Catherine read her postscript ‘о вчерашних словах’ [‘about yesterday’s words’] aloud to Khrapovitsky (*Dnevnik A. V. Khrapovitskogo*, pp. 310-11). It is the postscript of 25 September 1789 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 479.

⁷¹ Catherine’s autograph draft, *SIRIO*, XLII, p. 206.

⁷² Catherine to Grimm, 25 June 1790 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 488; 27 September 1790 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 500: ‘Je lis et relis la *Henriade* pendant ces troubles de la France; conseillez aux Français de la lire, afin que les gredins ci-dessus nommés apprennent à penser’; ‘Zapiska Imperatritsy Ekateriny II: o merakh k vozstanovleniyu vo Frantsii korolevskago pravitelstva’, p. 405.

cited Mathieu de Montmorency as a particularly repugnant French nobleman: he had betrayed the illustrious lineage of ‘grands Montmorencys’, those ‘braves chevaliers’ who followed Henri IV as ‘il s’apprête / A mériter son trône en marchant à leur tête.’⁷³ She similarly might have found in Voltaire’s *Siècle de Louis XIV* the anecdote that gave rise to her assertion to Ségur that Louis XIV turned to his nobility in times of distress: Voltaire recounts how, when Eugene of Savoy threatened to chase Louis from Versailles, Louis told the maréchal de Harcourt that ‘en cas d’un nouveau malheur, il convoquerait toute la noblesse de son royaume, qu’il la conduirait à l’ennemi, [...] et qu’il périrait à la tête’.⁷⁴ Yet in the end Catherine’s interpretation was quite her own: the choice to see Henri IV and Louis XIV as the exemplars of chivalry is already a rather peculiar reading of periods in French history when people could already look back on the Middle Ages with nostalgia. Disregarding any other historical realities or later literary constructions of her heroes, Catherine selected the single image of the monarch leading the faithful nobility to ward off the dangers of the Revolution.

Her reading of even older history proved equally selective. Catherine undoubtedly noticed in contemporary polemics the renewed interest in the eighteenth-century debate over the origin of the French nobility, most notably carried on by Henri de Boulainvilliers and the abbé Jean-Baptiste Dubos. During the Revolution, it was the abbé Sieyès who most prominently argued that the third estate, supposedly ethnically Gaulish and Roman, should chase out the nobles who claimed to trace their lineages and their privileges to the conquering Franks.⁷⁵ Catherine knew of and detested Sieyès,

⁷³ Catherine to Grimm, *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 500; *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. by Theodore Besterman and others (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968-), II: *La Henriade*, ed. by O. R. Taylor (1970), p. 486 (Canto 5).

⁷⁴ Voltaire, *Œuvres historiques*, ed. by René Pomeau (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 876.

⁷⁵ ‘Pourquoi ne renverroit-il [le tiers état] pas dans les forêts de la Franconie toutes ces familles qui conservent la folle prétention d’être issues de la race des Conquérants, et d’avoir succédé à des droits de

telling Grimm laconically: ‘je souscris à la pendaison de l’abbé Sieyès.’⁷⁶ She took up this debate in her own manner: she developed in her letters to Grimm a recurrent motif designating the Revolutionary French as ‘Gaulois’, who had retreated into barbarism upon chasing out their more civilised conquerors. Catherine conflated Caesar’s Gallic Wars with the Frankish conquest under Clovis, which took place more than 500 years later. For her, it was indifferent where the conquerors came from: all that mattered was that in both cases a great ruler with loyal followers brought order and an end of barbarism to Gaul. Catherine expected and awaited the return of a similar conqueror to restore civilisation to France, whether a Caesar or a Clovis. In 1791, Paris was a ‘repaire des brigands qui se sont emparés du gouvernement de la France et qui vont en faire la Gaule du temps de César. Mais César les réduisit! Quand viendra ce César? Oh! il viendra, gardez-vous d’en douter’.⁷⁷ Two years later, the Franks, perhaps in the modern form of the nobility under the comte d’Artois, were returning to save French civilisation: ‘Ce sont les Gaulois qui ont essayé de chasser les Franks; mais vous verrez revenir les Franks, et les bêtes féroces avides du sang humain seront ou exterminées ou obligées de se cacher où elles pourront.’⁷⁸ These allusions to ancient history merely reproduced in figurative language the repeated explicit call in her letters to Grimm for a great man to save France and all of Europe.⁷⁹ The opposition between barbarism and civilisation, meanwhile, was a standard concern of Enlightenment historiography, but Catherine was now quite far from what P. G. A. Pocock has termed the ‘Enlightened

conquête? La Nation, alors épurée, pourra se consoler, je pense, d’être réduite à ne se plus croire composée que des descendants des Gaulois et des Romains’ (Emmanuel Joseph Sièyes, *Qu’est-ce que le Tiers-Etat?*, 3rd edn ([n.p.]: [n. pub.], 1789), p. 17).

⁷⁶ 14 April 1795 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 636.

⁷⁷ 13 January 1791 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 503.

⁷⁸ 13 April 1793 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 581.

⁷⁹ For example, ‘Il faudrait feuilleter l’histoire et voir si jamais pays ait été sauvé par autre qu’un réellement grand homme, et d’après cette découverte je prédirais ce qu’il en sera de la France’ (30 April 1791 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 520).

narrative', according to which Europe emerged from the 'Christian millenium of barbarism and religion' into the Enlightened age of civilisation, trade, and philosophy.⁸⁰ She repeatedly denigrated the eighteenth century, revealing disillusionment at the discovery that 'ce dix-huitième siècle tant vanté ne vaut pas un liard plus que ceux qui l'ont précédé'.⁸¹ The struggle between barbarism and civilisation was ongoing, and for Catherine in her later years, only a monarch with a loyal elite band of supporters could enforce order and end the ravages of violent revolution.

Not just the universality of this opposition, but also the role in which Catherine places herself in her letters makes it clear that she is not talking about France alone. Although Catherine wrote of 'l'ancienne chevalerie française' as though it were a particularly French national trait, ultimately her constant exhortations to 'chevalerie' cast her as the sole leader in Europe who truly understood the meaning of chivalry and its implications for restoring European order. Her letters to her representative in Sweden, Count Otto Magnus von Stakelberg, show that she quite lucidly regarded the language of chivalry as a mantle to be assumed on occasion. Catherine had always mocked Gustav's desire to play the heroic knight, but now that ironic image blended with 'chevalerie' as a code-word for counter-revolution. Even as she ordered Stakelberg to push Gustav in that direction, thus diverting him from any possible plans to renew hostilities against her, she maintained an ironic distance from the 'point de la Chevalerie', as she called his intention to go to war against France, and from 'l'esprit et la tournure chevaleresque du Roy de Suede', as she called them.⁸² Her adoption of the rhetoric of chivalry in other contexts must therefore be regarded as an equally lucid

⁸⁰ J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999-), II: *Narratives of Civil Government* (1999), pp. 24-25.

⁸¹ 10 May 1791 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 534.

⁸² Catherine to Stakelberg, 27 May 1791 (OS) and [n.d.], 'Pisma Ekateriny II k grafu Stakelbergu. 1773-1796', *Russkaya starina*, 5 (May 1871), 605-27 (pp. 611, 627).

assumption of a role. Yet she presented herself as an expert on chivalry and on the need for a conquering great man regardless of context, whether she was exhorting French nobles or European heads of state, socialising with the prince de Ligne, or bragging to Grimm. She informed Grimm of her strategic letter writing that encouraged the French nobles to return to their duty: for example, she addressed ‘une belle lettre chevaleresque’ to Armand-Emmanuel du Plessis de Richelieu because ‘en dépit de l’assemblée nationale, je veux qu’il reste duc de Richelieu, et qu’il aide à rétablir la monarchie’.⁸³ She also reminded the prince de Ligne that ‘On aimait les anciens chevaliers français’: this could be seen as an immediately public performance, since her letters to de Ligne were more public than those to Grimm.⁸⁴ But it did not directly reach anyone capable of actually fighting the Revolution. Some of her ‘chevaleresque’ comments to Grimm are entirely devoid of any possible utilitarian purpose: she vaunted the huge size of her newborn grandson, the future Emperor Nicholas I, by asserting that ‘de ma vie je n’ai vu un chevalier pareil. [...] Le chevalier Nicolas sera baptisé dimanche’.⁸⁵ All these comments together suggest that Catherine saw herself as the leader of the leaders, a ‘granny’ of sorts who, through her own demonstrations of the necessary kind of greatness, could get others to help her to restore order. Ultimately she was the monarch who would lead the rest of Europe to victory over barbarism.

Her final letters suggest that she had resolved, at the very end of her life, to perform that heroic deed militarily as well as rhetorically. In August 1796, she exhorted one more time her Prussian colleague Friedrich Wilhelm to act, pressing particularly hard with the rhetoric of the great man and highlighting in particular his uncle’s example: ‘si Elle [Votre Majesté] avoit besoin d’un exemple, je Lui citerois celui de son

⁸³ 2 May 1791 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, p. 522.

⁸⁴ 30 June 1791 (OS), *Correspondances russes*, I, pp. 200-201.

⁸⁵ 25 June and 2 July 1796 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 679, 681.

glorieux prédécesseur. Assailli à la fois par des ennemis bien plus nombreux & bien plus formidables que celui qui nous menace présentement, au lieu de plier devant eux, il fut chercher la mort au milieu de leurs rangs.’⁸⁶ But she was no longer content to preach the model of the interventionist, heroic ruler restoring order to Europe: she was prepared to be that ruler herself. Ten days later, she wrote, albeit in a secretary’s hand, to the former Coalition general, Duke Karl Wilhelm Friedrich of Brunswick, that she had resolved to send 60,000 troops into Western Europe ‘sauver le genre humain de la subversion totale et du joug tyrannique que lui preparent les perturbateurs ferores de son bonheur et de sa tranquillité.’⁸⁷ Since over the preceding year she had even sent a French major-general in her service, the marquis de Lambert, to negotiate with the duke of Brunswick and had asked him to intervene with the king of Prussia on her behalf, Catherine knew that her message would reach her colleague too. The message was simple: she was determined to be the great man for whom she had been calling in so many letters to Grimm. She confirmed this intention in her last letter to Grimm: announcing that nothing, not even Friedrich Wilhelm’s quite contrary decision to fight against Russia instead, could stop her from sending Suvorov into Western Europe. She asserted that ‘L’honneur et la gloire n’ont qu’un chemin’, and she alone defended it. By this time, these key terms of heroism and nobility could be reduced to the same meaning as all the images of greatness that had pervaded her letters throughout the Revolutionary period: defense of monarchy with its matching, orderly society of estates.

⁸⁶ Catherine to Friedrich Wilhelm II, 8 August 1796 (OS), copy in Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv Standort Wolfenbüttel, 1 Alt 22 Nr. 1946, 63 verso.

⁸⁷ 18 August 1796 (OS), Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv Standort Wolfenbüttel, 1 Alt 22 Nr. 1946, 47 verso.

After all, the conquering monarch demonstratively allied with a unified nobility was a standard image of the post-Petrine Russian monarch.⁸⁸ From the 1780s, Catherine developed a deep interest in Russian history, reading extensively in Russian chronicles and writing not only her *Zapiski kasatelno rossiiskoi istorii* [*Notes Concerning Russian History*, 1787-1794], but also her history plays and her pseudo-etymological work for her comparative dictionary. This research offered her a ready-made model for a Russian ruler invading Europe and fixing the ‘confusion des langues’: as she wrote to Grimm in 1795, she believed that Slavic peoples had overrun the entire world three times, leaving behind traces in all the world’s languages.⁸⁹ Her late resolution to lead Europe in recovering from savagery was part of this rather eccentric image of Russia as a conquering and civilising state. Curiously, she made no claims in her letters as to the existence of ‘chevalerie’ in Russia, despite her conviction that Russian history had run apace alongside European developments until the end of the sixteenth century.⁹⁰ But she considered Russian monarchs exemplary in their ability to make use of even the least civilised of elites: she cited the example of Peter the Great in opposition to Louis XVI’s example of failed leadership. Whereas Louis XVI seemed to have made optimal choices of ministers and allies, his reign was a catastrophe, but to be effective, Catherine claimed, ‘[il] s’agit d’employer ce qu’on a sous sa patte.’ Those who asserted that Russia lacked a sufficiently cultivated elite were deceived: ‘Pierre I en avait qui ne savaient ni lire, ni écrire; eh bien, les choses n’allaient-elles pas? [...] y a

⁸⁸ Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995-2000), I: *From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I* (1995), I, pp. 81-83.

⁸⁹ 13 April 1795 (OS), *SIRIO*, XXIII, pp. 607-608.

⁹⁰ Catherine to A. Mordvinov, for Sénac de Meilhan, 4 October 1790 (OS), *SIRIO*, XLII, p. 114: ‘il est vrai que les troubles, qui ont suivi la mort du Czar Ivan Wassiliéwitz avaient arriéré la Russie de 40 à 50 ans, mais avant ce temps elle allait de pair avec toute l’Europe.’

multitude, mais faut faire aller: tout ira s'il y aura cet autre faisant-aller.'⁹¹ That 'faisant-aller' was the will of the great monarch, and Catherine, in her very last letters, demonstratively exhibited the force of will that she planned to apply to saving Europe. In her final letter to the prince de Ligne, for example, she stated once more the importance of the great man's will: 'je pense qu'après la bénédiction de Dieu heur et malheur dépendent des hommes et justes mesures qu'on prend pour faire réussir ce qu'on veut. Mais pour vouloir il faut savoir ce qu'on veut.'⁹² Although Catherine explicitly compared herself to Cardinal Mazarin, this statement is also reminiscent of Voltaire's assertion in his *Anecdotes sur le czar Pierre le Grand*: 'Je le répète, on n'a qu'à vouloir; on ne veut pas assez'.⁹³ Just as her definitive memoirs opened with a Plutarchan parallel between herself and her husband, declaring that character traits and actions determined good and ill fortune, Catherine sought to leave behind in her letters the image of a Russian monarch whose character and determination brought her success as a great ruler and as a defender of the civilisation that could understand that greatness.⁹⁴

The French Revolution overturned every aspect of Catherine's world, and she naturally used letters to cope with this challenge as with all obstacles in her path. Yet the Revolution tore apart the social structures that produced the elite circulation patterns on which she had based her initial epistolary interactions with Western Europe and which long perservered as her preferred mode of correspondence. The Revolutionaries also reinvented the vocabulary, the stylistic preferences, and the notions of grandeur on

⁹¹ 28 August 1794 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, pp. 607-608.

⁹² 10 May 1796 (OS), *Correspondances russes*, I, p. 256.

⁹³ Voltaire, *Anecdotes sur le czar Pierre le Grand*, ed. by Michel Mervaud, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, XLVI: *Histoire de l'empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand* (1999), pp. 1-84 (p. 71).

⁹⁴ *Sochineniya imperatritsy Ekateriny II*, ed. by A. N. Pypin, XI, p. 197.

which Catherine drew to create her epistolary persona and personal style. The Revolutionary great man was an austere Roman Republican, and moreover a commoner, who would never understand the apparent frivolity of her sociable tone. Catherine responded with alarm to the immediate threat to her person and to her position, and her fears played out in her letters. But first and foremost she sought to display in her letters the self-confidence that she believed could solve the problem: true greatness, after all, was for her the product of a steadfast character. In mocking Revolutionary vocabulary and persisting in her sociable tone, she declared that her unabashedly hierarchical version of cultivated society still could and should reign supreme. She redesigned her former vision of the great man, reintegrating the formerly attenuated military requirements of heroism. But her great man remained a fighter against barbarism and an exemplar of a Stoic ethic. In her last letters, Catherine sought to perform before her contemporaries the role of a defender of traditional modes of greatness. If, as she hoped, civilisation would reclaim the upper hand, posterity might also find in these epistolary performances an admirable resolution to endure the Revolution's ravages and to reassert the order in which Catherine believed. Catherine's image was no longer enlightened in a manner recognisable to someone like Voltaire, but neither was the Europe into which she sent her letters. To the very end of her life, Catherine used her letters to create an epistolary persona that was both sociable and grand in the old manner. When she wrote to Grimm in 1791 that her portrait 'n'est pas celui d'un grand homme, plutôt d'une bonne âme', she was putting on one of her usual performances of modest personability.⁹⁵ In reality, she still meant to be both: an

⁹⁵ 13 May 1791 (OS), *SIRIO*, xxiii, p. 539.

individual whose letters made her likeable and won her allies, as well as a 'great man' whose letters won her the admiration of her contemporaries and of posterity.

CONCLUSION

Within a decade of Catherine's death, excerpts of her correspondence began to reach the posterity that she had imagined, including Russian readers. But the discovery of Catherine's letters did not feed into a thoughtful and admiring history of her reign, as she might have hoped. In Western Europe, Catherine's letters were printed not to serve her posthumous glory, but rather that of her addressees. The letters that were published in her lifetime continued to circulate and be reprinted: these included the full correspondence with Voltaire and the isolated letters to d'Alembert and de Ligne that had been published in journals. In addition to these already-available letters, the Zimmermann correspondence appeared in the context of a literary spat between his former friends, and a few extracts from the notes to Buffon were mentioned in a memoir published to celebrate this famous writer.¹ In Russia, after Catherine's avoidance of publication and the repression of her son Paul's reign, the government alone could initiate the printing of her letters in Russia. Alexander I enlisted Catherine's letters to support his own image as an enlightened ruler and as a follower of his grandmother's legacy.² Three official presses, the Imperial Typography and the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, and the Senate Typography in Moscow, all printed Russian

¹ 'Anhang, welcher einen Theil der Correspondenz der Kayserin mit dem Ritter von Zimmermann enthält. Als Belege', in H. M. Marcard, *Zimmermanns Verhältnisse mit der Kayserin Catharina II. und mit dem Herrn Weikard. Nebst einer Anzahl Original-Briefe der Kayserin* (Bremen: Carl Seyffert, 1803), pp. 301-96; Hérault de Séchelles, *Voyage à Montbar, contenant des détails très-intéressans sur le caractère, la personne et les écrits de BUFFON* (Paris: Solvet, An IX [1800-1801]), pp. 61-62.

² He declared in his accession manifesto that he would 'управлять Богом Нам врученный народ по законам и по сердцу в Бозе почивающей Августейшей Бабки Нашей, Государыни Императрицы Екатерины Великия' (*Polnoe sobranie zakonov rossiikoi imperii, s 1649 goda*, 45 vols (St. Petersburg: Tipografia II Otdeleniya Sobstvennoi Ego Imperatorskago Velichestva Kantselyarii, 1830), xxvi, p. 583 (number 19,779)).

translations of Catherine's correspondence with Voltaire in 1802.³ Russian translators and printers instantly responded to the emperor's signal: in 1803, two new translations were published in Moscow, one on the press of Moscow province and one by an independent printer.⁴ These publications and those that followed relied essentially on happenstance to acquire text: whatever was available in Western Europe was translated, and then letters to various civil servants began to appear. The Imperial Typography printed a Russian translation of the exchange with Zimmermann in the very same year (1803) that it first appeared in the original French.⁵ An 1807 edition of the *Perepiska imperatritsy Ekateriny II s raznymi osobami* [*Correspondence of Empress Catherine II with Various Individuals*] contained mostly her letters to Russian statesmen, generals, and churchmen, but also included translations of her famous letter to de Ligne of 6 November 1790 (OS) and an excerpt from her letter to Zimmermann of 19 July

³ *Filosoficheskaya i politicheskaya perepiska imperatritsy Ekateriny II s g. Volterom. S 1763 po 1778 god: Perevod s frantsuzskago*, 2 vols (St. Petersburg: v Imperatorskoi tipografii, 1802); *Filosoficheskaya i politicheskaya perepiska Imperatritsy Ekateriny Vtoriya s g. Volterom, prodolzhashayasya s 1763 po 1778 god [...]*, 2 vols (Moscow: V Senatskoi Tip. u Selivanovskago, 1802); *Perepiska rossiiskoi Imperatritsy Ekateriny Vtoriya s g. Volterom, s 1763 po 1778 god*, trans. by M. I. Antonovsky, 2 parts in 1 volume (St. Petersburg: Pri Imperatorskoi Akademii nauk, 1802). Antonovsky was put on trial for plagiarising this translation (L. A. Shilov, 'Antonovsky Mikhail Ivanovich', *Sotrudniki RNB—deyateli nauki i kultury: Biograficheskii slovar* <http://www.nlr.ru/nlr_history/persons/info.php?id=11> [accessed 22 December 2014]). I have not yet been able to verify whether all three books contain the same translation.

⁴ *Perepiska Ekateriny Velikiya s gospodinom Volterom*, trans. by Aleksandr Podlisetsky, 2 vols (Moscow: V Gubernskoi Tipografii, 1803); *Perepiska rossiiskoi imperatritsy Ekateriny II i gospodina Voltera, prodolzhashayasya s 1763 po 1778 god*, trans. by Ivan Fabiyan, 2 vols (Moscow: V volnoi Tipografii Gariya i Kompanii, 1803). All translations use the Kehl edition and include footnotes from the French edition. The translator for the official Russian version, printed on the Imperial Typography in 1802, must have used an un-censored copy of Kehl, while Fabiyan and Podlisetsky in 1803 used 'cancelled' copies. For example, the latter follow the 'canceled' version in omitting from Catherine's letter of 30 March 1772 (OS) passages about sending French officers to Siberia for fighting in Poland and about kissing sacred images: these passages were censored post-publication as dangerous for Catherine's foreign policy and for her position as head of the Russian Orthodox Church. (Letter 109 in *Filosoficheskaya i politicheskaya perepiska imperatritsy Ekateriny II s g. Volterom* (St. Petersburg: v Imperatorskoi tipografii, 1802), II, pp. 103, 105; *Perepiska Ekateriny Velikiya s gospodinom Volterom*, trans. by Aleksandr Podlisetsky, II, pp. 94-96; *Perepiska rossiiskoi imperatritsy Ekateriny II i gospodina Voltera*, trans. by Ivan Fabiyan, II, pp. 78-79; *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. by Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, 70 vols ([Kehl]: Imprimerie de la Société littéraire typographique, 1785-89), LXVII, pp. 233-34.) This difference in source texts had the interesting effect of rendering the official publication freer from censorship than the 'free' editions.

⁵ *Perepiska imperatritsy Ekateriny II s Doktorom Zimmermanom, s 1785 po 1792 god. Perevod s Frantsuzskago podlinnika* (St. Petersburg: v Imperatorskoi Tipografii, 1803).

1791 (OS).⁶ The next year, a subordinate of the former governor of Moscow, P. D. Eropkin, published the letters that Eropkin had received from Catherine in a rather luxurious edition, on gilt-edged paper and embellished with an engraved reproduction of her letter of 14 June 1786 (OS).⁷ The overwhelming tendency in these collections was to exhibit Catherine as a great ruler, to the detriment of her literary charm. The message was not to display her for her own historical merits: rather, Russian translators and publishers wanted to show off that they had a ruler who brought good order and military success to Russia and whose patronage of literature allowed her to rank alongside European monarchs. The letters in the *Perepiska imperatritsy Ekateriny II s raznymi osobami* collection were clearly selected to illustrate her military conquests and her domestic ordinances. For example, her light and entertaining letter to Count Stakelberg of 4 August 1774 (OS) was printed alongside the letter to which it replied, so its function as a response to Stakelberg's congratulations on peace with the Turks stood out more than her witticisms.⁸ N. M. Karamzin, meanwhile, focused attention on Catherine's patronage as emulation of the classic relationship between great writers and great rulers in Europe, like Augustus, Louis XIV, Frederick the Great, and Peter the Great.⁹ The lightness and literary qualities of Catherine's letters were already eclipsed by the sole image of grandeur, which itself was adapted for others' rhetorical purposes.

⁶ *Perepiska imperatritsy Ekateriny II s raznymi osobami* (St. Petersburg: V tipografii F. Drekhslera, 1807), pp. 138-42.

⁷ *Vysochaishiya sobstvennoruchnyya pisma i poveleniya blazhennoi i vechnoi slavy dostoinoi pamyati gosudarynya imperatritsy Ekateriny Velikiya, k pokoinomu Generalu Petru Dmitrievichu Erapkinu i vsepoddanneishiya ego doneseniya, v trekh Otdeleniyakh*, ed. by Yakov Rost (Moscow: V Universitetskoi Tipografii, 1808).

⁸ *Perepiska imperatritsy Ekateriny II s raznymi osobami*, pp. 81-85. Stripped of its closer, Stakelberg's letter concludes with the obvious message of the publication, which transfers attention from Catherine's sociability to her political mastery of Europe: 'Будет маскарад, освещение, фейерверк, ужин—и я заставлю их плясть, так же как Ваше Величество заставите плясать всю Европу по воле Своей' (p. 82).

⁹ 'Власть разума не может ли еще служить некоторою опорою для политической власти? Так думали Август, Лудовик XIV, Фридрих и Петр Великий, Который, приходя к Боржаву, к Лейбницу, говорил: я с вами человек! Так думала и Великая ЕКАТЕРИНА!' (N. M. Karamzin,

Yet Catherine's literary skill in her letters was also acknowledged: she became a model letter writer in her own time and in the generations immediately following. Her first letter to d'Alembert instantly made its way into an English epistolary manual, George Seymour's *The Instructive Letter-Writer, and Entertaining Companion*. Catherine appeared as the 'Empress of RUSSIA' on the title page of the manual alongside classical authors like Cicero and Pliny; other monarchs like Charles I, Anne Boleyn, and Prince George of Denmark; English nobles like the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough; and recent English writers like Addison and Steele. She even found her way into the French epistolary canon, with which she had flirted throughout her French correspondences. By 1807, one of her letters to Voltaire had entered Louis Philipon de la Madelaine's *Manuel épistolaire à l'usage de la jeunesse*, which became a textbook in French lycées and thus kept Catherine's letter in the hands of French students of the epistolary art well into the nineteenth century.¹⁰ In Russia, Catherine made the substantial literary contribution of becoming the first 'Russian' to enter the Russian epistolary canon. The 1808 *Noveishii polnyi pismovnik* [*Newest Complete Letter Writer*] was the first Russian manual to include real letters by a Russian—namely, Catherine. The manual's title page emphatically proclaimed Catherine to be an epistolary writer: its instructions on how to write letters came with 'several exemplary letters of CATHERINE the Great, and many other famous foreign writers [...] and other men who became famous in this genre'. The very first letter in the collection was a new translation of an excerpt from Catherine's letter to Zimmermann of 29 January 1789 (OS); the manual also included two letters from Catherine and two from Voltaire from

'Istoricheskoe pokhvalnoe slovo Ekaterine II', in *Sochineniya Karamzina*, vol. 8 (Moscow: Tipografiya S. Selivanovskago, 1804), pp. 1-188 (p. 160)).

¹⁰ Louis Philipon de la Madelaine, *Manuel épistolaire à l'usage de la jeunesse [...]*, 3rd edn (Paris: Capelle et Renand, 1807), pp. 289-90; 12th edn (Paris: Ferra Jeune, 1830), p. 259. The title page of the 12th edition bears the note 'Ouvrage adopté pour les Lycées'.

the 1802 Imperial Typography translation.¹¹ The same year a new edition of the *Vseobshchii sekretar, ili novyi i polnyi pismovnik* [*Universal Secretary, or New and Complete Letter Writer*] appeared ‘with the addition of model letters by Russian Empress Catherine II, Paul I, French Emperor Napoleon’: again, Catherine led the way as the first mentioned and chronologically the first imperial writer to offer model letters.¹² It was not until 1810 that a Russian man of letters, rather than a head of state or a general or statesman in correspondence with a ruler, made it into a manual: even then, the editors selected fictional letters from Karamzin’s *Letters of a Russian Traveller*.¹³ It was thus through the epistolary form only that Catherine succeeded in her long-standing goal of leading Russian literature. Her plays and history writings remained rather idiosyncratic exceptions, but her satirical journalism of 1769, which often took epistolary form and which sparked a spate of imitators, and her real letters translated and published in the early nineteenth century were genuinely pioneering.

The aim of this thesis has been to recover an understanding of her letters as unique literary texts. Catherine mastered this key eighteenth-century literary form both as an instrument for tactical interventions in governance, court, and cultural life and as a genre particularly well suited to creating and circulating an image of the writer. She

¹¹ *Noveishii polnyi pismovnik, ili vseobshchii sekretar, sodержashchei v sebe Polnoe nastavlenie kak sochinyat i pisat vsyakogo roda luchshiya i upotrebitelneishiya pisma, k raznym osobam, s priobshcheniem nekotorykh primernykh pisem EKATERINY Velikoi, i mnogikh drugikh znamenitykh inostrannykh pisatelei Voltera, Markizy Pompadur, Khristiny Korolevy Shvedskoi, Lorda Chesterfilda, Papi Ganganelli, Popa, Gerveya i prochikh v sem rode proslavivshikhsya muzhei [...]* (St. Petersburg: Pri 1-m Kadetskom Korpuse, 1808), pp. 1-9. Some of the other letters by heads of state were apocryphal, like those by ‘Madame de Pompadour’: they came from François de Barbe-Marbois, *Lettres de madame la marquise de Pompadour, depuis MDCCLIII jusqu’à MDCCLXII, inclusivement*, 2 vols (London: G. Owen and T. Cadell, 1771), a translation of which was published in Russian during Catherine’s reign, in keeping with the eighteenth-century Russian interest primarily in royal and fictional letters (*Dobroe serdtse i zdravoi razum ili Pisma markizy Pompadur* (St. Petersburg: Na izhd. P. Bogd[anovicha]: Pech. u Vidkovskago i Galchenkova, 1787)).

¹² *Vseobshchii sekretar, ili novyi i polnyi pismovnik [...]* s prisovokupleniem primernykh pisem rossiiskoi imperatritsy Ekateriny II, Pavla I, frantsuzskogo imp. Napoleona [...], 4th edn (St. Petersburg: Pechatano v tip. Ivana Glazunova, 1808).

¹³ Anna Joukovskaïa, ‘La naissance de l’épistolographie normative en Russie’, *Cahiers du monde russe*, 40, 4 (October-December 1999), 657-89 (pp. 677-78, 685-688).

made the most of the seemingly contradictory aesthetic demands of her century, writing in a contrastive style that alternated between charisma and power, authorship and authority, a personable tone and a persona of grandeur. To a great extent she succeeded, since this combination of power and attraction is what continues to allure readers today.

Yet the present thesis is only the beginning of the work that must still be done to rehabilitate fully Catherine's epistolary corpus. A complete edition of Catherine's letters is necessary for historical, literary, and art historical scholarship on Russia and all of Europe. The new possibilities of the digital age will permit Catherine's letters to be collected and studied in greater detail and greater breadth than ever before: a pilot project for a full database of Catherine's letters has been commenced alongside work on this thesis.¹⁴ Such a resource will facilitate statistical analyses, make the letters accessible to far broader audiences, and provide a more comprehensive view of Catherine's language usage, her intellectual influences, and her diverse activities as a ruler and writer. A significant international effort will be required to reach this goal, but this thesis has substantiated the value and potential of such an undertaking. Only then will Catherine's letters finally have reached posterity and fully revealed her project to achieve greatness for herself and for Russia and, *au détour d'une phrase*, to enchant readers at home and abroad with her unexpectedly beguiling wit.

¹⁴ *CatCor: The Correspondence of Catherine the Great*, <<http://www.catcor-dev.oucs.ox.ac.uk>>. This project has been funded by British Academy/Leverhulme Trust and the John Fell Fund and supervised by Professor Andrew Kahn as principal investigator.

TRANSLATIONS OF QUOTATIONS IN LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH AND FRENCH

Italics in the translations indicate other languages within French passages.

Chapter One: Catherine's Personal Style: Sociability, Humour, and Irony in the Correspondence

Page 31: 'Быть веселым, однако ничего не портить, и не ломать, и ничего не грызть'

'Be joyous, but spoil and break nothing, and gnaw on nothing either.'

Page 32: 'из Эрмитажа, где нет камер-пажа'

'from the Hermitage, where there is no page in attendance'

Wit

Variety

Page 44: 'В Понедельник в Чистой. Поздравляю заговевшись на хрен и на редьку и на белую капусту.'

'On Clean Monday. I congratulate those who have begun fasting on horse-radish, radishes, and white cabbage.'

Page 44: 'Богу благодарю, что угрожаемая Нижнему-Новугороду от злодея опасность поминалась, [...] Уф тяжело, горько было да позабычливо! Теперь крушится меня народное в трех губерниях разорение.'

'Thanks be to God that the danger that threatened Nizhnyi Novgorod from the villain has passed, [...] Oof, what a bitter and hard time it was, a time to be forgotten! Now I mourn for the people's ruin in three provinces.'

Page 45: 'Verderben sie mir nur nichts durch unnütze Geschwätze von den Weibern und Leuten im Hause. Je weniger Geschnack, je besser.'

'Just don't spoil anything for me with useless gossip from the women and servants in the house. The less chatter, the better.'

Page 46: 'il y a un proverbe Russe qui dit que у древа казны все родня.'

'there is a Russian proverb that says that *everyone's related around the tree of the state treasury*.'

Page 48: 'je me disais: "Si tu pleureras, les autres sangloteront [...] tout le monde perdra et tête et tramontane, und alles das wird unverantwortlich werden."'

'I said to myself: "If you cry, the others will sigh [...] everyone will lose their wits and their weathervanes, *and all that will become unaccountable*."'

Page 51: 'Je suis persuadée que plus vous y rêverez, et plus vous y trouverez un grand sens und eine große Einbildung mit eine gewirkte Confusions-Kraft die denen Lackenkrämern ungewohnt ist, denen Post-Commissairen aber sehr wunderlich vorkommen wird, weil sie den Schah Baham nicht gelesen noch gehört haben, dieser sich aber unvergleichlich selbst verstand, den Andern aber dunkel schien. Tout cela n'est pas monosyllabe, mais jaserie toute pure sur le passé, le présent et le futur, mais j'oublie que je vous parle pour répondre à trois de vos lettres, que ce galimatias pindarique, physico-politico-philosophico, est là commencé sur ma table depuis dix jours [...]'.
'I am convinced that the more you ponder it, the more you will find in it great significance *and a great imagination with a well-wrought power of confusion, to which the lacquer-mongers are unaccustomed, but which will seem very strange to the Post-Inspectors, for they have never read nor heard of Schah Baham. But he understood himself incomparably well, but seemed obscure to others. All that is not monosyllabic, but rather pure chatter on the past, present, and future. But I forget that I am talking to you to reply to three of your letters and that this Pindaric physico-politico-philosophico-gibberish has been there underway on my table for ten days [...]*'.

Irony

Catherine's Personal Voice in Her Love Letters

Page 63: 'Благодарствую за посещение. Я не понимаю, что Вас удержало.'

'I thank you for the visit. I can't fathom what kept you away.'

Page 64: ‘Милая милуша, я встала очень весела и просвещеннее, нежели ложилась. Куда, сказывают, греки в старину какие хитрые были люди [...] но милее, умнее, красивее гораздо их тот, с кого списан точь-в-точь Артикул délicieux [in the *Encyclopédie*], то есть Гришенька мой любезный.’

‘Sweet sweetheart, I got up very cheerful and more enlightened than when I went to bed. They say that the Greeks were such very cunning people in the olden times [...] but the one whose spitting image is painted in the article “délicieux” [“delicious”, in the *Encyclopédie*] is far sweeter, cleverer, and handsomer than they: my darling Grishenka, that is.’

Page 64: (‘Дозволяю’); (‘Рука руку моет’); (‘Дай успокоиться мыслям, дабы чувства действовать свободно могли; оне нежны, сами сыщут дорогу лучую’).

‘I permit it’; ‘Scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours’; ‘Let our thoughts subside, so that our feelings can act freely; they are tender and will find a better path on their own’.

Page 64: ‘оплакал ты пустяки, а обида нигде со фанарем в руках никто не отищет. Прарочество само собою исчезнит, когда основано не на предвидящая здоровое рассуждение’.

‘You were crying over trifles, but no one can find an offence anywhere, even if they search with a lamp. Prophecies disappear on their own when not founded on prescient, sound reasoning’.

Pages 64-65: ‘Попу на рясы, попадье на платье дано будет. Испрашиваю себе за то при первом свидании взгляду благоприяженного; теперь же иду молиться о вашем здоровье в антресоль.’

‘The priest will get something for a cassock, the priest’s wife for a dress. I will ask for a friendly glance for myself when I next meet you; for the moment I am going to pray for your health on the mezzanine.’

Chapter Two: The Play of Authority in Epistolary Form

Authority and Authorship

Authority and Linguistic Mastery

Page 72: ‘я тебя и службу твою, исходящие из чистого усердия, весьма, весьма люблю, и ты сам безценный’.

‘I love you and your service, which come from pure zeal, very, very much, and you yourself are priceless’.

Page 72: ‘Сколь мне чувствительны оно [писания] изъяснения, то Богу известно. Ты мне паче родной матери’.

‘God knows how affected I was by the explications in that letter. You are more than my own mother to me’.

Page 73, footnote 17: ‘Между тобою и мною, мой друг, дело в кратких словах: ты мне служишь, а я признательна. Вот и все тут’.

‘Between you and me, my friend, all can be said in a few words: you serve me, and I’m grateful. That’s all here’.

Page 73: (‘Как я чаю, ты пуще хорош и чист после бани’)

‘I reckon you’re even more handsome and clean after your bath’

Page 73: (‘Подумаю, что в Сенате сию’)

‘I’ll imagine I’m sitting in the Senate’

Page 73: (‘Каково-то тебе мило с таковою разстройкою ума обходиться, не ведаю’)

‘I don’t know how it can be nice for you to deal with such a distemper of the mind’

Page 75: ‘comment la cour d’équité de Smolensk peut-elle se mêler des affaires d’autrui sans le désir des autrui [...] kommt Zeit, kommt Rath, sagen die Bürgermeister der freien Reichs-Städte, en frappant des doigts sur leurs tabatières d’argent et affectant de rire en tousotant.’

‘how can the equity court of Smolensk intervene in the affairs of others without the others desiring it [...] *time brings wisdom, say the mayors of free imperial cities, tapping their silver snuffboxes and pretending to laugh as they cough.*’

Page 76: ‘Die Ränke der Mißgunst, die sitzen wo sie sitzen; das Sprichwort sagt: kommt Zeit—kommt Rath und die Röthereyen bleiben im Rothe, so wie auch die Röther.’

‘The cabals of envy sit where they sit; the proverb says: time brings wisdom, and filth remains in filth, as do the filthy dogs.’

Page 76, Footnote 25: ‘Известно, что народы и языки народов мудростию и тщанием вышних правителей умножаются и распространяются. Каков Государь благоразумен, о чести своего народа и языка прилежен, по тому и язык того народа процветет’

‘It is well known that peoples and their languages are multiplied and spread by the wisdom and zeal of supreme rulers. The language of a people will flourish in accordance with the sovereign’s prudence and assiduity for the honour of his people and its language.’

Authority and Writing Practices

Page 82: ‘На весьма дружеское письмо Короля Прусского буду ответствовать, а между тем к Вам обратно посылаю церемониальное его письмо, дабы ответ Коллегия изготовила.’

‘I shall answer the King of Prussia’s very friendly letter, and in the meantime I am sending back to you his ceremonial letter, so that the College can prepare an answer.’

Page 83: ‘собственноручно писать изволила к Грейгу о шведских и финских обстоятельствах.’

‘she was pleased to write to Greig in her own hand about Swedish and Finnish affairs’

Page 83: 'Письмо начато 22-го, после обеда, и кончено 23-го, по утру; при мне читано.'

'The letter was begun on the 22nd after lunch and completed on the 23rd in the morning; it was read aloud in my presence.'

Page 83: 'Истребовано вчерашнее письмо Нессельрода; сами ответ писать станут.'

'She demanded Nesselrode's letter from yesterday; she will write an answer herself.'

Page 83: 'Я разучилась писать, прикажите составить примерный ответ.'

'I've unlearned how to write: order them to compose a sample answer.'

Page 85: 'Ваше благоразумие и ко мне дружба обещают вашему другу, что мое письмо подастся тогда, когда е. в. не отягощена другими делами, дабы оно яснее рассмотрено было. И прошу об ответственности [...]'.

'Your prudence and friendship for me promise your friend that my letter will be presented at a time when Her Majesty is not burdened with other affairs, so that it will be examined more clearly. And I ask for a reply [...]'.

Page 85, Footnote 48: 'Дуралеюшка Зубов удивился, услыша от Дмитрия Прокофьевича Трошинского, что секретари Ея Величества докладывают по входящим бумагам и подают указы к подписанию, и ставят на них числа'.

'The little fool Zubov was surprised to hear from Dmitry Prokofevich Troshchinsky that Her Majesty's secretaries report on incoming papers, present decrees to be signed, and put dates on them'.

Page 85: 'что я сама пишу, в том отчетом не обязана'

'I am not obliged to give an account of what I write myself'

Page 86, Footnote 50: 'Спокойно писали с моей руки к Графу Алексею Григ[орьевичу] Орлову Чесменскому о приемлемом соучастии в печали по смерти брата его, Гр[афа] Ивана Гр. Орлова, случившейся 18 Ноября'.

'She calmly wrote in my hand to Count Aleksey Grig[orevich] Orlov Chesmensky about her sympathy for his grief at his brother C[ount] Ivan Gr. Orlov's death, which occurred on 18 November'.

Page 87: ‘Читали мне в шутливом слоге многозамыкающее в себе письмо к Принцу де Линь. Тут сказано, что le délire de Montcoeur (Hertzberg) est digne des petites maisons. Мне сие изъяснено.’

‘She read to me a letter to the prince de Ligne that contains much meaning in a jocular style. In it, it is said that Mountain-Heart (Hertzberg)’s delirium is worthy of the madhouse. This was explained to me.’

Page 87, Footnote 54: ‘Голубчик, при сем посылаю к Вам письмо к Гр[афу] Алек[сею] Гр[игорьевичу] Орлову. Если в орфографии есть ошибка, то прошу, поправя, где надобно, ко мне возвратить’.

‘Sweet dove, I attach a letter to C[oun]t Alek[sey] Gr[igorevich] Orlov. If there are any mistakes, I beg you to correct it as necessary and return it to me’.

Page 87, Footnote 55: ‘Смотрел письма В. К-м и К-нам [великим князьям и княжнам]’

‘I looked over the letters to the G. D-s and D-sses [grand dukes and duchesses]’

Page 87, Footnote 55: ‘Александра Павловна, портрет мой маленький я к вам пришлю, буде здесь подобный отыщу. Я вас мысленно целую. ЕКАТЕРИНА’

‘Aleksandra Pavlovna, I will send my little portrait to you, if I find such a one here. I kiss you in my thoughts. EKATERINA’

Page 89: ‘При сем к Вам посылаю письмо к Графу Горну [presumably the Swedish Count Adam Horn of Ekebyholm]; если оное Вам не нравится, то извольте сказать, в чем’.

‘I send you herewith a letter to Count Horn. If you do not like it, please explain why’.

Page 89: ‘Буде найдете приложенное ответное письмо достаточным и поправления не требующим, то отошлите, куда надлежит, списав копии.’

‘If you find the attached letter of reply satisfactory and not requiring corrections, then copy it and send it where it should go.’

Page 89: ‘Вы более похвалы письму моему к Королю Прусскому даете, нежели я ожидала, сочиня оное, и для того кондиционально к Вам послала.’

‘You praise my letter to the King of Prussia more than I expected when composing it; that is why I sent it to you conditionally.’

Page 89: ‘Не угодно ли будет Вашему Императорскому Величеству в письме вашем к Императору включить засвидетельствование благодарности и признания Вашего за сообщения, в крайней доверенности по повелению его графом Кобенцелем учиненных.’

‘Will it please Your Imperial Majesty to include in your letter to the Emperor a statement of Your gratitude and appreciation for the highly confidential communications that Count Cobenzl made on his orders.’

Pages 89-90: ‘Буде не найдешь, чего прибавить, то пошли приложенное письмо.’

‘If you can find nothing to add, then please send the attached letter.’

Epistolary Etiquette *Materiality*

Page 99: (‘Посмотри, пожалуй, ненарочно случилось, а опять новое [письмо]—лист сей попался, так разгляди, пожалуй, лист поперек писан’).

‘Look, please, I didn’t do it on purpose, but here’s yet another [letter]—I came across this sheet, and look, please, the sheet has been written all across’.

Page 99: ‘Adieu, французские пять томов in-folio.’

‘Farewell, five French volumes in-folio.’

Salutations

Page 111: ‘по божью изволенью, а не по многоятежному человечества хотению’

‘by the will of God, and not by the most stormy desires of humanity’

Page 112: ‘Тако убо и вы мнесте под ногами быти у вас всю Русскую землю; но вся мудрость ваша ни во что же бысть божиим изволением. Сего ради трость наша наострился к тебе писати.’

‘And so you thought that the whole Russian land would be under your feet, but by God’s will your sagacity came to nothing. For this reason we have sharpened our pen to write to you.’

Page 112: ‘Писмо ваше я принял, на которое отвечаю. Зело удивляюсь тебе, понеже я чаял, что есть ум в вас, а ныне как вижу, что скота глупее.’

‘I received your letter, to which I am replying. I am very surprised at you, for I thought that you had a brain, but I now see that you are dumber than a beast.’

Closers

Page 116: ‘пребываю к вам благосклонна’; ‘В прочем остаюсь как всегда к вам доброжелательна’

‘I remain well disposed toward you’; ‘Moreover I continue as always to wish you well’

Page 116, Footnote 136: ‘halten Sie sich des aufrichtigen Wohlwollens versichert mit dem Ich stets verbleiben werde’

‘be assured of the sincere goodwill with which I will constantly remain’

Foregoing Etiquette

Page 120: ‘Петр Васильевич, от трех до четырех тысячи душ по вашему выбору в Беларуси и в Украину [...]’

‘Petr Vasilevich, from two to three thousand souls [male serfs] of your choice in Belorussia and Ukraine [...]’

Page 121: ‘Желаю вам здравствовать и остаюсь к вам всегда доброжелательная’

‘I wish you good health and continue always to wish you well’

Page 126: ‘Мой господине и брате любезнейший (и друже истинною, а не политикою)’

‘My lord and most dear brother (and friend truly, not politically)’

Pages 129-130: ‘Милая милушечка Гришенька, здравствуй’, ‘Душенька Гришенька’, ‘Миленький голубчик и безценный дружочек’, ‘Душатка’

‘Sweetest little sweetheart Grishenka, hello’, ‘Darling Grishenka’, ‘Sweet little dove and priceless dear friend’, ‘Little soul’

Affection-Seeking Formulae

Balancing Formulae with Other Structural Elements

Postscripts

Page 142: ‘Прочтя сие письмо, мне оно показалось очень чинно написано и для того заблагоразсудила сказать, что я тебя, мой друг, очень люблю запросто.’

‘When I read over this letter, it seemed very ceremoniously written, and so I thought it fit to say very simply that I love you very much, dear friend.’

Page 142: ‘всякой час спешить в опасности, и добровольно в них вдаваться как простому солдату отнюдь не надобно, чтоб без всякой нужды потерять жизнь, которая со временем может быть весьма полезна, естли Вы ее соблюдете на пристойной Вам случай.’

‘There absolutely is no need to rush into dangers at all times and willingly to expose yourself like a simple soldier, and thus needlessly to lose a life that could in time be very useful, if you preserve it for the proper occasion.’

Page 142: ‘Но как с моей стороны я весьма желаю ревностных, храбрых, умных и искусных людей сохранить, то Вас прошу попустому не даваться в опасности.’

‘But since, for my part, I very much desire to preserve zealous, brave, intelligent, and skilful people, I beg you not to rush into dangers to no purpose.’

Pages 142-43: ‘Господин Генерал-Поручик и Кавалер’; ‘ибо я всегда к Вам весьма доброжелательна. / Екатерина.’

‘Lieutenant-General and Cavalier, sir’; ‘for I continue always to wish you very well. / Ekaterina.’

Page 143: (‘усердие ко мне персонально и вообще к любезному Отечеству, которого службу Вы любите’); (‘Вы, я чаю, столь упражнены глазенъем на Силистрию, что Вам некогда письма читать’).

‘[your] zeal to me personally and in general to the dear Fatherland, the service of which you love’; ‘You, I imagine, are so busy eyeing Silistria, that you have no time to read letters’.

Page 143: ‘Скажите и бригадиру Павлу Потемкину спасибо за то, что он хорошо турок принял и угостил, когда оне пришли за тем, чтоб у Вас батарею испортить на острове.’

‘Tell Brigadier Pavel Petrovich thank you too for receiving and regaling the Turks well when they came to spoil your battery on the island.’

Page 144: (‘Впрочем остаюсь ныне, как и всегда, к вам с неотменной уверенностью и дружбою’)

‘Moreover I remain today, as always, with unfailing trust and friendship towards you’

Page 145: ‘Поздравляю вас с именинами. Где то вы сей день празднуете?’

‘I wish you a happy name day. Where are you celebrating this day?’

Signatures, Addresses, and Attachments

Page 146, Footnote 212: ‘дабы чрез то дать знать Прусскому королю, что Турок спасти не может’

‘thereby to let the Prussian king know that he cannot save the Turks’

Page 147: ‘За сим желаю вам здравствовать и остаюсь к вам доброжелательна, / А кто я вы ведаете.’

‘After that, I wish you good health and I continue to wish you well, / And you know who I am.’

Page 148: ‘wenn sie auch nur einige Zeilen schrieb, so war das Zettelchen versiegelt, und es stand eine Adresse darauf.’

‘Even when she wrote only a few lines, the little scrap of paper was sealed and addressed.’

Page 149, Footnote 224: ‘Die Herrn Gelehrten tächten woll, wenn sie das schelten und zanken beyseiten laßen wolten. Den dabey ist sehr wenig Ehre zu verdienen’

‘The scholars would do well to leave off scolding and squabbling. For there is very little honour to be gained thereby.’

Page 150: ‘Отдать генерал прокурору Александру Ивановичу Глебову’

‘Give to General-Procurator Aleksandr Ivanovich Glebov’

Page 150: ‘an den Hof und Kamer / artz Weickart’

‘to the Court and Chamber Doctor Weickart’

Page 151: ‘Из Оренбурга от Киргизской Царевны к Мурзе’

‘From Orenburg, from the Kirgiz Princess to the Murza’

Pages 152-53: ‘тридцать ананасов, которые к вам посылаю, зная, что вы их любите’

‘thirty pineapples, which I am sending to you because I know that you like them’

Chapter Three: The Letters of an Enlightenment *Grand Homme*

More-Than-Military Greatness

The Correct Exercise of Military Might

Page 167: ‘Государи и государства должны полагать взаимное свое поведение одних к другим на обще принятых правилах естественной справедливости.’

‘Sovereigns and states should base their mutual behaviour to one another on the generally accepted rules of natural equity.’

Page 168: ‘польза и слава отечества Нашего требуют неотменно сохранять и утверждать в публице сие для Нас толь выгодное мнение.’

‘the advantage and glory of Our fatherland require that we preserve and strengthen without fail such a favourable image of Us amongst the public.’

Page 168: ‘для того и надобно, чтоб все наши меры и предприятия действительно ограничивались в пределах видимаго правосудия и собственной безкорыстности, а особливо те, кои ныне, под вашим мужественным и патриотическим руководством, производится в Греции’.

‘for that very reason we must really limit ourselves to obvious justice and our own disinterestedness in all our measures and undertakings, but especially those which are now being carried out in Greece under your courageous and patriotic leadership’.

Compensating for Military Heroism: Flourishing Provinces

Page 173: ‘Петр Первый, принуждая натуру, в Балтических своих заведениях и строениях имел более препятствий, нежели мы в Херсоне.’

‘Peter the First, overcoming nature, faced more obstacles in his Baltic institutions and constructions than we do in Kherson.’

Page 175: ‘мы здесь чванимся ездою и Тавридою и тамошними Генерал-Губернаторскими распоряжениями, кои добры без конца и во всех частях.’

‘Here we are boasting of the ride and of the Crimea and of the local Governor-General’s dispositions, which are endlessly and in all respects good.’

Page 176: ‘здесь Я нашла треть прекрасной легкой конницы той про которой некоторые **незнающие** люди твердили до ныне будто она лишь числится на бумаге’.

‘here I found a third of the light cavalry, of which certain **ignorant** people have hitherto insisted that it exists only on paper’.

Page 176: ‘В здешней Губернии труд и прилежность, везде очутительно, что Мне весьма приятно’

‘In this province labour and diligence can be perceived everywhere, which pleases Me greatly’

Pages 176-77: ‘столько разных объектов, достойных взгляду, idée же на десять лет здесь собрать можно; c’est un Empire à part et il n’y a qu’ici, où l’on peut voir ce, que c’est que l’immense entreprise de nos lois’.

‘so many different objects worthy of examination, one could gather ten years’ worth of ideas[s] here; it is an empire of its own, and only here can one see what an immense enterprise our laws are’.

Patronage of the Arts and Sciences

Page 182: ‘Mais écoutez donc, cette année est fatale au mérite, [...] tous mes partisans désertent; aber, mein Gott, was wird denn das werden?’

‘But listen then, this year has been fatal to merit, [...] all my supporters are abandoning me; *but, my God, what ever shall come of it?*’

Ethical Greatness

Page 185: ‘Облекись, матушка, твердостью на все попытки, а паче против внутренних и внешних бурбонцев’.

‘Gird yourself, dear mother, with steadfastness against all trials, and most of all against internal and external Bourbons’.

Page 185: 'Я не могу без утешения взирать на славу что приобрела она себе и своему государству твердостью своего духа [...]. Твердость есть наипервейшее качество человека'.

'I cannot regard other than with great consolation the glory that she acquired for herself and her state by the steadfastness of her spirit [...]. Steadfastness is the very first quality of humanity'.

Page 186: 'уныние могло тем наипаче быть вреднее, что подобное расположение душевное предводительствующаго, какою бы он ревностью и усердием впрочем ни наполнен был, не может иного действия в подчиненных произвести, как упадок души и ослабление'.

'despondency could have been all the more harmful, since such a disposition of mind in a leader, no matter how filled he is with zeal and ardour, cannot but cause his subordinates to lose heart and grow weaker'.

Page 186: 'Не унывая в сем нещастии и замыкая печаль горькую в сердце моем, я стараюсь, чтоб общему делу возратить поверхность, колико можно.'

'I will not lose heart in this misfortune, will lock up my bitter grief in my heart, and will try to set right the common cause as far as is possible.'

The Legislator

Chapter Four: Epistolary Publicity and the Audience for Catherine's Western Correspondences

Page 198: 'eine Art politischer Reklame für sich' 'die öffentliche Meinung Europas [zu] beeinflussen'

'a kind of political advertisement for herself'; 'to influence European public opinion'

The Injunction Against Publication

Building Reputation through Networks of Epistolary Sociability

Page 221: 'Но мужество Орла [Салтыкова] Диана [Екатерина] почитает, / И весь пернатый свет его заслуги знает.'

'But Diana [Catherine] respects the Eagle's [Saltykov's] courage, / And the whole of the winged world [also high society] knows his merits.'

Managing Celebrity through Epistolary Circulation

Page 233, Footnote 91: 'Diesen Abend war Meilhan unterhaltender, aber seine eitle Selbstgenügsamkeit war in jedem Worte, in jeder Gebärde sichtbar. Er sprach von seinem Briefwechsel mit der Kaiserin, wie Zimmermann von dem seinigen mit dieser Monarchin spricht'

'This evening Meilhan was more entertaining, but his vain self-satisfaction was visible in every word and every gesture. He spoke of his correspondence with the empress as Zimmermann speaks of his with that monarch.'

From Reputation to Glory: Writing for Posterity via 'gens de mérite'

Page 235: 'о моих делах оставляю времени и потомкам безпристрастно судить'

'I will leave it to time and posterity to judge my deeds impartially'

Pages 236-37: 'Для будущих времен сии письма будут любопытны [...] думаю, что не Моя сторона останется слабейшая.'

'These letters will be curious in future times [...] I think I will not prove to be the weaker side.'

Page 242, Footnote 113: ‘Nu, mein Herr, wie sind Sie mit uns zufrieden? Sind wir nicht faul gewesen?’

‘Well, good sir, are you satisfied with us? Have we not been idle?’

Chapter Five: Greatness Challenged: Catherine's Epistolary Response to the French Revolution

Catherine's Epistolary Tactics in Fighting the Revolution

Page 251: 'Я таким образом сменила Шуазеля, переписываясь с Вольтером.'

'I thus replaced Choiseul by corresponding with Voltaire.'

Page 251: 'ныне по корреспонденции с Циммерманном сменили Герцберга.'

'now, by corresponding with Zimmermann, you have replaced Hertzberg.'

Page 251: 'И впрям так, я и забыла.'

'It is indeed so. I had forgotten.'

Old and New in Catherine's Personal Epistolary Style

Greatness Challenged

Conclusion

Page 282, Footnote 2: ‘управлять Богом Нам врученный народ по законам и по сердцу в Бозе почивающей Августейшей Бабки Нашей, Государыни Императрицы Екатерины Великия’

‘govern the people entrusted to Us by God according to the laws and the heart of Our late Most August Grandmother, the Sovereign Empress Catherine the Great’

Page 284, Footnote 8: ‘Будет маскарад, освещение, фейерверк, ужин—и я заставлю их плясть, так же как Ваше Величество заставите плясать всю Европу по воле Своей’.

‘There will be a masquerade, an illumination, fireworks, supper—and I will make them dance just as Your Majesty makes all Europe dance to Your will’.

Page 284, Footnote 9: ‘Власть разума не может ли еще служить некоторою опорою для политической власти? Так думали Август, Лудовик XIV, Фридрих и Петр Великий, Который, приходя к Боргаву, к Лейбницу, говорил: *я с вами человек!* Так думала и Великая ЕКАТЕРИНА!’

‘Can the power of the mind not also serve as a certain support for political power? So thought Augustus, Louis XIV, Frederick, and Peter the Great, who, on approaching Boerhaave and Leibniz, said: *I am a man like you!* So thought the Great Catherine too!’

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