

The Enlightened Virago

Princess Dashkova through the Eyes of Others



Edited by Georgina Barker

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The Enlightened Virago: Princess Dashkova through the Eyes of Others

&

Princess Dashkova, the Woman Who Shook the World

A historical verbatim play in three acts

Georgina Barker

The Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities

The University of Edinburgh

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The Enlightened Virago: Princess Dashkova through the Eyes of Others
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Princess Dashkova, the Woman Who Shook the World

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To read this as an e-book, or to watch a video of the play, visit: www.tinyurl.com/princess-dashkova

About the Author

Georgina Barker is a researcher and translator of Russian, specialising in Russian receptions of classical antiquity. She holds a PhD in Russian Literature from the University of Edinburgh. She was a postdoctoral fellow at IASH from June to December 2018, where she researched the reception of Princess Dashkova between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries. As an MHRA scholar at the University of Exeter she is currently writing her book *USSR Meets SPQR: Classical Antiquity in the Poetry of Elena Shvarts*. Her next research project, supported by a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship at UCL, explores Russian receptions of classical 'lesbians'. The gender-bending Princess Dashkova, memorialised so unconventionally by Shvarts, bridges Georgina's current and upcoming projects very aptly.

Катерина Романовна

Она – душа осьмнадцатого века, –
Он ветром ей наполнил рукава!
Но гордая его библиотека
Была бы неполна и не права,

Когда бы – из его злодейств отсека –
Не выкрала б ни искры озорства,
Не выкроила б ни смешинки смеха
Двух Академий царственных глава!

Век самодурства, век самоуправства,
Зловещих и нешуточных интриг,
Не мог на (нестандартное!) лукавство

И вас не натолкать, княгиня книг,
Что все дела мечтала кончить ладом, –
Спиною повернувшись к чаше с ядом.

Katerina Romanovna

She was the soul of the eighteenth century –
Its breezes blew in and filled her sleeves!
But its illustrious library
Would have been incorrect and incomplete,

Had not she – from its alcove of villainy –
Stolen a single spark of mischief,
Or sliced just one giggle of gaiety –
She, the head of two royal Academies!

Age of tyranny, age of usurpation,
Of sinister schemes and a serious coup,
It could not but to (unique!) deception

Drive even you, Princess of print, who
Dreamed of patching everything up,
Turning your back on the poisoned cup.

Novella Matveeva, from *Sonnets to Dashkova* (1989-1993), *Sonety*, p. 33,
translated from Russian by G. Barker

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Timeline

1743	<i>17 March</i>	Born Countess Ekaterina Romanovna Vorontsova
1759	<i>Winter</i>	Meets Catherine
	<i>February</i>	Marries Prince Mikhail Dashkov
1760	<i>21 February</i>	Gives birth to Anastasia
1761	<i>January</i>	Gives birth to Mikhail
1762	<i>28 June</i>	Catherine II takes the throne
	<i>Autumn</i>	Son Mikhail dies
1763	<i>May</i>	Gives birth to Pavel
1764	<i>August</i>	Husband Mikhail dies
1769-71		Tours Europe
1775-82		Travels to Europe for son Pavel's education
1776-79	<i>December-June</i>	Lives in Edinburgh
1783	<i>January</i>	Appointed director of Academy of Sciences
	<i>October</i>	Founds the Russian Academy
1788	<i>January</i>	Son Pavel marries Anna Alferova
1789		Publishes Russian Academy Dictionary
1793		Falls out with Catherine over publishing <i>Kniazhnin</i>
1794		Retires from Academies
1796		Catherine II dies, succeeded by Paul
		Paul I exiles Dashkova to northern Russia
1797		Returns from exile
1801		Paul I murdered, succeeded by Alexander
1803		Martha Wilmot arrives
1805		Writes <i>Memoirs</i>
		Catherine Wilmot arrives
1807	<i>January</i>	Son Pavel dies
		Catherine Wilmot leaves
1808	<i>October</i>	Martha Wilmot leaves
1810	<i>4 January</i>	Dies

Introduction

Dashkova's exploits made her one of the most talked-about women of the Enlightenment. Aged just 19, Dashkova overthrew the Tsar to put her friend Catherine the Great on the Russian throne. After her husband's early death, she took control of his precarious finances, and travelled around Europe with her two young children. In her thirties she lived in Edinburgh for two years to put her son through the university; while in Scotland, she raised more than a few eyebrows with her cross-dressing, and became the first Russian to tour the Highlands (her account of this tour still exists). By 40, Dashkova was the head of not one but two Russian Academies – of science and of language and literature – the first woman in Europe to hold an equivalent office. She was by most accounts an extremely capable administrator of the Russian Academy of Sciences, making it solvent again, expanding its collections and buildings, and bringing many foreign scholars and scholarship to Russia and Russian. At the Russian Academy she made great personal contributions to Russian linguistics, and promoted literature in Russian – her second language, which she learned so she could communicate with her husband's Muscovite family. However, after eleven years at the helm, she fell foul of Catherine's paranoia and retired to her estate – before being briefly exiled to Siberia by Catherine's son Paul. A few years before her death, when her house guest Catherine Wilmot recognised her capabilities, thinking 'she would be most in her element at the Helm of the State', Dashkova had disappeared from the world stage into obscurity – an obscurity in which she still languishes.

This work aims to bring Dashkova back to the public view. It brings together many accounts of Dashkova from both eyewitnesses and posterity, presenting a multifaceted figure who is sometimes lovable, sometimes monstrous. I hope this external viewpoint will complement the internal viewpoint in Dashkova's *Memoirs*. It also presents the verbatim play *Princess Dashkova, the Woman Who Shook the World*, in which 25 characters discuss Dashkova within a fantasy salon, presided over by Dashkova herself. The play was performed (to great acclaim) at St Cecilia's Hall in Edinburgh on 29th November 2018, 235 years to the day after Dashkova introduced the letter 'ë' to the Cyrillic alphabet, and 240 years after Dashkova's visit to Edinburgh.

Dr Georgina Barker

Institute of Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh, 2018

Youth

Aleksandr Gertsen, ‘Princess Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova’ (1857),
translated from Russian by G. Barker

The nineteenth-century liberal thinker, writer, and historian Aleksandr Gertsen (or Alexander Herzen) was the first translator of Dashkova’s Memoirs into Russian.

“Дашкова родилась женщиной и женщиной осталась всю жизнь. Сторона сердца, нежности, преданности, была в ней необыкновенно развита. [...] Дашковой русская женская личность, разбуженная петровским разгромом, выходит из своего затворничества, заявляет свою способность и требует участия в деле государственном, в науке, в преобразовании России — и смело становится рядом с Екатериной.

В Дашковой чувствуется та самая сила, не совсем устроенная, которая рвалась к просторной жизни из-под плесени московского застоя, что-то сильное, многостороннее, деятельное петровское, ломоносовское, но смягченное аристократическим воспитанием и женственностью.”

“С первого свидания Дашкова любит Екатерину страстно, «обожает ее», как пансионерки обожают своих старших совоспитанниц; она влюблена в нее, как мальчики бывают влюблены в тридцатилетних женщин.”

“Dashkova was born a *woman* and remained a *woman* all her life. In her, the area of the heart, tenderness, loyalty, was uncommonly well developed. [...] In Dashkova, Russian *female identity*, roused by Peter’s rout, emerges from its seclusion, declares its capability, and demands participation in state business, in science, in the transformation of Russia – and boldly stands alongside Catherine.

In Dashkova can be felt that same, somewhat disorganised strength, which had exploded out into rampant life from under the mildew of Muscovite stagnation, something strong, multifaceted, dynamic, Petrine, Lomonosovian, but softened by aristocratic education and femininity.”

“From their first meeting, Dashkova loves Catherine passionately, ‘adores her’, like schoolgirls adore girls from the higher forms; she is in love with her, like boys are in love with thirty-year-old women.”

Notes from Grand Duchess Catherine to Dashkova (c. 1760-2), *Memoirs of the Princess Daschkaw*, vol. 2, pp. 65-81

The future Catherine the Great met Dashkova at a supper at the palace of Vice Chancellor Vorontsov (Dashkova's uncle), when Dashkova was fifteen and Catherine thirty.

“What verse and what prose! – and this at seventeen! I beg, nay, I conjure you not to neglect so singular a talent. Perhaps I may appear not quite an unprejudiced judge, since in this instance, dearest princess, it is your too flattering partiality which has made me the subject of your charming composition. Tax me, however, with vanity, or what you please, I must be allowed to say, that I do not know when I have read four such correct and poetical lines. Nor do I the less feel their value as a proof of your affection; for both my head and heart vie in offering you their homage. I only entreat you will continue to love me, and to be persuaded that the warmth of my friendship will never cease to correspond with that of your own. I anticipate with delight the day you are to spend with me next week, and still hope that this pleasure will be more easily repeated as the days begin to shorten. I send the book which I spoke of; pray keep it as much as possible to yourself.”

“I love you sincerely, and will not permit you to say that it is an insignificant empire to rule over your heart. Erase from it at once such an idea.”

“As to your reputation, it is better established than that of the whole calendar of saints.”

“I am really sorry that your sore throat prevents you from coming to me, and deprives me of the pleasure of enjoying your society. But pray, how comes it that you will enact the water nymph?* I should certainly scold you, did I not recollect that at nineteen years of age I too had a tenderness for such adventures. To chastise you, however, a little for the injury you have inflicted, and with your eyes open, I will pronounce for your mortification, that a few years will effectually cure you of all these frolics. In the meantime, I believe you have deserved my pardon by the candour of your acknowledgement, though I grant it only on the condition that you will not thus endanger your health in future. [...] Upon my word, I am ready to beat those *puppies* who compose your train into the mud and marshes, and do so little to discourage such giddy pranks; for I cannot afford to lose a friend like you.”

* “In allusion to an accident [...] which happened to the princess at her estate near Petersburg, when she stepped into a bog, taking it for a piece of verdant meadow.”

(Ten o'clock in the morning) "Between five and six o'clock I intend going to Catarinenhof,¹ where I shall change my dress, as it would not be prudent to pass through the streets in man's attire. I advise you to drive thither direct in your own carriage, lest you should be mistaken for a cavalier in good earnest, and of course be set down as my lover."

Catherine Hyde (1801/2), *Private Anecdotes of Foreign Courts*, vol. 2, pp. 34-7, 84-5.

Socialite and travel writer Marchioness Hyde (a.k.a. Hyams, a.k.a. Catherine Govion Broglio Solari) probably never met Dashkova, but paints a lively picture of her from eyewitness accounts.

"The contrast [...] between [Grand-duke Peter] and the two individuals who were regarded as the most polished and attractive men in the Russian Court, Saltikoff and Poniatowsky,² was too striking not to be observed by the young and sprightly Catherine; nor did much time elapse after the marriage before [Empress] Elizabeth perceived the aversion she had imbibed for her nephew. Having one day addressed the Princess Daschkoff, her principal lady of honour, on the subject, and intimated that a continuance of the partiality shown towards the above-named noblemen would lead to the worst consequences, the Princess, who had become extremely intimate with Catherine, very ingenuously replied, by observing, that 'she had taken her Imperial Majesty as a model.' –'How can that be?' replied the Empress. –'Why,' said the Princess, 'all the world knows, that notwithstanding your Majesty's predilection for Razoumoffsky, the private staircase has not been always barred to others.' –'But he was not publicly declared my husband,' answered Elizabeth. –'So much the worse,' said Princess Daschkoff; 'a woman may be pardoned at our court for a *faux pas* towards her husband, but never to her lover.'

The freedom with which this Princess was in the habit of addressing her Imperial mistress greatly contributed to the silence which she afterwards maintained with regard to the conduct of the Grand-duchess."

"As might well be expected, the growing intimacy of Catherine and Stanislaus [Poniatowsky] excited the jealousy of the courtiers: this was so openly manifested, that, but for the ingenuity and address of the Princess Daschkoff, the happiness which they had promised themselves might have been protracted to an indefinite period, if not prevented altogether. As anxious to encourage the passions, as to

¹ Ekateringof/Catherinehof, a royal park in St Petersburg.

² Catherine's husband Grand Duke Peter; Count Sergei Saltykov and King Stanisław Poniatowski of Poland, both Catherine's lovers.

promote the ambitious views, of her mistress, the Princess, aided by an Italian Secretary, enabled the lovers to enjoy and unreserved intercourse for some time”

“I was confidently informed by an eye-witness that Catherine fainted on seeing the baby brought in. My informant added, that, had it not been for the firmness of the Princess Daschkoff, Paul would never have worn the Imperial crown, nor Russia been governed by one of her most capricious despots.

Whether the Princess foresaw that the preservation of the infant was necessary to the future designs of Catherine, with which she had by this time become very well acquainted, or that she was influenced by a sentiment of humanity, it is well known that she watched over its earlier movements with the most assiduous care; and by having it frequently brought into the presence of Catherine, accustomed her to look on the child with somewhat less disgust. She would even console the Grand-duchess with the hope of a second child, who might efface the painful recollection of the first. It was most probably in the course of their conversation on this subject, that the idea of giving up her own lover to the embraces of Catherine, was first conceived.

“The Princess Daschkoff,’ said Madame Narishkin,³ ‘in renouncing her favourite Orloff, had two great objects in view, particularly after she discovered that an intrigue had actually commenced between him and the Grand-duchess. The first was, that of ingratiating herself still more into the good graces of a woman whose future power she already predicted; and the second, that of retaining him as a friend at court, ready to support the influence she had acquired over the mind of Catherine.’ As but too frequently happens, she was cruelly deceived in both these objects; Orloff soon forgot the debt of gratitude, and Catherine, though she profited by the treason, despised the traitor. Her abhorrence was not, however, openly manifested, until the Princess had been made subservient to her ambitious design of usurping the throne, in which memorable transaction she was destined to play a most conspicuous and important part.”

³ Possibly the same Naryshkina with whom Dashkova had quarrelled – see A. V. Khrapovitskii’s diary.

The Coup



Portrait of Dashkova in military uniform, unknown artist

Catherine Hyde (1801/2), *Private Anecdotes of Foreign Courts*, vol. 2 pp. 41-2

“No sooner [...] had the [...] report [that Peter intended to divorce and imprison Catherine], whether true or false, reached the ears of the Princess Daschkoff and of Orloff,⁴ than these faithful agents of Catherine met for the purpose of consulting on the best mode of anticipating the intentions of the Emperor [...] Having apprised their emissaries and friends of what was about to take place, the Princess dressed herself in the uniform of the old Imperial Guard, and accompanied by Orloff, visited all the military quarters, where she harangues the soldiery on the degraded condition to which they were reduced by the late innovations; and by the aid of a plentiful supply of *woodka*,* great numbers threw their caps into the air, and said they were ready to execute her orders. Thus attended, she next proceeded to the house of the principal civil authorities, and invited them to join the soldiery; and with this accession of strength, she repaired to the Palace, whereto Catherine had been brought in the greatest haste from Peterhoff.**⁵ The first step now adopted, was to dress the Empress in a suit similar to that assumed by the Princess Daschkoff; after which, both were placed on superb chargers, while all the Prussian uniforms that could be found, were tied to the tails of other horses, and followed the two modern amazons, who rode through the city amidst loud cries of ‘Long live Catherine the Second!’

* A strong spirit resembling gin, and of which great quantities are consumed by the Russians of all classes.

** One of Catherine’s confidential attendants assured me, while I was at Moscow, that the Princess Daschkoff and her friends had proceeded thus far in their operations, without there being time to consult the Empress, who was not even aware of the extent to which the conspiracy had been carried until a few days before, when the mother of Orloff was sent to bring her from Peterhoff, where she had been kept almost as a prisoner by order of the Emperor.”

⁴ Grigorii Orlov, Catherine’s lover and conspirator.

⁵ The Peterhof Palace, in the outskirts of St Petersburg.

Novella Matveeva, 'What Goes on in the Rebellion', from *New Sonnets in Defence of Princess Dashkova* (2016?), translated from Russian by G. Barker

Sixties bard-poet Novella Matveeva wrote dozens of sonnets in later life vindicating Dashkova.

В часы мятежа

Валяясь на одной полупоходной койке
(Раз не было другой) две дамы толковали
Не об эротике, не о двойной морали,
Но о политике и Царства перестройке.

То греясь кое-как (одна из них – в простуде),
То – выставив посты за дверью, для защиты, –
Спешили отдохнуть. Одетыми. Как люди
Служилые, – когда пути назад – закрыты.

Суди же ты о них, дурак, *по обстановке!*
По *смыслу* их речей! По той *экипировке!*
Но... не угонятся де Сад и Казанова

За грязью наших дней! Когда, запутав планы,
О кратких роздыхах Паллады и Дианы
Историк-пакостник судачит козлоного!

What Goes on in the Rebellion

Sprawling on one single makeshift camp pallet
(Since there wasn't a second one) two ladies chatted,
Not about erotics, not about moral dualism,
But about politics and reforming the Tsardom.

Warming themselves as best they can (one's caught a chill),
Then – after posting guards outside the door, on vigil –
They hurried to their repose. Fully clothed.
Like service men, when all the roads back are closed.

So judge them, you fool, *by the situation!*
By their *equipment!* By the *thrust* of their conversation!
And yet... not even de Sade and Casanova

Can keep up with today's filth! When, muddling their plan, a
Hooligan-historian blethers devilry over
The quick breather of Athena and Diana.

Dispatch from Robert Murray Keith to George Grenville (1 (12) July 1762), *Sbornik imperatorskago russkago istoricheskago obshestvo*, vol. 12 p. 7

Keith: British ambassador to Russia; Grenville: British Secretary of State for Northern Affairs.

“the most singular circumstance of the whole [revolution] is, that the place of rendezvous was the house of the Princess Dashkoff, a young lady not above twenty years old, daughter to Count Roman Larionowitz Woronzoff, sister to the late favourite Elisabeth, and niece to the Chancellor; it is certain that she bore a principal share in contriving and carrying on the conspiracy from the beginning to the conclusion of it.”

Letter from Horace Walpole to George Montagu (Strawberry Hill, 10 August 1762), *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, vol. 4 pp. 11-12

Walpole, the famous letter-writer and originator of the Gothic novel (The Castle of Otranto), met Dashkova in England in 1770.

“Our drought continues, though we have had one handsome storm. I have been reading the story of Phaeton in the *Metamorphoses*; it is a picture of Twickenham – *Ardet Athos, taurusque Cilix, &c.*; mount Richmond burns, parched is Petersham: *Parnassusque biceps*, dry is Pope’s grot, the nymphs of Clivden are burning to blackmoors, their faces are already as glowing as a cinder; Cycnus is changed into a swan: *quodque suo Tagus amne vehit, fluit ignibus aurum*, my gold fishes are almost molten. Yet this conflagration is nothing to that in Russia: what do you say to a Czarina mounting her horse, and marching at the head of fourteen thousand men, with a large train of artillery, to dethrone her husband? Yet she is not the only virago in that country; the conspiracy was conducted by the sister of the Czar’s mistress, a heroine under twenty! They have no fewer than two Czars now in coops – that is, supposing these gentle damsels have murdered neither of them. [...] This is the fourth Czarina that you and I have seen; to be sure, as historians we have not passed our time ill. Mrs Anne Pitt, who, I suspect, envies the heroine of twenty a little, says, “The Czarina has only robbed *Peter* to pay *Paul*”

Letter from Horace Mann to Horace Walpole (4 August 1762), *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, vol. 22 p. 68

Diplomat Sir Horace Mann, based in Florence, corresponded with Walpole for forty years.

“The unhappy Czar finished a miserable life eight days after they had dethroned him. That was a natural consequence of it, and better for him than to be permitted to draw out a long life in Siberia. If ever a true history of this revolution is published, it must be curious. They talk of two sisters Woronzow, nieces of the Chancellor, one the mistress of the Czar who communicated in confidence to her sister the resolution he had taken to put his Empress into confinement, to whom that sister revealed the secret. But that circumstance is only said to have hastened the execution of the plot that was already concerted.”

Letter from Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann (Arlington Street, 12 August 1762), *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, vol. 4 pp. 13-14

“[Catherine] was ready for anything; nay, marched herself at the head of fourteen thousand men and a train of artillery against her husband, but not being the only Alecto in Muscovy, she had been aided by a Princess Daschkaw, a nymph under twenty, and sister to the Czar’s mistress. [...] The Spaniards, not so expeditious in usurpation as the Muscovites, have made no progress in Portugal. Their absurd manifestoes appeared too soon. The Czarina and Princess Daskaw stay till the stroke is struck. [...] You see how this Russian revolution has seized every cell in my head [...] I am a punctual correspondent when empresses commit murders.”

Catherine Hyde (1801/2), *Private Anecdotes of Foreign Courts*, vol. 2 pp. 50-1

“With respect to the Princess Daschkoff, it is due to her memory to declare, that she was exonerated by her contemporaries and accomplices in the revolution from any share in the murder, and that her remonstrances on its impolicy and injustice, formed the first cause of the irreconcilable quarrel which afterwards took place between herself and the Empress. From the subsequent treatment experienced by the Princess, as well as her frequent avowals, there is no doubt of her having deeply repented the conspicuous part she had taken in bringing about the elevation of Catherine. But she adds another instance to the many already on record, of what jealousy and ambition will effect in female minds. The growing ascendancy of her sister, the Countess Woronzoff, over Peter, and consequent fear of being supplanted in power, induced her not only to sacrifice her lover, Alexis Orloff, to the wishes of the Empress, but to become the most active agent and strenuous promoter of the conspiracy.”

Letter from Catherine II to Poniatowsky, *Memoirs of the Empress Catherine II*, p. 351

“The Princess Dashkoff, the youngest sister of Elizabeth Voronzoff, although she wishes to arrogate to herself all the honour of this revolution, was in very bad odour on account of her connections, while her age, which is only nineteen, was not calculated to inspire confidence. She pretends that everything passed through her to reach me, yet I was in communication with all the chiefs for six months before she even knew one of their names. It is quite true that she has great talent, but it is spoilt by her excessive ostentation and her naturally quarrelsome disposition. She is hated by the chiefs, and liked by the giddy and rash, who communicated to her all they knew, which was only the minor details. Ivan Schouvaloff, the basest and most cowardly of men, has written, I am told, to Voltaire, that a woman of nineteen had overturned the government of this empire. Pray undeceive this distinguished writer. It was necessary to conceal from the Princess Dashkoff the channels through which others reached me, five months before she knew anything; and, during the last four weeks, no more was told her than was absolutely unavoidable.”

M. le comte de Ségur, quoting Frederick II, *Mémoires*, vol. 1 pp. 414-5, translated from French by G. Barker

Frederick the Great: Emperor of Prussia; Louis Philippe de Ségur: diplomat and historian.

“Ah! me répondit le roi, [...] on ne peut imputer justement à l'impératrice *ni l'honneur, ni le crime de cette révolution*; elle était jeune, faible, isolée, étrangère, à la veille d'être répudiée, enfermée. Les Orloff ont tout fait; la princesse d'Aschkoff n'a été là que la mouche vaniteuse du coche. Rulhière s'est trompé. Catherine ne pouvait encore rien conduire; elle s'est jetée dans les bras de ceux qui voulaient la sauver.”

“‘Ah!’ replied the King to me, ‘[...] the Empress cannot in fairness be accorded *either the honour or the crime of this revolution*; she was young, weak, isolated, foreign, on the eve of being repudiated, imprisoned. The Orloffs did everything; the Princess d'Aschkoff was there only as the conceited fly, the backseat coach-driver.⁶ Rulhière was mistaken. Catherine was not yet able to steer anything; she threw herself into the arms of those who wanted to save her.’”

⁶ From a fable in which a fly buzzes around the coach-horses and then demands to be paid for its ‘work’.

Aleksandr Gertsen, ‘Princess Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova’ (1857), translated from Russian by G. Barker

“Не надобно забывать, что у нашего Преображенского сержанта есть дочь Настя, которую он горячо любит и с которой ему хочется поиграть, наигравшись досыта императорской короной.”

“One must not forget that our sergeant from the Preobrazhensky Regiment has a daughter Nastya, whom he loves fiercely and with whom he would like to play, now he has played long enough with the imperial crown.”

Letter from Mikhail Vorontsov to Aleksandr Vorontsov (21 August 1762), *Arkhiv Kniazia Vorontsova*, vol. 5 p. 105, translated from Russian by G. Barker

Mikhail Vorontsov: Dashkova’s uncle; Aleksandr Vorontsov: Dashkova’s older brother

“О сестрѣ вашей княгинѣ Дашковой увѣдомить имѣю, что мы отъ нея столько же ласковости и полѣзы имѣемъ, какъ и отъ Елизаветы Романовны, и только что подѣ именемъ ближняго свойства слывемъ, а никакой искренности, ни откровенности, и еще менѣе какого либо вспомошествованія или надежды, чтобъ въ пользу нашу старанія прилагала, отнюдь не имѣемъ; и она, сколько мнѣ кажется, имѣетъ нравъ развращенной и тщеславной, больше въ суетахъ и мнимомъ высокомъ разумѣ, в наукахъ и пустотѣ время свое проводить. Я опасуюсь, чтобъ, она каприсами своими и неумѣреннымъ поведеніемъ и отзывами, столько не прогнѣвила Государыню Императрицу, чтобъ отъ Двора отдалена не была, а чрезъ то наша фамилія, въ ея паденіи, напраснаго порока отъ публики не имѣла. Правда, она имѣла многое участіе в благополучномъ восшествіи на престолъ всемилостивѣйшей нашей Государыни, и въ томъ мы ее должны весьма прославлять и почитать”

“About your sister Princess Dashkova I can inform you that we get as much affection and use from her as from Elizaveta Romanovna, and we have influence only in the name of our close connection, and we certainly get neither sincerity nor openness, still less any assistance or hope that she might take any pains on our behalf; and she, as far as it seems to me, has a corrupt and conceited character, preferring to spend her time in vain commotion and would-be high reason, in science and frivolity. I am afraid that with her caprices and her unchecked behaviour and opinions she will so anger Her Majesty the Empress that she will be

distanced from the Court, and through this our family would be unjustly tainted in the eyes of the public by her fall. True, she played a large part in the successful ascension to the throne of our most merciful Monarch, and for this we must celebrate and respect her”

John Hobart, *The Despatches and Correspondence of John, Second Earl of Buckinghamshire, Ambassador to the Court of Catherine II of Russia 1762-1765*, vol. 2 pp. 36-210, vol. 1 pp. 98-100

Dispatch from Mr. Mitchell to the Earl of Buckinghamshire (Berlin: 4 June 1763)

“I hear the Princess d’Ashkow is likely to travel, and that the Great Chancellor, Woronzow, with his family, will be here in the month of August or September next. So many illustrious travellers from the same country, where revolutions are so common, occasion great speculation. I wish your Lordship could say something to explain to me the cause of these unexpected movements.”

Dispatch from the Earl of Buckinghamshire to Mr. Mitchell (Petersburg, 17 June (N.S.) 1763)

“The Princess d’Ashkow by presuming too much upon the favour of her Imperial Majesty had lost it before I came into the country; since that her conduct has by no means been such as to efface any bad impressions her imprudence might have made. I have heard her mention a wish of seeing other countries, but imagine her leaving this would meet with many difficulties, nor, if I am well informed, would her husband’s circumstances admit of such an expense.”

Dispatch from the Earl of Buckinghamshire to Lord Halifax (Petersburg, 28 June (N.S.) 1763)

“The Princess d’Ashkow, who so much distinguished herself in the revolution last year, is ordered to accompany her husband to Riga, where his regiment is quartered. That lady’s arrogant behaviour had in great measure lost the Empress’s esteem even before my arrival at Moscow. Her spirit was too great either to try to appease her Mistress or to submit to her disgrace, and she has been suspected ever since of exciting and encouraging those who were disaffected to the present Government.

M. Panin⁷ will be very sensibly affected by her departure from Court, as she was his near relation and great favourite, but England has no great reason to lament it, as she was strongly in the interest of France.”

Dispatch from the Earl of Buckinghamshire to the Earl of Sandwich

(Petersburg, 9 December (N.S.) 1763)

“The Princess d’Ashkow is arrived here. M. Panin, who had promised to sup with me on Tuesday last, made his excuses, which I was afterwards informed was to have an opportunity of being with her. It will require all his flegm and authority to keep her active spirit in a tolerable state of tranquillity. I wait with some sort of impatience to see the reception she receives at Court.”

Dispatch from the Earl of Buckinghamshire to the Earl of Sandwich

[Separate and most secret.] (Petersburg, 3 July (N.S.) 1764)

“The Princess d’Ashkow has been seen in man’s cloaths amongst the Guards, but her steps are narrowly looked into, and she is soon to set out for Moscow. That young lady’s disappointed vanity and restless ambition seem in some sort to have affected her senses; had she been contented with a moderate share of authority she might have continued till this time the first favourite of the Empress.”

Dispatch from the Earl of Buckinghamshire to the Earl of Sandwich

(Petersburg, 31 July (N.S.) 1764)

“There are many reports concerning the Princess D’Ashkow; she certainly is very much suspected.”⁸

⁷ Nikita Panin, statesman, cousin of Dashkova’s husband, tutor of Catherine’s son Paul.

⁸ In Mirovich’s failed attempt to free Ivan VI.

John Hobart, 'A Succinct View of the State of Russia: 1762'

“The Princess D’Ashkow is the favourite of [Panin’s] heart; many doubt whether as his child or his mistress. He speaks of her with affection, is with her almost every moment of his leisure, and communicates the most important secrets to her with that unbounded confidence which a minister should scarcely place in any individual! The Empress, informed of this, and justly alarmed that such intelligence should be given to a person whose restless, intriguing spirit and insatiable ambition has rendered her from her bosom friend her most inveterate enemy, extorted a promise from him that he should never talk to her of affairs of State. He gave his word, but in this instance broke it. Upon this account, as well as from certain intelligence that the Princess used every art to alienate the hearts as well of M. Panin as of many others from her person and government, she has determined to send her from Petersburg.

Princess D’Ashkow, a lady whose name, as she wishes, will indisputably be mentioned in history, has a remarkable good figure, and presents herself well. When, for a few moments, her impetuous passions sleep, her countenance pleases and her manner is calculated to raise those sentiments she scarcely ever knew. But though that countenance is fair and the features in no instance faulty, the character of it is generally such, as a skilful painter would wish to imitate who meant to draw any of the many illustrious ladies whose refinements upon cruelty fill the tragic magazine. Hardened and daring beyond expression, her first idea would lead her by the most desperate means to set mankind at liberty, her next to make them all her slaves. If the fate of the late Emperor was ever in deliberation, her vote indisputably condemned him; had a hand been wanting to execute that sentence, hers would have courted the office. In one instance she has paid a tribute to humanity the shedding tears for the loss of her most amiable husband. He was a man most deservedly loved, and regretted by his sovereign and all who knew him. The ladies most particularly distinguished him; he had been extremely intimate with his wife’s two elder sisters before he married her. She surprised him into the marriage, which he never intended, by contriving that her uncle, the Great Chancellor, should find them together; the moment he came in she told him the Prince had just made her proposals of marriage, and the young man, embarrassed with his situation, and afraid of the First Minister, did not dare to contradict her.

The Princess has read a great deal, possesses a singular activity of body and mind, and has a very ready apprehension. If she was mistress enough of her temper to be quiet till the present suspicions of her are subsided, till age has tempered the rage of her passions and ripened her judgment, her story would not end here.”

Letter from George Macartney to the Earl of Sandwich (St Petersburg, 1 (12) March 1765), *Sbornik imperatorskago russkago istoricheskago obshestvo*, vol. 12 pp. 199-200

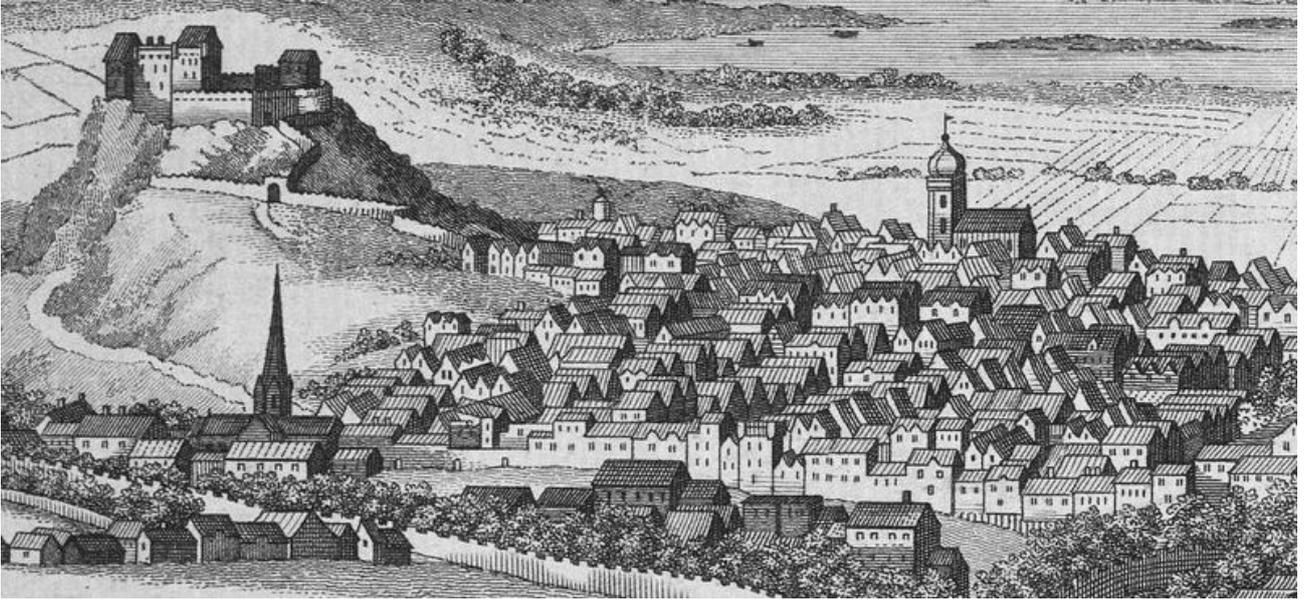
Sir George Macartney: British ambassador to Russia.

“The Princess Dashkoff, who has lived here extremely retired ever since the death of her husband, has at last taken the resolution of quitting this Capital, and going to reside at Moscow. She set out yesterday; but before her departure, had the honour of kissing the Empress’s hands, and taking leave in form; she had been forbid the Court long since, but as She was now to leave it, perhaps for ever, Her Majesty at the persuasion of Mr Panin, consented to see her before she went. Her reception was such as she ought to have expected; it was cold and ungracious; every body seems pleased that she is no longer here; though scarcely twenty two years old, she has been already in half a dozen plots; the first succeeded, but not being considered, nor rewarded, as she imagined, according to her service, she engaged in new conspiracies which proved abortive; she was no otherwise punished than by a total loss of her Mistress’s favour, who still had retained some degree of kindness for her; she is a woman of an uncommon strength of mind, bold beyond the most manly courage and of a spirit capable of undertaking impossibilities to gratify any predominant passion; a character highly dangerous in a country like this, especially when joined to an engaging behaviour, and a beautiful person”

Review of Lady Morgan’s ‘Woman and Her Master’ (June 1840), *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine for 1840*, p. 396

“In the grave farce performed by Agrippina, on the death of Claudius, [...] which stripped the rightful heir, the young Britannicus, of his inheritance, and gave the empire to her son; our author finds occasion for the measureless laudation which leads us to fear that, in the Empress Catherine, and her auxiliary, the Princess Daschkaw, she will yet find the greatest women of modern times.”

European Travels



Detail from engraving 'A General View of the City & Castle of Edinburgh, the Capital of Scotland', c. 1769, by Morris

Novella Matveeva, 'The Hotel', from *Sonnets to Dashkova* (1989-1993), *Sonety*, p. 39, translated from Russian by G. Barker

Гостиница

Стояла в Данциге гостиница одна.
И в ней (сочтя ее – для штучек – лучшим местом!)
Патриотическим, но не правдивым! – жестом
Хозяин вывесил два хитрых полотна.

Утихшая, на них виднелась война.
И войско русское (с просительным присестом,
С «пардоном» якобы!) – клонило знамена
Пред властью прусских сил победных... Мимоездом –

Княгиня Дашкова рискнула на авось
И... перекрасила тайком от всей квартиры,
Мундиры прусские – на русские мундиры,
А форму русскую – на форму прусских войск.

– Кто их переделал?! вскричал хозяин грозно.
Но кони Дашковой уж дальше скачут... Поздно!

The Hotel

There was once a hotel in the city of Danzig.
Thinking it the best place for a thingamajig,
In a patriotic – but not authentic! – gesture,
Inside, its owner had hung up two artful pictures.

Depicted on them was a battle, now ebbing.
And the Russian troops (with a suppliant posture)
Bowing their standards (saying “sorry”, for sure!)
Before the might of the triumphant Prussians... Travelling

Through, Princess Dashkova daringly took a risk
And... in secret from the whole house, with paint transformed
Prussian uniforms – into Russian uniforms,
And Russian war tunics – into Prussian war tunics.

“Who changed their clothes?!” shouted the owner, irate.
But Dashkova’s horses already gallop onwards... Too late!

Aleksandr Gertsen, ‘Princess Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova’ (1857), translated from Russian by G. Barker

“Из Женевы она едет в Спа; там она живет в большой интимности с мистрис Гамильтон и, прощаясь с ней, романически клянется приехать через пять лет для свидания с нею, если не увидится прежде, и, что еще более романически, действительно приезжает.”

“From Geneva she travels to Spa; there she lives in great intimacy with Mrs Hamilton,⁹ and on parting from her romantically swears to come to meet her in five years’ time, if they do not see each other before, and, what is still more romantic, actually comes.”

Letter from Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann (Strawberry Hill, 4/6 October 1770), *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, vol. 5 pp. 261-2

“Who do you think is arrived? The famous Princess Daschkaw, the Czarina’s favourite and accomplice, now in disgrace – and yet alive. Nay, both she and the Empress are alive! She has put her son to Westminster-school. The devil is in it, if the son of a conspiratress with an English education, does not turn out a notable politician. I am impatient to get well, or at least hope she may stay till I am, that I may see her. Cooled as my curiosity is about most things, I own I am eager to see this amazon, who had so great a share in a revolution, when she was not above nineteen. I have a print of the Czarina, with Russian verses under it, written by this virago. I do not understand them, but I conclude their value depends more on the authoress than the poetry. One is pretty sure what they do not contain – truth.”

‘Portraiture of the Princess Daschkaw by Diderot’ (November 1770), *Memoirs of the Princess Daschkaw*, vol. 2 pp. 177-90

Philosopher and writer Denis Diderot met Dashkova in Paris in 1770. In her Memoirs, Dashkova claims to have convinced Diderot, an advocate of freedom, of the merits of serfdom!

“The Princess Daschkaw has spent a fortnight here, during which I have been with her four times, from about five o’clock in the afternoon till midnight I have had the honour of dining and supping with her, and am almost the only Frenchman whose visits she has accepted.

⁹ Catherine Hamilton, daughter of John Ryder, Archbishop of Tuam, and cousin of the Wilmots.

She is Russian *intus et in cute*, full of admiration for the empress, of whom she always speaks with profound respect and veneration. Her taste for this English nation is so pronounced, that I fear her partiality for this anti-monarchical people may somewhat indispose her to render justice to our own. [...]

Although it was the beginning of November, Madame Daschkaw went out every morning about nine o'clock, and never returned to her house till the close of the day for dinner. All this time was employed in informing herself of everything which the eyes could take in, of pictures, statues, buildings, manufactures. In the evening I went to chat with her on subjects which the eyes could not discern, and with which she could only be fully acquainted by a long residence, – laws, customs, government, finance, politics, manners, arts, sciences, literature: of these I told her all I knew.

With regard to her expectations from the empress, her object, I found, was neither grandeur nor riches; it was simply to preserve the esteem of her sovereign, which she thought that she merited, and her friendship, which she flattered herself that she possessed. We spoke but for a moment of the revolution; and as far as any merit was concerned in producing that event, she disclaimed every pretension to it, both on her own part and on that of others. It was brought about, she said, by an imperceptible clue, which she and all had unconsciously followed; and if there was any one who could be named as giving a positive impulse to this adventure, it would be no other than Peter the Third himself, through his extravagances, his vices, his incapacity, and the scorn and disgust which his low-lived and scandalous habits had excited throughout the nation. Every one was hurried on towards the same end by the general voice; and so little was there of concert in the proceeding, that the affair was very far advanced before she, or the empress, or any other person, had any suspicion of the result which was at hand. Three hours before the revolution, she declared it was as little contemplated as if it was distant as many years. The acclamation which placed her on the throne was commenced by four officers of the guards, who afterwards were exiled, and remain so still. [...] The princess protested to me that there was not a man in Russia, even amongst the peasants, who believed that Catherine was an accomplice in the death of Peter the Third; although in the empire, as well as throughout Europe, every one was convinced that his death was a violent one. [...] Less than forty-eight hours before the death of the Empress Elizabeth, the whole court was split into parties, which kept a jealous watch over each other. Every avenue was filled with spies, and any communication between any of the parties was at the risk of the poniard. The princess, however, at that time between eighteen and nineteen years old, rose from

her bed, repaired across the snow to the palace of the grand duchess, and passed some hours in conference with her. The first word she uttered was to ask what plan she had formed. 'You are either an angel or a demon,' exclaimed the grand duchess. 'Neither,' returned the princess; 'but Elizabeth is dead, and the question is, what are your resolutions?' 'To abandon myself to the course of events,' said Catherine, 'since I am unable to direct them.' [...]

The part which the princess took in the revolution had rendered her on bad terms with her family, whose hopes, founded on the taste of Peter the Third for her sister, a good-humoured, fat woman, without attractions and without talents, had been entirely overthrown. Her father and her brothers have refused to see her these several years.

Princess Daschkaw is by no means handsome. She is little, with a high and open forehead, large puffed-out cheeks, eyes neither large nor small, a little sunk in the socket, dark hair and eyebrows, nose somewhat flat, a wide mouth, thick lips, a round straight neck of the national form, open chest, not much of figure; she has ease in her movements, without the graces, and much affability of manner. The general expression of physiognomy is favourable. Her character is grave; she speaks our language fluently; all that she knows and thinks she does not say, but what she says she says simply and forcibly, and with the tone of truth. She has a heart lacerated by misfortune; and exhibits a decision and grandeur in her ideas, as well as boldness and pride in her mode of thinking. There is in her also, I am convinced, a profound spirit of rectitude and of dignity.

The princess is a lover of the arts. She understands both the men and the interests of her nation. She has a cordial aversion for despotism, as well as for everything which nearly or remotely tends to tyranny. She is intimately acquainted with the present ministry; and on this point delivers her sentiments without the least disguise, praising the good qualities of the men in office, and pronouncing with equal decision on their defects. [...] If an action is in itself grand, she cannot endure its being lowered by any little political views. 'It is just and beautiful,' she said to the empress, in rendering thanks to the Almighty for her successes on the tomb of Peter the First, 'to have directed the Archbishop Platon to ascribe them first to God and then to the Czar; it is just and beautiful because it is true; – for why seek on such an occasion to administer any low flattery to a nation which knows what is due to itself and what is not?'

When Catherine projected her code of laws, the princess, whom she consulted, said, 'You will never witness its conclusion, and at another time I would have told

you the reason; but it will always be a great thing to have made the attempt; the very project will not fail to make an epoch.' With the same undeviating veracity she would speak of the virtues and vices of her friends and enemies.

Her sorrows had brought on the appearance of age, and greatly deranged her health. [...] In December this year, 1770, she will be only twenty-seven years of age, and she has the appearance of forty. She has sold everything she possessed in order to pay the debts of her husband, whom she loved to such a degree as to regard his death as the greatest of her misfortunes.

She is perfectly resigned to the obscurity of her life and the mediocrity of her fortune. [...]

The princess possesses penetration, coolness, and judgment. She has a quick insight into the real nature of things, and could never bear to be made a subject of admiration, either from her natural modesty, or from the little value she herself attached to the part she had borne. [...] The princess appeared to me a decided enemy of gallantry. She had been suspected of an intimacy with Count Panin, an idea at which she was utterly indignant. It was a matter of no small self-congratulation that, in respect to her character, the empress had never dared to speak to her on the subject of her love for Orloff, notwithstanding she had lived with her in habits of the greatest familiarity – a familiarity which never led to her disgrace. The princess, with the freedom of an old and understood friendship, visits the empress when she pleases, sits down, chats, and retires without ceremony. [...]

Princess Daschkaw has two children, whom she tenderly loves – a son and a daughter. She holds life in no great value. She has been two years on her travels, and she intends continuing abroad eighteen months longer; then returning to Petersburg to sojourn for a short time, and afterwards to retire to Moscow. Should you ask the reason of her disgrace, what shall I answer? Perhaps she did not find her services sufficiently rewarded; perhaps, in elevating Catherine to the government of the empire, she had the project of governing her; perhaps the suspicion under which she had fallen in the affair of the flagellated image might have had the effect of cooling the empress towards her; perhaps the princess had taught the empress a lesson, that what she had dared to do *for* her she might not be afraid to do *against* her; perhaps she might have aspired to the place of minister – even of first minister – at least to a place in the council; perhaps the princess took offence that her friend, whom she wished to make regent, had possessed the art, without her knowledge, and contrary to her projects, of making herself empress; perhaps she could not brook the indignity of being set aside amongst a herd of

those to whom a new decoration had been given, – she who had moved at the head of those personages, who had been honoured with the ancient order. Whatever it might be which led to her disgrace, certain it is that their mutual dissatisfaction did not manifest itself till the arrival of the court at Moscow. The Princess Daschkaw accompanied Catherine thither, and there, without explanation and without reproach, she separated from her sovereign, never to see her more. [...]

When I went to take leave of her, she promised not to forget me, and begged not to be forgotten by me. She had the kindness also to say that I was one of the most agreeable men to listen to she had ever met with; and whether I was playing the wise man or the fool, she had always remarked that I was never otherwise than consistent and in character.”

Letter from Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann (12/16 November 1770), *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, vol. 5 p. 266

“Well! I have seen the Princess Daschkaw, and she is well worth seeing – not for her person, though, for an absolute Tartar, she is not ugly: her smile is pleasing, but her eyes have a very Catiline fierceness. Her behaviour is extraordinarily frank and easy. She talks on all subjects, and not ill, nor with striking pedantry, and is quick and very animated. She puts herself above all attention to dress and everything feminine, and yet sings tenderly and agreeably, with a pretty voice. She, and a Russian lady who accompanies her, sung two songs of the people, who are all musical; one was grave, the other lively, but with very tender turns, and both resembling extremely the Venetian barquerolles. She speaks English a little, understands it easily: French is very familiar to her, and she knows Latin. When the news of the naval victory over the Turks arrived at Petersburg, the Czarina made the archbishop mount the tomb of Peter the Great, and ascribe the victory to him as the founder of the Marine. It was a bold *coup de théâtre*, and Pagan enough. The discourse, which is said to be very eloquent, the Princess has translated into French, and Dr Hinchcliffe, Bishop of Peterborough, is to publish it in English. But as an instance of her quickness and parts, I must tell you that she went to a Quaker’s meeting. As she came away, one of the women came up to her, and told her she saw she was a foreigner, that she wished her all prosperity, and should be very glad if anything she had seen amongst them that day should contribute to her salvation. The Princess thanked her very civilly, and said, ‘Madame, je ne sçais si la voye de silence n’est point la meilleure façon d’adorer L’Être Suprême.’ In short, she is a very singular personage, and I am extremely pleased that I have seen her.”

Letter from Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu (Deal, 29 November 1770),
Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, to Mrs. Montagu, vol. 1 pp. 88-9

The bluestocking writer, translator, and classicist Elizabeth Carter, writing to fellow bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu, assesses Catherine and Dashkova's relevance to the women's movement.

“It is to be feared, notwithstanding your gratitude to the Czarina, that our general condition is not likely to be much improved by the appearance of a termagant genius of an Empress, once or twice in an age. I suppose you know that Princess Daschan, who at nineteen harangued the troops, and was the principal instrument of bringing about the Revolution, is now in England. She seems to be a most extraordinary genius. She rides in boots, and all the other habiliments of a man, and in all the manners and attitudes belonging to that dress. This might be accounted for, from the custom of her country, and the greater safety of managing her horse. But she likewise dances in a masculine habit, and I believe appears as often in it as in her proper dress. Would not one think from all this, that it would be quite terrible to meet her on Bagshotheath? But you may visit Mrs. Wilmot¹⁰ in safety. She is, in spite of this formidable appearance, remarkably gentle; has weak nerves, and low spirits, and great delicacy both of sentiment and conversation. She is very careful of the education of her son, and told him once, she had rather see his neck twisted, than that he should act unworthy of the memory of his father, of whom she always speaks with the highest esteem and tenderness. It seems she had seen herself upon the list of those whom the Emperor had marked for destruction. As instrumental as she was in bringing about the Revolution, it is said, she had no share in his death. It is happy for her if this circumstance is true. She is very negligent in her female dress, and renounces all respect to her high rank, unless it is paid to her character. As this lady seems an unusual kind of phenomenon, I have told you a good deal about her, and I have it upon very good authority. The Russian ambassador has orders from the Czarina, to shew her all kinds of attentions while she is here; probably she may not be sorry to have her any where rather than at her elbow.”

¹⁰ Martha Wilmot, cousin by marriage of Dashkova's friend Catherine Hamilton, and mother of Martha and Catherine Wilmot, Dashkova's house guests in later life.

Letter from John Glen King to George Macartney (February 1771), *Our First Ambassador to China*, pp. 83-4

The Rev. John Glen King wrote on the Russian Orthodox Church; British ambassador to Russia George Macartney published King's essay as an appendix to his own Account of Russia.

“I must tell you the Princess Dashkoff, who presented me at Spa to all the English of distinction as a man of genius and erudition beloved and esteemed by everybody in her country, when she came to London blackened me all in her power, and said... that I was *l'homme le plus perfide, et que je passe a Petersbourg pour le plus grand menteur*, etc. – you know her character, and talents to speak ill; and tho' every one despises and detests her, yet I am afraid and have reason to fear what she said has made some impression on the minds of several persons, particularly on the Bp. of P.—, with whom she was much acquainted; for tho' he is civil, he is not friendly. It seems the cause of Madam's resentment, and the reason why she calls me *un menteur*, is, that she had heard at Spa that I had said some truths which offended her, or were made offensive by the Lady, a country woman of yours, as I suspect, who repeated, or rather misrepresented, what I said. I assure you I was very cautious on that subject; but while one thought she was banished, others that she was a spy, and all were questioning me, I was necessitated to say something; yet from her civilities to me there, I was disposed to speak as favourably as possible.”

Letter from Voltaire to Dashkova (Ferney, 12 May 1771), *Memoirs of the Princess Daschkaw*, vol. 2 pp. 193-4

Voltaire: famous Enlightenment writer, friend and correspondent of Catherine the Great.

“Madam, – The old man whom you have almost rendered young, thanks as much as he regrets you. I shall not fail to boast to her imperial majesty of a sermon worthy of Plato the Grecian himself, presented me by one who is no less worthy to be the friend of Tomeris. Happy those, madam, who accompany you to Spa! – unhappy we who remain behind on the banks of the Lake of Geneva! Our mountains will long resound the echo of your name – a name which will dwell for ever in my heart with admiration and respect.

The Old Invalid of Ferney.”

Letter from Voltaire to Catherine II (Ferney, 15 May 1771), *Documents of Catherine the Great*, p. 108, translated from French by G. Barker

“Madame, il faut vous dire d’abord que j’ai eu l’honneur d’avoir dans mon ermitage madame la princesse Daschkof. Dès qu’elle est entrée dans le salon, elle a reconnu votre portrait en *mezzo-tinto*, fait à la navette sur un satin, entouré d’une guirlande de fleurs. [...]

Il faut qu’il y ait quelque vertu secrète dans votre image; car je vis les yeux de madame la princesse Daschkof fort humides en regardant cette étoffe. Elle me parla quatre heures de suite de votre majesté impériale, et je crus qu’elle ne m’avait parlé que quatre minutes.

Je tiens d’elle le sermon de l’archevêque de Twer, Platon, prononcé devant le tombeau de Pierre-le-Grand, le lendemain que votre majesté eut reçu la nouvelle de la destruction entière de la flotte turque par la vôtre. Ce discours, adressé au fondateur de Pétersbourg et de vos flottes, est à mon gré un des plus beaux monuments qui soient dans le monde.”

“Madame, I must tell you firstly that I have had the honour of having the Princess Daschkof in my hermitage. As soon as she entered the living room she recognised your portrait in *mezzo-tinto*, embroidered in satin, encircled with a garland of flowers. [...]

There must be some secret property in your image; for I saw the eyes of the Princess Daschkof become very moist as she looked at this fabric. She spoke to me four hours together about your imperial majesty, and I believed she had spoken to me for only four minutes.

I have from her the sermon of the Archbishop of Tver, Platon, delivered before the tomb of Peter the Great, the day after your majesty received the news of the total destruction of the Turkish fleet by yours. This speech, addressed to the founder of Petersburg and your fleets, is to my mind one of the most beautiful monuments in the world.”

Letter from Horace Walpole to Lady Mary Coke (c. November 1771), *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, vol. 6 p. 40

“Shall not you call at Copenhagen, Madam? If you do, you are next door to the Czarina, who is the quintessence of friendship, as the Princess Daskioff says, whom, next to the late Czar, her Muscovite Majesty loves above all the world.”

Letter from Diderot to Dashkova (Petersburg, 24 December 1773), *Memoirs of the Princess Daschkaw*, vol. 2 pp. 171-2

“you, madam, are a writer of verses; I can write them also; but yours are always delightful, mine only sometimes. You can harmonize them for the voice, and your vocal music is always tender, varied, touching, I may say even voluptuous. For my part, I can feel all this merit, but I do not possess it. How happy you are, princess, to be a genuine lover of music. It is the most powerful of the *beaux arts*.”

Letter from Alexander Wedderburn to William Robertson (Spa, 31 August 1776), MS 3942, fols. 271-2

Alexander Wedderburn: lawyer and first Earl of Rosshyn; William Robertson: historian and Principal of the University of Edinburgh.

“My dear Robertson,

The Princess Daschkaw whose letter I inclose to you desires me to add a few lines from your old & sincere friend, not to introduce you to each other, for in that business I would not presume to encroach upon the established right of introduction which Fame possesses amongst those she has once distinguished, but to explain a few things which Fame never publishes; & it is but right that I should, for I have told a great many things of you that are unknown to Fame. Imagine to your self then a reasonable, frank, good-humoured Woman, warm in her friendships, open in her dislikes, without suspicion or fear, one in short whom you will scarcely believe that you have not known all your life, & add to these qualitys a clear & well cultivated understanding. Such is the Lady I am to present to you, & tho Fame has with justice given her a distinguished place amongst the Personages You take upon you to present, I am apt to believe you will set a greater value upon the domestick, than the historical Character.

The Princess’s letter makes it very unnecessary to tell you, that No Mother was ever more attached to a child than she is to a Son, who has never however been hurt by her Indulgence. Her determination to fix her residence in the place of his Education will be a great satisfaction to you, for the preference given to the University under your care is as hazardous, as it is flattering; and the Observation of such a Mother will give courage to Every one engaged in the Instruction of her son. It was thought you might incline that the Prince should become a part of your family, but I have apprized the Princess that it is more probably you will wish that he should remain in her house, which will be more entirely dedicated to the

purposes of his Education than yours can be consistently with the dutys of your office; I have at the same time assured her that wherever her Son is lodged, his Improvement will be equally the object of your peculiar Attention, not only by directing the course of his studys & examining the progress he makes in his different lectures, but by infusing into his mind that turn of observation & thought, which Conversation and not lectures must teach.

It is so long since I saw Edinburgh that I am not able to state with precision, what source of Education It affords for a young Man of great rank & expectation; from what I did know, I could state many defects It then had, I might add that I believe your care has remedied most of them; But such answers will not satisfy the reasonable Inquiry of a carefull Guardian, much less the just & maternal Anxiety of a Mother, whose soul is bound up in the welfare of her son; send me then, I entreat you, a particular account of the plan you would propose for such a Pupill, his course of study, his way of life, his Exercises, his Conversations, what portion of his time would be spent with you, how much you would allow to his Mother, what to amusement. I wish to know a little the detail of his Œconomy, the necessary expences of his studys & exercises, the expences that are almost necessary because they are becoming in certain ranks, even the superfluous expences, for they form a Class which œconomy must admit. I have a notion that untill the Princess Daschkaw is able to fix upon a house for herself, It would be very easy to engage some of the Persons who have apartments in the Abbay¹¹ to offer her the use of them.”

Letter from Elizabeth Carter to Elizabeth Montagu (Deal, 23 November 1776), *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, to Mrs. Montagu*, vol. 3 p. 19

“From the displeasure which Princess Daschow exprest at her reception, the last time she was in England, one should not have expected her return. But, poor woman, she must be somewhere, and she cannot be at home. One of my friends was well acquainted with her abroad, and spoke favorably of her. Would you suppose that a lady capable of such a part as she acted, should have very weak nerves? ‘Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.’ But, perhaps, her weak nerves, may be the effect of the action.”

¹¹ Holyrood Abbey/Palace; Dashkova did stay here for a while before finding permanent accommodation.

Letter from Alexander Wedderburn to William Robertson (25 November 1776), MS 3942, fols. 291-2

“My dear Sir

You have no reason to be alarmed at the approach of your Princess, she is provided with the D: of Hamiltons apartments if she pleases to make use of them and she has also an address to Mr. Menzies who by Mr. Mackenzie’s desire is to do the honours of Edinburgh at her first entrance. Tho’ she does not speak English well, she understands it perfectly & converses without much embarrassment to herself in that Language; You will therefore need no interpreter to her, & if there should at any time be occasion for you to convey more to her than she chuses to understand or you to express, her friend Mrs Hamilton a Daughter of the late Archbp: of Tuam who accompanys her, is a very sensible Worthy Woman & will be of use to you.
[...]

To you who know characters so well, and make other People understand them equally well, I cannot attempt to describe hers; I can only tell you that She has uncommon Parts & a very strong mind which she has begun a little late & by her own exertions to cultivate, consequently you must expect to find a little roughness in It. I don’t know whether I misapply a phrase of Scotch Divinity when I say that her Conversation tho’ It is sensible & animated wants Unction. She has, & I don’t know that It is a fault, some share of vanity especially on two Points, the fortitude of her mind is one, and the other is her rank. An Attention to her Condition is very proper and necessary, but that Condition is so undefined by the various Ideas attached to the word *Princess* in different Countrys, that It is a little difficult to observe a first time. I have always considered her as a Person of the first quality amongst the Subjects of Russia, but I have seen People who bestowed the *Highness* upon her very liberally, & seemed to recommend themselves very much by It. In your case I should think it adviseable to observe a degree of ceremony. It will save you a great deal of time; her friendships & she has already conceived one for you are very ardent, & she can never see too much of those she regards. A little distance & a total independence will preserve your friendship a long time. But I will not answer for its duration if you submit to be directed.

If there is a good Whist Party at Edinb: that Point will not be immaterial. She understands It & loves to play for somewhat more than the ordinary run of Play used to be amongst your Society.”

Letter from John Robison to William Robertson (1776), MS 3942, fol. 301

John Robison: professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh.

“Mr Wedderburn has most accurately delineated Princess Dashkoff, who is really a very uncommon character both for great natural parts, cultivated understanding and generous principles. She is of a noble family (Woronzoff) and Prince Dashkoff is one of the old Prussian Nobility. [...] The Princess’s sister was favorite of Peter the 3^d, and it is believed by all that he would have marryd her in a few days, had not the Revolution disposed of him in another way. She was as weak a woman as he was a prince, and Princess Dashkoff might have managed them both. But her patriotism had no bounds, and if she contributed nothing more to the revolution, she at least gave the Empress every information of her approaching fate if she did not take strong measures. The Princess expected greater deference both for her opinions and her principles than she met with from the Empress after the Revolution. The Empress, whose principles were not so generous as the Princess’s does not choose to have her much at Court, and generally sends her away with handsome presents. This scheme of educating her son in Britain I have often heard her talk of, and when I was in town in July I was informed of her intention of coming with him. So far as I know the Russians in general, and the princess more particularly, the sciences on which the stress must be laid are ethics and Jurisprudence. Their gentry, with very shallow knowledge, are great dabblers in all the french books of [*illegible*] philosophy of this kind, and I know that the Lady would wish that her son should not only be well [*principled?*] in these branches of education, but should also shine in such conversation. [...] I cannot expect that she will have patience to wait here during the course of his Education, which, considering his age, you can hardly make less than four years. She will find this a constraint on her, and, tiring of it, will take him away, to ramble with her to the universities on the Continent. My high opinion of the mother makes me form favourable expectations of the Son”

Letter from Jean Duff, Dowager Countess of Fife to her son (16 December 1776), MS 2727/1/155, fols. 1v-2r

Jean Duff, Dowager Countess of Fife, has more wayward spelling than the other eighteenth-century writers in this collection.

“we have gote a Russian princes here, many people are goeing to see her, perhapce Courriosity may me goe likeways. She was at the play yesterday, the Ladies were

dissatisfied with her appearance, as they expected to see one uncommonly fine, but she despises dress, and was quite plain, only she wore a star on one side I suppose relating to some order, she desires that any Lady that come to visit her, may come in an undress if Sophia, and I goe we will obey her, she has a son here, they say that he is heire to the Crown of Russhia they say that the Empress gives her plenty of monie, provided, that she live out of that Kingdom, the reason is belived to be that she knows too much of her majestys secrets. She cutts a good figuer here, has twelve footmen attending when she goes abroad.”

Robert Chambers, ‘Princess Dusloff’ (1825), *Traditions of Edinburgh*, p. 48

Robert Chambers: Scottish publisher, geologist, and author. He never met Dashkova.

“The Princess Dusloff, who had so great a share in the murder of the Russian Emperor Peter, after she lost the favour of Catherine, came to Edinburgh, and resided in a hotel (now Gibb’s) at the south-east corner of St Andrews’s Square. She gave parties in the large room there. The ladies only were accommodated with chairs, while the gentlemen stood or acted as waiters. – She afterwards paid a visit to Mr Daniel Campbell, M.P. at Woodhall and was supposed to have had an amour with him. At least she contrived to fleece him out of all the family diamonds. – We are informed by a lady of quality still alive, that, when a girl, she went, with her grandmother, to drink tea with the Princess at Mrs Greenfield’s, in Middleton’s Entry, near the Potterrow. Mrs Greenfield’s son was tutor to the son of the Princess. The Russian was quite covered over with costly furs and diamonds, and came with her guards. Her robe had a deep skirt of white fur, with a large black star behind.”

Kate Douglas Wiggin, *Penelope’s Progress*, p. 48

Kate Douglas Wiggin: late nineteenth-century American children’s author, known for Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm.

“It was the Princess Dashkoff who said, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, that of all the societies of men of talent she had met with in her travels, Edinburgh’s was the first in point of abilities.”

Letter from David Garrick to Dashkova (Mistley, Essex, 3 May 1778), *Memoirs of the Princess Daschkaw*, vol. 2 pp. 136-7

Dashkova sent one of her musical compositions to the famous actor David Garrick.

“Madam, – I feel most sensibly the very great honour you have done me, and I have felt as sensibly the charming object of my gratitude. Yesterday, a most accomplished musician and an excellent composer did all the justice in his power to your highness’s composition. The small audience was in raptures; the taste, harmony, and pathetic simplicity of the airs were felt from the heart. Indeed, madam, you were judged, not as a princess, but as a great artist. Not the least favour was shewn to your titles or rank, and though the musical jury sat upon you with the most critical rigour, yet your acquittal was as unanimous as their approbation; in short, I fear what one of our own poets once prophesied will come to pass –

‘Russia shall teach the arts to Britain’s isle.’

May your highness long continue to be an honour to your own nation, and the delight of ours; and may that pure taste for nature and simplicity get strength from your highness’s example, and drive from our theatres the present vocal and instrumental music, which astonishes the ears without ever touching the heart.”

Letter from Judith Milbanke to her aunt (Scarborough, 12 September 1778), *The Noels and the Milbankes*, p. 122

Lady Judith Milbanke saw Dashkova while taking the waters at Scarborough.

“A Russian Lady of a very extraordinary Character has been here sometime, the Princess Daschkaw who had a great share in the last Revolution and was one of those principally concerned in the Czar Peter’s Death ... She wears an order of Diamonds which the Empress gave from her own breast as soon as she gained Possession of the Palace. She left Russia eight years ago, the Empress *advising* her to *travel for her health*, being I suppose of too enterprizing a spirit to be agreeable to her. She ... has resided at Edinburgh the last two years for her Son to study under Robison and Dr. Blair ... Her son about 15 and her Daughter 18 are here with her and Mrs. Hamilton the Archbishop of Tuams Daughter who ... has lived with the Princess these four years ... they say she is very well informed & of a strong Masculine Spirit which I should guess was the case from her Appearance.”

Letter from Horace Walpole to the Countess of Ossory (Strawberry Hill, 1 June 1780), *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, vol. 7 pp. 374-5

“On Tuesday I was asked to a conversation-piece at Lady Clermont’s, and there I found that Thalestris, the Princess Daskiou, and her son and daughter. The lad is a tolerable Pompey; the daughter, a perfect Tartar. The mother, who I hoped had forgotten me, recollected our having passed an evening together at Northumberland House, as she told Lady Clermont; but as she did not claim me, I shall not leave my name at her lodgings in blood-bowl alley.”

Letter from Horace Walpole to the Countess of Ossory (Berkeley Square, 3 June 1780), *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, vol. 7 p. 377

“I do not know whether he [the Russian officer] is an associate of Thalestris [Dashkova], who seems to have snuffed a revolution in the wind.”¹²

Letter from Horace Walpole to William Mason (Strawberry Hill, 9 June 1780), *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, vol. 7 p. 392

“That Scythian heroine, the Princess Daskiou, is here; her natural brother Rantzau [Aleksandr Rontsov] was taken in Monsieur Cordon’s Chapel [...] *She* herself on Wednesday, *I know*, sent Lord Ashburnham word that his house was marked for destruction. Merciful tigress! it is proof that he is not an Emperor.”

Letter from Horace Walpole to the Countess of Ossory (Strawberry Hill, 29 June 1780), *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, vol. 7 p. 406

“The Princess Daskiou was here this morning with her horde of Tartars, but I kept out of sight, having nothing to regale her but one old horse.”

¹² Dashkova was suspected of complicity in the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 2-3 June 1780, when rioters sacked the chapel of the Sardinian ambassador, the Marchese di Cordon. Among the thirteen men arrested was a Russian officer – Dashkova’s half-brother, Aleksandr Ronstov.

Letter from Arabella Denny to Dashkova (Peafield Cliff, 14 July 1780), *Memoirs of the Princess Daschkaw*, vol. 2 p. 138

Philanthropist and first female member of the Royal Irish Academy Lady Arabella Denny became friends with Dashkova during the latter's tour of Ireland with Catherine Hamilton.

“I had as well confess all my trespasses on your highness since you left Ireland. I have been with you every day, and conversed with you by reflection; I have profited by your judgment of things, and improved my mind by your sentiments; in short, I have hardly left you one moment to yourself [...] Miss K. Fitzmaurice and I agreed that we would go and water the trees the Princess Daschkaw planted, (three of which are in a promising state.) My own hand, lame as it was, went to the watering-pot; and this was followed by our most sincere wishes that your highness might very very long enjoy every felicity that the best parent could hope for, from the two moral plants which had engaged so constantly your maternal and affectionate attention, whose blossoms promised the most salutary as well as the most pleasing fruits”

Letter from Hugh Blair to Dashkova (Edinburgh, 5 August 1780), *Memoirs of the Princess Daschkaw*, vol. 2 pp. 135-6

Hugh Blair: minister, theologian, and professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh.

“Dr. Blair presents his most respectful compliments to Princess Daschkaw. As soon as the copies of the second volume of his sermons arrived in Edinburgh, he immediately directed one for her highness [...] at Dublin. [...] It will give him great satisfaction if he can learn that the princess honours this volume with the same approbation as she did the former. He begs leave to offer his best respects to the prince and to Mad. Scherbinin;¹³ he [...] makes no doubt but in the future course of his life, the prince will go on to fulfil the high hopes which were entertained concerning him by all who had access to know him in Scotland.”

¹³ Dashkova's daughter Anastasiia Shcherbinina.

Letter from Lady Arabella Denny to Dashkova (Peafield Cliff, 23 December 1780), *Memoirs of the Princess Daschkaw*, vol. 2 pp. 141-2

“This season puts me in mind of the difference I shall experience between this Christmas and the last, when the most gloomy days of the winter were often brightened by your presence at my little farm. The Christmas-pie is making, but alas! it will not have the honour the last had. Thus little things as well as great call to my mind the advantage I had, of conversing with one whose benevolent heart and improved mind must benefit all those who had the happiness of being admitted to any degree of intimacy with the Princess of Daschkaw.”

Letter from Georgiana Shipley to Benjamin Franklin (6 January 1781), *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 34 p. 253

Writer, scientist, and founding father of America Benjamin Franklin met Dashkova in Paris.

“I send this enclosed to Madme Scherbinin, who has promised to deliver it in person. I wish you extremely to be acquainted with her & her mother the Princess of Daschkaw, who is a woman of uncommon good parts & great strength of understanding; my father was quite charm’d with her, & you agree with him on so many subjects, that I do not believe you will differ on this.”

Letter from Benjamin Franklin to Georgiana Shipley (after 3 February 1781), *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 34 p. 346

“I recd also your very kind Letter by a Made. Sherbinin with whom and the Princess her Mother I am much pleased; tho’ I have not seen them so often as I wish’d, living as I do out of Paris.”

Journal and anecdotes of Cornelia Knight (Rome, 1782), *Autobiography of Miss Cornelia Knight*, vol. 2 pp. 219-21, 322, 324

Ellis Cornelia Knight: socialite, artist, writer, and traveller.

“Princess D., who had been staying some time at Rome with her son and married daughter, came to the fête dressed in black. She was considered by the Grand-Duke and Duchess as a spy on their proceedings; and, at all events, the part which she was supposed to have taken in the imprisonment and death of the Grand-Duke’s father must have rendered the sight of her very painful to them. Unmindful of this,

she seated herself at the concert as near as possible to the Grand-Duke, just behind him to the right. He was greatly annoyed, and, turning towards her, said: 'Madame, on ne vient pas habillé en noir à la fête d'un souverain.' Princess D. gave as an excuse the assurance that, as she was about to leave Rome, all her other dresses were packed up. The Grand-Duke replied: 'On peut toujours rester à la maison.'

The Princess was a short, fat, middle-aged woman, with a very red face and harsh countenance; and the broad red riband and star, which she wore in the way such decorations are worn by men, added to her formidable appearance. It is said she was only eighteen years of age when the death of the Emperor Peter took place, and that, seated at a table with two pistols before her, she waited for the news with the intention, if it proved contrary to her wishes, of killing the messenger with one and herself with the other. Pistols, we were told, she always carried about with her; and, notwithstanding the services she had rendered to the Empress Catherine, and the strange masculine honours conferred upon her in return – such as this decoration, and her being made President of the Academy of Sciences – it is evident that her absence was more agreeable to her Imperial mistress than her presence would be, for she was many years in England, Scotland, and Italy. She would not allow her daughter to live with her husband, and she used to lock up her son, who must have been turned of twenty, every night. How unlike to her amiable and excellent brother. It is said that she had a sister who was gentleness itself. One would wish to think that Princess Dashkoff was in some measure misrepresented.”

“Princess Dashkoff being at Cardinal de Bernis’ in carnival time, boasted that she would not fear to face forty cannons, and yet started when the petards were fired to give the signal for the race. She was asked if she felt cold, and she answered that her imagination was colder than her person.”

“Princess Dashkoff said she thought the Polish nation the most servile in the world till she saw the Italians.”

Presidency of Two Academies



Portrait of Princess Dashkova as president of the Russian Academy, unknown artist

Letter from Samuel Bentham to Jeremy Bentham (Petersburg, 31 January/11 February 1783), *Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham*, vol. 3 pp. 152-3

The mechanical engineer, naval architect, and inventor Samuel Bentham lived in Russia 1780-91, where he designed ships and machinery for Catherine the Great, and served in the Russian army. As he writes to his brother the philosopher Jeremy Bentham, he met Dashkova through her son.

“I have written by this Post to Sir Joseph Banks President of the Royal Society to inform him of the late director of the Academy of Sciences being turned out of his place and Princess Dashkawa appointed directrice in his stead. [...] I enclosed him a copy of the speech the Princess made at the first meeting. Now you must bestir yourself to afford all scientific information, and as any proposals for the improvement of Science will at present stand an excellent chance of being forwarded you may rummage up all you have of that kind. My great intimacy with the Princess and more particularly with the son ensure me a great deal of attention. Tomorrow the Princess will present to the Empress a plan of mine of a chart for exhibiting a view of the absolute and comparative state of Population of the whole or any parts of the Empire.”

Journal of Katherine Harris (January 1783), Lowry Cole Papers, 30/433, no. 19, fols. 10, 8v-9r, translated from French by G. Barker

Katherine Robinson (née Harris): elder sister of the 1st Earl of Malmesbury.

“un Caractère assez extra-ordinaire, avec beaucoup d’Esprit infiniment de Connoissances mais sans une bonne tête. [...] La Princesse parla bon Sens et fut très aimable.”

“a quite extraordinary Character, with lots of Spirit, infinite Knowledge, but without a good head. [...] The Princess spoke good Sense and was very amiable.”

Letter from Samuel Bentham to Jeremy Bentham (Petersburg, 30 September 1783), Add. MS 33558, fols. 188-9

“I have been talking with Princess Dashkoff about different objects of rural Economy, she has offered to give me the management of her principal estate where there are new 2,000 Peasants for a certain time as ten years during which time I should have all that I could make of it over and above what she now receives which is not more than 2 ½ or 3 Rubles a Head. Something of this kind may

hereafter be done if Anderson or some such Person would go and live on the spot. It is situated in a fine Part of the Country about 100 Miles from Moscow.

I believe I told you before that I dont wish to have any money Connections with Princess Dashkoff. She is as mean & avaricious as possible with her Vanity which latter passion she is actuated by in the highest degree.

It is not however by flattering her Vanity that I am good friends with her & I imagine it is my intimacy with her son that forms the cement – she requires the most servile obedience from him to her, and imagines that all his merit is from her and expects he should think so. He on his part has his share of Vanity with the best pretensions to it, sees his follies, and is ashamed of them.

He is of too violent a disposition to admit of any gouvernance. I step between as a Mediator and she cannot but have observed that of the two I have the more real power over his conduct than herself. She rails against him to me and represents him as the most infamous insensible Profligate Son imaginable; to others she speaks of him as an Angel. I take her part by endeavouring to show her that the bad qualities which she complains of in him as far as they exist are the unavoidable attendants on his good ones, but you can well imagine that it is not easy to make her see that while she requires of him more obedience & respect than he is disposed to give her she is taking the most effectual means to root out all affection from his heart. The daughter who is submission itself she treats still worse. I dont like to see Peoples Characters on paper when they are of this stamp, otherwise I should long ago have given you several.”

Letter from Samuel Bentham to Jeremy Bentham (12 October 1783), Add. MS 33558, fol. 194

“Princess Dashkoff seems to be in as high favour as ever; She has persuaded the Empress to Establish a new Academy of Belles Lettres¹⁴ to consist of Sixty Members of which the greatest Part are of the first nobility, The Princess is the President, – their business is to be to watch over the purity of the Russian language, and to set up a standard to judge it by. I go as seldom as possible to her, but I see the daughter frequently in her own Rooms, and when the Mother is at Court Mrs. Hamilton is of our Party.”

¹⁴ The Russian Academy.

Letter from Samuel Bentham to Miss at London [called ‘Нанка’ (‘Nanka’) in letter] (Petersburg, 13 October 1783), Add. MS 33558, fol. 195

“My friend Dashkoff arrives, more call for prudence & circumspection, more anxieties – the mother attacks me, the son attacks me. They pull different ways, and I tug against both at length however he sets off; Further Lamentations.”

Letter from Samuel Bentham to Jeremy Bentham (14/25 October 1783), *Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham*, vol. 3 p. 226

“Princess Dashkoff could now be made usefull in any thing that would please the Empress and She is well capable of judging what will do that. There is some fear that when Potemkin returns she may lose her favor; but I do not fear the finding other channels of coming at the Empress.”

Letter from Samuel Bentham to Jeremy Bentham (14/25 October 1783), *Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham*, vol. 3 p. 228

“I told you of a periodical work¹⁵ that is published here at the Academy under the immediate management of the Princess Dashkoff, it is in this work that the Empress herself is giving the history of this country. She also writes some other things in which the aim is wit and humour more than scientific knowledge. The rest consists of Poetry, Satire and some moral tales. 2 or 3 months ago there was published in this work a paper¹⁶ containing about 20 questions relating to the government which would astonish you by their freedom. One of them was ‘why are not trials in courts of justice printed?’ another was ‘why do men of merit quit the service?’”

Princess Dashkoff shewed this paper to the Empress before she dared permit it to be printed. Leave however was obtained.”

¹⁵ *Sobesednik Liubitelei Rossiiskago Slova / Interlocutor of Lovers of the Russian Word.*

¹⁶ Later discovered to be by the playwright Denis Fonvizin.

Mikhail Kheraskov, 'To Her Excellency Princess Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova' (1783), *Sobesednik liubitelei rossiiskago slova*, vol. 6 pp. 19-22, translated from Russian by G. Barker

Mikhail Kheraskov: court poet and playwright.

**Ее сиятельству княгине
Екатерине Романовне Дашковой**

Призывающему гласу
Я последовать хочу,
Ко священному Парнасу
Прежнего пути ищу.

Сладко мне повиноваться
Председательнице муз,
Только должен я признаться,
Что к стихам исчез мой вкус.

Будто моря удаленье
Обнажает берега,
Иль морозов наступленье
Нам сулит одни снега.

Тако пение бесплодно,
Тако стало студено;
Летам не цветущим сродно,
Сухо, пасмурно, темно.

Мне не лиру, но цевницу
Свойственно теперь иметь –
Пусть Мурза поет Фелицу,
Может он со вкусом петь.

Спознакомясь со Парнасом,
Душиньку пускай поет
Богданович нежным гласом,
Только помня мой совет.

**To Her Excellency Princess
Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova**

I want to follow after
The voice that summons,
I seek the former path
To sacred Parnassus.

It is sweet for me to submit
To the chairwoman of the muses,
Only I am bound to admit
My taste for poems has vanished.

As if the sea's withdrawal
Lays bare the shores,
Or the frosts' arrival
Promises us only snows.

So is singing fruitless,
So it is become glacial;
To blossoming summers incongenial,
Arid, overcast, tenebrous.

Not the lyre, but a pipe of reeds
Is suited to me these days –
Let the Murza hymn Felitsa,
He is able to sing with taste.

Making Parnassus' acquaintance,
Let Bogdanovich hymn his
Dushinka with tender voice,
Only keeping in mind my advice.

Пусть ко солнечному свету
Юные парят орлы
И свою имеют мету
Петь монархине хвалы.

Предлежит пространно поле
Музам ради их трудов:
Здесь премудрость на престоле;
Много надобно венцов.

Ум природы совершенство,
Истина ее уста;
Зиждет общее блаженство
Каждая руки черта.

В сердце милость обитает,
На челе священный мир,
Важный дух в очах блистает;
Сколько видов ради лир!

Муз лишенный, справедливо
Сожалею лишь о том,
Что писать бессилен живо
Ей хвалы моим пером;

Но мое стихотворенье
Будто бы поля весной,
Чувствует животворенье,
Внемя кроткий голос твой.

Кто российской громкой славы
Не удобен в рог звучать,
Тот испорченные нравы
Постарайся обличать.

Пусть вещает и вострубит
В прозе и стихах своих:
Кто Россию прямо любит,

Let the young eagles Orlov¹⁷
Soar towards the sun's brightness
And have as their goal
To eulogise the monarchess.

The field opens before the muses
Far and wide for their labours:
Here wisdom is on the throne;
Many garlands are owed.

Her mind is nature's perfection,
Truth is her lips;
Her hand's every lineation
Creates general bliss.

In her heart mercy resides,
On her brow is sacred peace,
A solemn spirit shines in her eyes;
How many aspects for the lyres!

Bereft of muses, rightly
I am sorry only
That my pen is powerless to write
Her praises that are lively;

But my composition,
Like fields in spring-time,
Feels a vivification,
Hearing your gentle voice.

Whoever is not suited to sound
Russia's loud glory on his horn,
You must try to unmask
His corrupted morals.

Let him pontificate and trumpet
In his prose and his poems:
Whoever really loves Russia,
He will not borrow the traits of others.

¹⁷ Kheraskov only implies the Orlov brothers in the original Russian, with the word 'orly'/'eagles'.

Не заемлет свойств чужих.
Чем славна богиня в мире,
То питает мысль мою;
Но теперь на томной лире
Я Владимира пою.

Древность солнце мне являет
В просвещенном муже сем;
А Минерва оживляет
Дух премудрости лучом.

Сладко музам под покровом
Сей богини ликовать
И вседневно в чувстве новом
Благодарность воспевать.

Пойте, росски музы, пойте,
Есть наперсница у вас;
Восхищайтесь, лиры стройте,
Вверен Дашковой Парнас.

It is the goddess' earthly glory
That nourishes my thought;
But now on my wearied lyre
I sing of Vladimir.

Antiquity shows me the sun
In that enlightened man;
And with her beam Minerva quickens
The spirit of wisdom.

It is sweet for the muses
Under the mantle of this goddess
To exult and daily with new emotion
To sing forth their appreciation.

Sing, Russian muses, sing,
You have a confidante;
Rhapsodise, build your lyres,
To Dashkova is entrusted Parnassus.

Iakov Kniazhnin, 'To Princess Dashkova. A Letter upon the Occasion of the Opening of the Russian Academy' (1783), *Izbrannnye proizvedeniia*, pp. 649-53, translated from Russian by G. Barker

Iakov Kniazhnin: playwright. Dashkova published Kniazhnin's tragedy Vadim of Novgorod posthumously, to benefit his widow. The play's anti-autocratic sentiments caused Dashkova's fall from grace with Catherine.

К княгине Дашковой. Письмо на случай открытия Академии Российской

Избранная Минервы волей
Устроить росским музам сень,
Позволь для них счастливый день
Восторженну их лучшей долей
Оставить в памяти граждан...
Не думай, чтобы я, гордяся
Талантом, мне который дан,
И чтоб тщеславно становяся
С венчанными мужами в ряд,

Которых Феб к своим причислил,
Убравши в лавровый наряд,
Я дерзко б о себе помыслил,
Что лира слабая моя
Так славу раздавать способна,
Как просвещенна мысль твоя
Тому содействовать удобна,
Чем небо в благодати своей
Из уст монархини к нам дышит.

**To Princess Dashkova. A Letter upon the Occasion of the Opening
of the Russian Academy**

You who have been elected by Minerva's will
To erect an awning for Russia's muses,
Allow me, enraptured by their better fortunes,
To leave this happy day of theirs still
In the memory of the citizenry...
Do not think that I, by vaunting
The talent that has been given me,
And that by vaingloriously standing
In line with the crownèd men,
Whom Phoebus ranked among his own,
Adorning them in laurelled apparel,
That I conceive so boldly of myself
That my feeble lyre
Is as skilful at dispensing the glory
As your enlightened thought
Is fitted to promote it,
Which heaven in its goodness
Breathes on us from the lips of our monarchess.¹⁸

'The Russian Academy' (April 1785), *The Edinburgh Magazine*, vol. 1 p. 304

“On the 25th of November last was celebrated the anniversary of the new Russian Imperial Academy in the palace of her highness the Princess de Daschkaw, president both of this academy and of that of Sciences at St Petersburg. The great mental powers of this extraordinary lady, her thorough knowledge of various sciences, and the vast acquisition she has made of every species of useful information, from the most eminent philosophers and learned men of this age, during her travels through the most polished and civilized nations of Europe, attracted the attention of her Imperial Majesty the Empress of Russia. The superior discernment of this August Potentate determined her to give new proof to succeeding generations how much better suited the fair sex is often, not only for the highest employments of governing vast and extensive nations, of which Herself

¹⁸ The rest of Kniazhnin's 159-line poem is devoted to praising Catherine the Great.

is the most illustrious example; but of directing the arduous and delicate task of the various speculative sciences and nobler arts.”

Note from Catherine II to Dashkova (c. 1786?), *Memoirs of the Princess Daschkew*, vol. 2 p. 94

“If [...] you [...] select a spot of ground for this [botanical] garden, which can be obtained without injury to any person or to any establishment, I will do my best to procure it for the Academy, where they may dig and sow as much as ever they please. If you grow into a sunflower, dear madam, I shall be like the prophet who reposed at Nineveh under the shade of this or some other plant, infinitely pleased with one who loves me well enough to take root for my sake.”

John Sinclair (1786/7), *The Correspondence of the Right Honourable Sir John Sinclair*, vol. 1 p. 151

Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster was a Scottish MP and financial and agricultural writer.

“I was fortunate enough to procure from Dr Robertson, and other eminent literary characters in Scotland, letters of introduction to this distinguished personage, and received from her, during my stay in St Petersburg, the most friendly marks of attention.”

Letter from Joseph Black to Dashkova (Edinburgh, 27 August 1787), Ms.Gen.873/III, fols. 36-8

Joseph Black: professor of Medicine and Chemistry at the University of Edinburgh.

“Those whom you honoured with your freindship here are in general well & often remember you with respect & affection. Poor Mrs. Hunter Blair however has lost her husband [...]. Principal Robertson is well. Dr. Blair being at ease in point of fortune has publishd his Lectures & resigned his Professorship [...]. Mr. Greenfield is now Professor of Rhetoric [...]. Professor Stewart formerly of Geometry is now Professor of moral Philosophy in place of Mr. Ferguson who has retired. Dr. Hutton who assisted in making the Catalogue of your beautiful Collection of Derbyshire fossils has commenced author.¹⁹ he has read two Papers in our Philosophical Society which are soon to be published in the first volume of their

¹⁹ James Hunter Blair, William Robertson, Hugh Blair, William Greenfield, Dugald Stewart, Adam Ferguson, James Hutton.

transactions already printed. the first Paper is on the cause of rain, the other is a Theory of the terrestrial Globe or explains the formation & arrangement of Fossils. his reasonings and opinions on this subject have great merit & are much admired. He desires me to express his gratefull acknowledgements for your kind invitation it is very tempting on many accounts but he is not easily set in motion. his attachment to the freinds he lives with, was always strong by affection & time has made it stronger by habit. Your Excellency perhaps may have a Curiosity to know something of his Theory of the Earth I shall here give the general Principles of it

There are two grand operations going on perpetually in Nature; one of these is the graduall & slow demolition of the elevated parts of the Earths surface by the action of air, water & frost. by the repeated impressions of these agents the hardest Rocks & Mountains are slowly moldered down into Rubbish & dust. [...] were it to go on without being counteracted the inequalitys of the earths surface would be levelled in the course of time to a perfect plain & mostly covered by the sea or by Collections of stagnating water. But there is a Remedy in nature to prevent such a great change in the constitution of the globe. There is another Cause acting as constantly to prepare new rocks & mountains or as Dr. Hutton expresses it 'new Land, or new worlds' [...] This other cause is subterranean fire the agency of which tho not so obvious can be demonstrated to produce its effects constantly during very long periods of time under a great many parts of the surface of the Globe. This is evident from the hot springs & Volcanic mountains & Islands [...]

In the theory of Dr. Hutton there is a grandeur & sublimity by which it far surpasses any that has been offered. The boundless preexistence of time and of the operations of Nature which he brings into our View, the depth & extent to which his imagination has explored the action of fire in the internal parts of the Earth strike us with astonishment. [...]

I had been thinking of a Lecture on this subject for next winter & I perceive that my lecturing Ideas have escaped from me in writing my letter. To return to the news of this place Professor John Robison has read a Paper on the new Planet & this also will be published in the first volume. I am very sorry to add that he has been confined for many months with a most painfull & distressing disorder from which I am afraid he must suffer a great deal more without hopes of recovery. he informs me that when he left Russia the Empress was pleased to grant him a Pension of 400 Rubles in character of correspondent with the Marine Cadet Corps. this Pension was paid during the four years that the Russian Boys were with him but has been discontinued ever since and no reason assigned. perhaps your Highness's goodness may incline you to be freindly to his Family in this matter [...]

It gives your excellencys Friends here the greatest satisfaction & pleasure to learn that your sons Character & progress corresponds so well to the hopes they had formed.”

John Sinclair (1787), *General observations regarding the present state of the Russian Empire* (London: 1787?), pp. 34-5

“PRINCESS DASCHKOW Is a kind of minister to the Empress in literary matters, being at the head of the Petersburg academy. Has sometimes a good deal to say, and knows every thing that is passing at court. Her character and history uncommonly singular. She was married at fifteen. Could at that age speak the French language only, but taught herself the Russian. Became a widow at twenty-two. Her husband left his affairs in great disorder. Retired to the country, and lived on L.60 a-year, to pay his debts. Devoted herself entirely to the education of her children after they had grown up, and with that view resided a considerable time in Scotland, where she placed her son under the care of the great historian Robertson, and afterwards travelled, accompanied by her children, all over Europe. So strong is her appetite for power, that she wished to have her son appointed the Empress’s personal favourite when they returned to Russia. But Potemkin, knowing her boundless ambition, very artfully contrived to defeat her project. The principal handle he made use of, was young Daschkow’s repeating, in a ridiculous manner, in the course of a drunken frolic, some passages from Shakespeare. It is astonishing on what trivial circumstances great events may depend. Had the Princess succeeded in her views, the system of the court of Petersburg would have been altered, and Russia, in the midst of the American war, would have declared in our favour.

She is of the Worontzow family, and got the name of the *learned* Countess of Worontzow. Another sister was called the *handsome*, who became infamous for her lewdness; and a third the *ugly*, who found means however to ingratiate herself with the Emperor, Peter III, and became his mistress. The Princess Daschkow one day reproached her ugly sister for her conduct in living with the Emperor, disgracing her family, &c. ‘The time *may soon* come,’ said the Countess with indignation, ‘when you will talk to me in a different style, and will think yourself honoured with a nod.’ This betrayed Peter’s intentions to divorce his wife, and to crown his mistress, and occasioned a revolution, to which the jealousy of an elder sister not a little contributed.

The young Prince, her son, has hardly answered the pains she has taken with him. He speaks many languages, as Russ, English, French, Latin, German, Italian, and a little Erse and Greek, but is far from being very deep in any thing. He is very self-

sufficient, and expensive, keeps an amazing number of horses, gambles a good deal, and at one sitting is said to have lost L. 10,000 Sterling.

The Daschkow property is valued at L. 12,000 *per annum*; but it is ill managed, and wasted much in building, particularly in carrying on a magnificent palace at Moscow. The Princess is in perpetual difficulties, but is too proud to accept of any pecuniary bounty from the Empress, though frequently proffered.”

**Letter from Benjamin Franklin to ‘Madame la Princesse Dashkaw
Presidente de l’Academie des Sciences, à Petersburg’** (Philadelphia, 7 May 1788), *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 45 p. 505

“Madame, – It gave me great Pleasure to hear, that your magnanimous Empress had plac’d you at the Head of your Academy of Sciences. It was doing Honour to Learning. With this you will receive the second Volume of the Transactions of our Philosophical Society, who hope it may be favourably accepted as a Testimony of their Respect for yours. With great and sincere Esteem and Respect, I am, Madame your most obedient &c”

Gavrila Derzhavin, ‘On the Death of Countess Rumiantseva’ (1788), *Stikhotvoreniia*, pp. 118-21, translated from Russian by G. Barker

Dashkova published Derzhavin’s poem ‘Felitsa’ – its portrait of Catherine delighted her, and gave Derzhavin his big break to become the favourite court poet. Yet his poems to Dashkova are all extremely barbed: patronising and critical of her transgressions of gender norms.

На Смерть Графини Румянцевой

Не беспрестанно дождь стремится
На класы с черных облаков,
И море не всегда струится
От прменяемых ветров;
Не круглый год во льду спят воды,
Не всякий день бурь слышен свист,
И с скучной не всегда природы
Падет на землю желтый лист.

Подобно и тебе крушиться
Не должно, Дашкова, всегда,

Готово ль солнце в бездну скрыться,
Иль паки утру быть чреда;
Ты жизнь свою в тоске проводишь,
По английским твоим коврам,
Уединясь, в смущеньи ходишь
И волю течь даешь слезам.

Престань! и равнодушным оком
Возри на оный кипарис,
Который на брегу высоком
На невские струи навис
И мрачной тени под покровом,
Во дремлющих своих ветвях,
Сокрыл недавно в гробе новом
Румянцевой почтенный прах.

Румянцевой! — Она блистала
Умом, породой, красотой,
И в старости любовь снискала
У всех любезною душой;
Она со твердостью смежила
Супружний взор, друзей, детей;
Монархам осмерым служила,
Носила знаки их честей.

И зрела в торжестве и славе
И в лаврах сына своего;
Не изменялась в сердце, нраве
Ни для кого, ни для чего;
А доброе и злое купно
Собою испытала всё,
И как вертится всеминутно
Людской фортуны колесо.

Возри на памятник сей вечный
Ты современницы твоей,
В отраду горести сердечной,
К спокойствию души своей,
Прочти: «Сия гробница скрыла
Затмившего мать лунный свет;
Смерть добродетели щадила,

Она жила почти сто лет».

Как солнце тускло ниспускает
Последние свои лучи,
По небу, по водам блистает
Румяною зарей в ночи, —
Так с тихим вздохом, взором ясным
Она оставила сей свет;
Но именем своим прекрасным
Еще, еще она живет.

И ты, коль победила страсти,
Которы трудно победить;
Когда не ищешь вышней власти
И первою в вельможах быть;
Когда не мстишь, и совесть права,
Не алчешь злата и сребра, —
Какого же, коль телом здрава,
Еще желаешь ты добра?

Одно лишь в нас добро прямое,
А прочее всё в свете тлен;
Почует чья душа в покое,
Поистине тот есть блажен.
Престань же ты умом крылатым
По треволению летать;
С убогим грузом иль богатым,
Всяк должен к вечности пристать.

Пожди, — и сын твой с страшна бою
Иль на щите, иль со щитом,
С победой, с славою, с женою,
С трофеями приедет в дом;
И если знатности и злата
Невестка в дар не принесет,
Благими нравами богата,
Прекрасных внучат приведет.

Утешься, и в объятьи нежном
Облобызай своих ты чад;

В семействе тихом, безмятежном,
Фессальский насаждая сад,
Живи и распложай науки;
Живи и обессмерть себя,
Да громогласной лиры звуки
И музы воспоют тебя.

Седый собор Ареопага,
На истину смотря в очки,
Насчет общественного блага
Нередко ей давал щелчки;
Но в век тот Аристиды жили,
Сносили ссылки, казни, смерть;
Когда судьбы благоволили,
Не должно ли и нам терпеть?

Терпи! — Самсон сотрет льву зубы,
А Навин потемнит луну;
Румянцев молнии дхнет сутубы,
Екатерина тишину.
Меня ж ничто вредить не может,
Я злобу твердостью сотру;
Врагов моих червь кости сложет,
А я пиит — и не умру.

On the Death of Countess Rumiantseva

The rain does not strive relentlessly
To reach the crops from the black clouds,
And the sea is not billowing constantly
Away from changeful winds;
The waters do not sleep in ice all year round,
The piping of gales is not heard every day,
And the yellow leaf is not falling always
From tedious nature to the ground.

Likewise you too, Dashkova,
Should not sorrow forever,
Whether the sun is ready to hide in ocean,
Or 'tis once again morning's turn;
You spend your life in regrets,

A recluse, you pace to and fro,
Bewildered, over your English carpets
And allow your tears to freely flow.

Desist! And with impassive eye
Gaze upon yonder cypress
Which on its shore up high
Has overhung the Neva's streams
And under a shroud of gloomy shade,
In its slumbrous branches,
Has lately hid in their new grave
Rumiantseva's venerable ashes.

Rumiantseva! – She shone
With wit, breeding, beauty,
And in her old age she won
The love of all with her amiability;
She united determination
With a wifely eye, friends, children;
She served eight monarchs,
She wore the badges of their honours.

And she beheld her very own son
In laurels, glorious and triumphant;
She never altered in heart or temperament,
Not for anything, not for anyone;
Yet she experienced good and ill
Respectively of all kinds for herself,
And how minute by minute
The wheel of human fortune pivots.

Gaze upon this monument eternal
To that woman, your peer and rival,
And for solace to your heart's trouble,
To bring serenity to your soul,
Read: 'This tomb has hidden from sight
The mother of he who dimmed moonlight;
Death was lenient to the righteous,
She lived almost a hundred years'.

Just as the sun lowers faintly

Its final glimmering rays,
Beaming ruby sunset across the sky,
Across the waters, into the night –
Just so, with a quiet sigh, with a clear eye,
She left this world behind;
But in her splendid name
Even still she stays alive.

And you, if you have vanquished your passions,
Which are hard indeed to vanquish;
When you do not seek supreme power
And to be first among princes;
When you forgive, and your conscience is clear,
When you do not hoard gold and silver –
What, then, if you are of sound body,
What more could you wish to add to this bounty?

The only real thing within us is goodness,
And all besides in this world is dust;
Whosoever's soul that in peace doth rest,
Truly that person is blest.
Desist from flying 'pon adversity
With your wingèd intellect;
Whether with a poor freight or a rich,
All must land in eternity.

Just wait – and your son from fearsome fray
Either on his shield or with his shield,
With victory, with glory, with bride,
With trophies shall come home to stay;
And if your daughter-in-law does not bring
Eminence and gold as her dowry,
Then, rich in good morals, she
Will provide fine grandchildren.

Take comfort, and shower tender embraces
And kisses on your brood of children;
In your household quiet and strifeless,
Sowing your Thessalian garden,
Live and propagate sciences;
Live and immortalise yourself,

And may the lyre's thund'rous-voiced strains
And the muses sing your praises.

The grey-haired assembly on Areopagus,
Inspecting the truth through their glasses,
Often had cause to give her a fillip
Regarding the good of the public;
But Aristides lived in another era –
Then people bore exile, execution, death;
When the fates have been kind to us,
Should not we, too, endure?

Endure! – Samson will pull the lion's teeth,
And Joshua will make the moon dark;
Rumiantsev will inspire great lightning darts,
And Catherine – tranquillity.
As for me, nothing can bring me harm,
Spite I with resoluteness defy;
My enemies' bones will be gnawed by worms,
But I am a poet – and I shall not die.

A. V. Khrapovitskii's diary, quoting Catherine II (1787-9), *Pamiatnyia zapiski A.V. Khrapovitskago*, pp. 44-201, translated from Russian by G. Barker

Aleksandr Khrapovitskii: Catherine's State Secretary.

“«Дашкова съ Л. А. Нарышкинымъ въ такой ссорѣ, что, сидя рядомъ, оборачиваются другъ отъ друга и составляютъ двуглаваго орла. Ссора за 5-ть сажень земли.»”

“Съ Дашковой хорошо быть подалѣе изъ деликатеса. [...] Дашкова хотѣла бы жить въ Царскомъ Селѣ, по причинѣ печали, ей причиненной женидѣбою сына на Алферовой.»”

“Выведенъ Совѣтъ, чтобъ очистить комнаты Анны Никитишны Нарышкиной, но такъ расположено, чтобъ не было комнатъ для Княгини Дашковой: «Съ одною хочу проводить время, съ другою нѣтъ; онѣ же и въ ссорѣ за клочъ земли.»”

“Поднесъ переписанную *la rage aux proverbes*, и получилъ, для переписки, на Россійскомъ языкѣ пословицу За мухой съ обухомъ. Тутъ очень ясно между Пострѣловой и Дурындинымъ описана тяжба Кн. Дашковой съ А. А. Нарышкинымъ.”

“Поднесъ пословицу За мухой съ обухомъ; признались, что надобно смягчить суровость имянь и выкинуть хвастовство Пострѣловой о вояжахъ”

“Дашкова побила Нарышкиныхъ свиней; смѣясь сему происшествію, приказано скорѣе кончить дѣло въ судѣ, чтобъ не дошло до смертоубійства.”

“Княгиня Дашкова прислала письмо къ Графу М. А. Дмитріеву-Мамонову съ изъясненіемъ о свиньяхъ: «Тотъ любитъ свиней, а она цвѣты, и отъ того все дѣло вышло.»

“Вышедъ къ волосочесанію, изволили смѣяться, что въ одной сатирической книгѣ, съ Англійскаго переведенной, нашли, гдѣ искать *longitude*: *c'est dans les procès!* — Посыланъ съ запискою о семь на низъ; тамъ приписали, что тутъ же найдутъ и квадратуру циркуля, и въ самой тотъ день Княгиня Дашкова помирится съ А. А. Нарышкинымъ. Сему смѣялись, оставя записку у себя.”

“Письмо Княгини Дашковой о внучкѣ славнаго Эйлера, оставшейся вдовою послѣ Бернулли, въ объясненіе на ея просьбу; ей Княгиня даетъ мужнина жалованья только за 2 мѣсяца: — дополнили годовое изъ Кабинета... Она ни съ кѣмъ не уживется. «*Je reux m'accomoder de tous les caractères. Je suis comme Alcibiade à Sparte et dans Athenes.*»”

16 November 1787 “Dashkova and [A.] A. Naryshkin are at such odds, that when they are seated together, they turn away from each other and make a two-headed eagle. The dispute is over 11 feet of land.”

24 February 1788 “It would be good to keep distance from Dashkova out of delicacy. [...] Dashkova would like to live in Tsarskoe Selo, because of the sadness occasioned her by the marriage of her son to Alferova.”

19 May 1788 “A Council has agreed to clean the rooms for Anna Nikitishna Naryshkina, but it has been so arranged that there will not be rooms for Princess Dashkova: ‘I want to spend time with one, and not the other; for they are arguing over a scrap of land.’”

23 October 1788 “I brought the transcribed copy of *la rage aux proverbes*, and received for transcribing a morality play in Russian, ‘Swatting a fly with an axe-head’

[‘За мухой съ обухомъ’]. This very clearly describes, in the figures of Postrelova [‘Scoundrelova’] and Duryndin [‘Nitwittin’], Princess Dashkova’s quarrel with A. A. Naryshkin.”

24 October 1788 “I brought the morality play ‘Swatting a fly with an axe-head’; She admitted She should soften the severity of the names and throw out Postrelova’s boasting about her travels”

30 October 1788 “Dashkova slaughtered Naryshkin’s pigs; laughing at this occurrence, She ordered that the matter be concluded in court as soon as possible, so it does not come to murder.”

2 November 1788 “Princess Dashkova sent a letter to Count M. A. Dmitriev-Mamonov with an explanation about the pigs: ‘He loves pigs, and she – flowers, and from this the whole matter came about’.”

23 January 1789 “Having come to head-scratching, She deigned to joke that in one satirical book translated from English, She discovered where to find *longitude*: c’est dans les procès! – Sent downstairs with a note of this; there they added that in the same place She would also find the square of the circle, and on that very day Princess Dashkova would make peace with A. A. Naryshkin. She laughed at this, and kept the note.”

31 July 1789 “Letter from Princess Dashkova about the granddaughter of the renowned Euler, who was left a widow after Bernoulli, in explanation to her request; the Princess is giving her her husband’s salary for only two months: – She has supplemented the annuity from the Cabinet.... She [Dashkova] cannot get along with anyone. ‘Je peux m’accomoder de tous les caractères. Je suis comme Alcibiade à Sparte et dans Athenes.’”

C. F. P. Masson, *Secret Memoirs of the Court of Petersburg*, pp. 307-8, 324-9

Charles François P. Masson: writer.

“The existence of the Amazons appeared to me no longer a fable, after I had beheld the russian women. [...] Under the reign of Catharine the women had assumed a pre-eminence at court, which they carried with them into company, and displayed at home. Princess Dashkof, that ‘Tomyris talking French’, as she was called by Voltaire; masculine in her tastes, her gait and her exploits, was still more so in her titles and functions of *director* of the academy of sciences, and *president* of the russian academy. It is well known that she long solicited Catharine to appoint

her colonel of the guards; a post in which she would undoubtedly have acquitted herself better than most of those by whom it was held. Catharine, however, had too much distrust of one who boasted that she had seated her on the throne, to confide such a place in her hands.”

“the princess Dashkof, who of all the women of Russia next to Catharine, has been most the subject of conversation, and whose portrait would form a proper companion for that of Potemkin [...]. I shall neither refute nor repeat what has been said a hundred times in print of this virago, the real heroine of the revolution of 1762. For some years the friendship between her and her royal mistress had singularly altered, and the following is the true cause of the last quarrel, which was never made up.

In hopes of gaining a few rubles, in 1794, the princess directed a posthumous tragedy of the poet Knæginin to be printed at the expense of the academy. At any other period no notice would have been taken of this piece, the merit of which was trifling. But from the time of the french revolution, and particularly after the death of Potemkin, Catharine had become fearful and suspicious: surrounded by weak and timid beings, their characters had infected hers. This tragedy was mentioned to her as a seditious piece. It was prohibited; all the copies were seized, and search actually made for those that had been already sold. As the work had been printed by the express orders of madame le president Dashkof, she was sent for by the empress. ‘Good heaven, what have I done to you, that you should print such an infamous and dangerous work?’ said Catharine, with great emotion: ‘if it be so great a crime to reign, was it not you who made me commit it?’ The princess, surprised at this pointed attack, said in excuse, that she had no ill design, and had not even read the piece, but relied entirely on the censor. To this Catharine sharply replied, that in such critical times people should rely on no person, but do their duty themselves. Madame Dashkof, mortified at this reprimand, procured her nephew, Bakunin, to be vice-president, to supply her place, and asked permission to retire to Mosco; which was granted her. The censor was punished; and it was happy for the author that he was dead.

The princess had long rendered herself odious and contemptible by her sordid avarice. This celebrated conspirator, who boasted of having conferred a crown, sent to all the officers or aides-de-camp of her acquaintance, to be tarnished epaulettes and old lace. To untwist and sell these was become her chief employment; and persons, who were interested in obtaining her favour, began by sending her old gold or silver lace. She made no fires in the winter in the apartments of the academy, and yet expected that the academicians should regularly attend the

meetings. Many chose rather to expose themselves to her vulgar abuse, and lost their medals, than shiver in an ice-house: but the princess never failed to be there, muffled up in rich furs; and it was a singular spectacle to see this lady only, seated in the midst of bearded popes and russian professors, trembling and submissive before her; for she treated these academicians with a haughtiness and even brutality worthy of Peter I. She took men of letters for soldiers, and the sciences for slaves.

Her adventure with count Gregory Razumofsky made all Petersburg laugh, and rendered her contemptible in the eyes of every man of sense. She had sent him an academicians's diploma unsolicited. Some time after she consigned to him a bale of russian books, to the value of about 600 rubles (60%). Razumofsky refused to take them, saying that he had the originals of these russian translations already in his library. The princess replied, that she had created him an academician only on condition of his purchasing these books; and in consequence Razumofsky sent back his diploma. The princess wished to persuade the world, that he was not in his senses; but the ridicule fell upon herself. Thus she prostituted her academy: as to herself, it was what no longer remained to be done.*

What rendered her completely ridiculous, both at court and in the city, was her lawsuit with Alexander Narishkin, who had a country seat in the neighbourhood of Petersburg, adjoining to hers. One day Narishkin's pigs got into the grounds of the princess, and devoured some of her cabbages. The heroine ordered them all to be massacred. Narishkin, seeing her at court, said "There she is, still red with the blood of ---** my pigs."

Such was this celebrated woman, who prided herself on the share that she had in the revolution of 1762, who went to fisty-cuffs with her landlady in Holland, who at Paris wanted to blow out the brains of poor abbé Chappe, whom Voltaire pretended to admire, whom german authors, on whom she never bestowed a farthing, treated in vain as a genius, and who at last became a laughing-stock to all Russia.

*One day having lost thirty rubles at cards to S---, she sent him the next morning thirty of the academy's almanacs by way of payment. I speak here only of her ridiculous meanness: the turpitude of her manners would carry me too far.

** This marked pause brought to the hearer's mind Peter III. and the crimson face of the princess was singularly suited to the expression used."

Gavrila Derzhavin, ‘To the Portrait of Princess Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova, DURING HER PRESIDENCY OF THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES’ (1790), *Sochineniia Derzhavina*, vol. 3 p. 350, translated from Russian by G. Barker

**К портрету княгини Екатерины
Романовны Дашковой, ВО
ВРЕМЯ ЕЕ ПРЕЗИДЕНТСТВА
В АКАДЕМИИ НАУК**

Сопутницей была,
Когда с небес на трон
Воссесть Астрея шла;
А ныне – Аполлон.

**To the Portrait of Princess
Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova,
DURING HER PRESIDENCY OF
THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES**

Her companion she was
When from heaven Astraea
Went forth to mount the throne;
But now – she is Apollo.

Gavrila Derzhavin, ‘To the Portrait of a Hermaphrodite’ (1790), *ibid.*, translated from Russian by G. Barker & O. Ferguson

К портрету Гермафродита

Се лик:
И баба и мужик.

To the Portrait of a Hermaphrodite

This physiognomy:
Both a she and a he.

This physique:
Both *baba* and *muzhik*.

These features:
Both a bird’s and a geezer’s.

This phizog:
Both bitch and dog.

Novella Matveeva, ‘To the Portrait of Princess Dashkova’, from *Sonnets to Dashkova* (1989-1993), *Sonety*, p. 52, translated from Russian by G. Barker

To the Portrait of Princess Dashkova *...Not only is it easy to assimilate,
But it also emboldens disloyalty –
Historians denouncing to posterity
An undesirable face.*

A woman who read books that were called ‘men’s’,

A woman who wrote her own verses and music,
With her water-lily-ditty, born in a harpsichord,
She is not quite yet resurfaced from its rippling depths

And – once more harkening to the harpsichord stream
(All the while – in the quagmire of throbbing echoes –
It will not wholly vanish, as it flows on in tremolos) –
She is not quite yet wakened for any mundane theme;

Illustrious for her almost victorious service,
But... as if suddenly seeing she's been denounced to us,
She looks out at us from golden twilight,

Like he who, having suffered unjust persecution,
Was ready to give in to temptation – self-opinion –
But remembered the pious and poor before it was too late.

К портрету княгини Дашковой

*...II усвоится легко,
II потекает вероломству
Донос историков потомству
На неудобное лицо.*

Читательница книг, зовущихся «мужскими»,
Создательница строф и музыки своей,
С кувшинкой-песенкой, рожденной в клавесине,
Не сразу вынырнув со дна его зыбей

И – снова вслушиваясь в клавишный ручей
(Пока – в качающихся отзвуках трясине –
Он не исчезнет весь, толчками относимый), –
Не сразу пробудясь для будничных речей;

Служением светясь почти победоносным,
Но... как бы вдруг поняв, что на нее донос нам, –
Из сумерек она к нам смотрит золотых,

Как тот, кто, испытав неправогоненье,
Поддаться был готов соблазну самомнения, –
Но вспомнил вовремя о бедных и святых.

Letter from John Parkinson to Mrs Langford Brooke (21 February (NS) 1793),
MS Dixon 16/6/18

John Parkinson: Anglican clergyman and travel writer.

“The Princess Dashkoff is president of the Academy of Science & sister of Count Worontzoff the Russian minister in England from whom we brought a letter to her. She has shewn us very particular attention, and as she is a woman of great talent & knowledge, we have received no small pleasure from her conversation. We supped with her one evening very pleasantly when there was nobody but ourselves; and have also dined with her once when she treated us with several national dishes; but in general we pay our visits to her between six and eight in the afternoon, & if she is not engaged at cards pass an hour or an hour & a half with her.”

John Parkinson, *A Tour of Russia, Siberia and the Crimea*, pp. 24-221

Thursday 8 November 1792 “In the evening we called on Mr. H[ineham]...I did not know before that the Sister of the Princess D was the mistress of Peter III: the order which she wore was given after the revolution to the Princess.”

Sunday 11 November 1792 “Every body rejoiced at [Potemkin’s] death. The Princess [Dashkoff] rejoices because she thinks that he was such an expence to the country.”

Tuesday 13 November 1792 “About half after five Bootle [and I] paid another visit to the Princess Dashkoff, who though in deshabelle was so good as to receive us. We sat with her for a considerable time. Her conversation evidently savoured of disaffection to the Empress; she regretted a constitution like ours, she spoke of their abode in Peterburg as a sort of exile, she seemed unwilling to allow the present Sovereign the smallest merit for what she had done towards the embellishment of the Town.”

Saturday 17 November “the Imperial Minister’s ball [...] was exceedingly brilliant. [...] We did not get away till near two after holding a long conversation with the Princess Dashkoff who was excessively civil. Though she blames us for some things, upon the whole she is a great admirer of the English Nation, envies us our constitution and regards a well-educated English Gentleman as the glory and perfection of his species. What renders her dissatisfied with the Government and the Court [is] among other things the *éloignement* of her son from Petersburg. As I

am told, they dread his abilities and choose therefore to keep him at a distance. She superintended his education and travelled with him herself.”

Monday 19 November 1792 “Bootle and I paid a visit to the Princess Dashkoff, whom we found at cards with two Cavaliers [...]. She received us with great civility and was addressing her conversation to one of other of us continually whenever her game left her at liberty. She advised us to purchase the Russian costume, i.e. the different habits of the several people who compose the Russian Empire, which are to be had here at the China Manufactory. She recommended, Extracts in five volumes quarto, from the Byzantine Historians, which consist of two hundred volumes folio; the Cryptomereous plants, and essay by a person of Vienna which got the piece issued by the Academy of Sciences here; and the Medallie History of this country [...]. She had subscribed some years ago for a print of the death of Lord Chatham and seemed to take it very well that we offered to make enquiries about it.”

Sunday 25 November 1792 “Princess Dashkoff having desired us to call on her as soon as we could after dinner, because she was engaged to go to the Hermitage at six, we hurried thither almost as soon as we rose from table, but were still too late. The Princess, having heard from Hineham that we talked of going to China, advised us at Count Bezborodko’s ball in the first place not to think of any such thing because it was impossible and in the second place not to talk of it because it would render us suspected, at this time particularly when England was endeavouring to cheat Russia out of her Chinese trade.”

Saturday 2 December 1792 “The Princess Dashkoff says that during the extinction of the Arts in every part of the world for some time, when nobody could say what was become of them, at that time they took their abode in Russia.”

Thursday 6 December 1792 “At 5 o’clock we went by appointment to the Princess Dashkoff’s who received us very obligingly. She has made a collection of curious books for us; she has chalked out several routes for us to chuse; and when we have made our choice, she has promised us letters both for that route and for Moscow.”

Tuesday 11 December 1792 “we went to the Princess Dashkoff’s whose conversation was uncommonly amusing this afternoon. The Orloffs she says were always her enemies. Some time ago when she was on bad terms with the Empress, Potemkin waited upon her, I don’t know for what purpose. She told him that being left a widow at the age of twenty she had submitted to live in a very economical retired manner for the sake of her children. ‘What then,’ she said, ‘do you think I am not capable of doing at the age of forty-two? Let the Empress take my pittance

from me. I have still resources, I will go to England: there I will publish the Empress's letters to me which will bring in 10,000; I will afterwards publish the memoirs of my own life: they will not fail to bring me 20,000 more.' Her salary as President of the Academy is 3,000 roubles. Potemkin's soup, she said, every day I think for three months before he gave his great fete, while the rehearsals were going on, cost as much. [...]

She travelled in western Europe under an assumed name. At Paris they wished to have paid her great honours, i.e. the Duke of Choiseul, out of pique I think to the Empress: but she would not accept of them.

She has a house and estate 140 Versts from Moscow: her steward is an Englishman and she offers to give us letters to him; and let us reside there if we have a desire to make ourselves acquainted with the manners of the people.

We staid with her so long that the Ball at court was almost over when we arrived there.”

Saturday 29 December 1792 “In the evening we called upon the Princess Dashkoff who very obligingly invited us to sup. The supper consisted partly of things entirely Russian, particularly the cold Soup, the Caviare and the Postilla. [...] After supper the Princess made us drink some Quass: they put a little mint into it. It certainly is a very quenchy draught. The Princess could not help exclaiming how much is this superior to lemonade. [...]

She played us several Russian tunes, two of which particularly pleased me, one a peasant's tune, the other made by the inhabitants of the Volga, in the time of Peter the 1st's grandfather, on some memorable occasion.

My enquiries concerning the comparative number of Peasants subject to the crown led her to remark that all those who had belonged formerly to the church and Religious houses and had been in this reign annexed to the Crown, were in a much worse plight than they had been previous to that regulation.”

Thursday 3 January 1793 “She said that the sovereigns having been for a long time all women who had come to the throne by a kind of usurpation, they had all been under a little awe and had carried on a very mild government. She gave it as her opinion if the Grand Duke listened to the counsels of those who would be disposed to suggest severe principles to him and a very different line of conduct, that a revolution would probably be the consequence. She represented the Golitzin family to be very numerous, very stupid and very proud....The palace of Ice which was erected on the Neva in the reign of the Empress Ann, was created she told us

on occasion of the marriage of a Prince Golitzin who served as a buffoon at court and with a view to humble that aspiring family.

She has a painting by Sir Joshua [Reynolds] of his own niece, which she regards as his masterpiece because she did not suffer him to lay on his perishing colours.”

Monday 25 February 1793 “We went to the Princess Dashkoff’s this morning in sledges and drove fast through the dirty uneven streets, being afraid that she would think us late. She gave us an account of her Manouvre to prevent the Countess Esterhazy from being presented otherwise than in the common way. She told us that the Grand Duke by insinuating that it would be agreeable had introduced the Custom among the Russians when they paid their respects to him of kneeling, which is not observed to the Empress.”

Friday 1 March 1793 “at the Princess Dashkoff’s whom we found with a face swelled by crying for the departure of her brother.”

Monday 4 March 1793 “After dinner we made a very long visit to the Princess Dashkoff where we were joined by Lord Dalkeith and M. le Chevalier Garshore. She was very civil to my Lord but seemed to take very little notice of the Chevalier.”

Saturday 27 April 1793 “In speaking of the Empress it is very much the fashion to say *c’est un grand homme*. Tchoglikoff in speaking of the Princess Dashkoff said likewise ‘*c’est un grand homme*’.

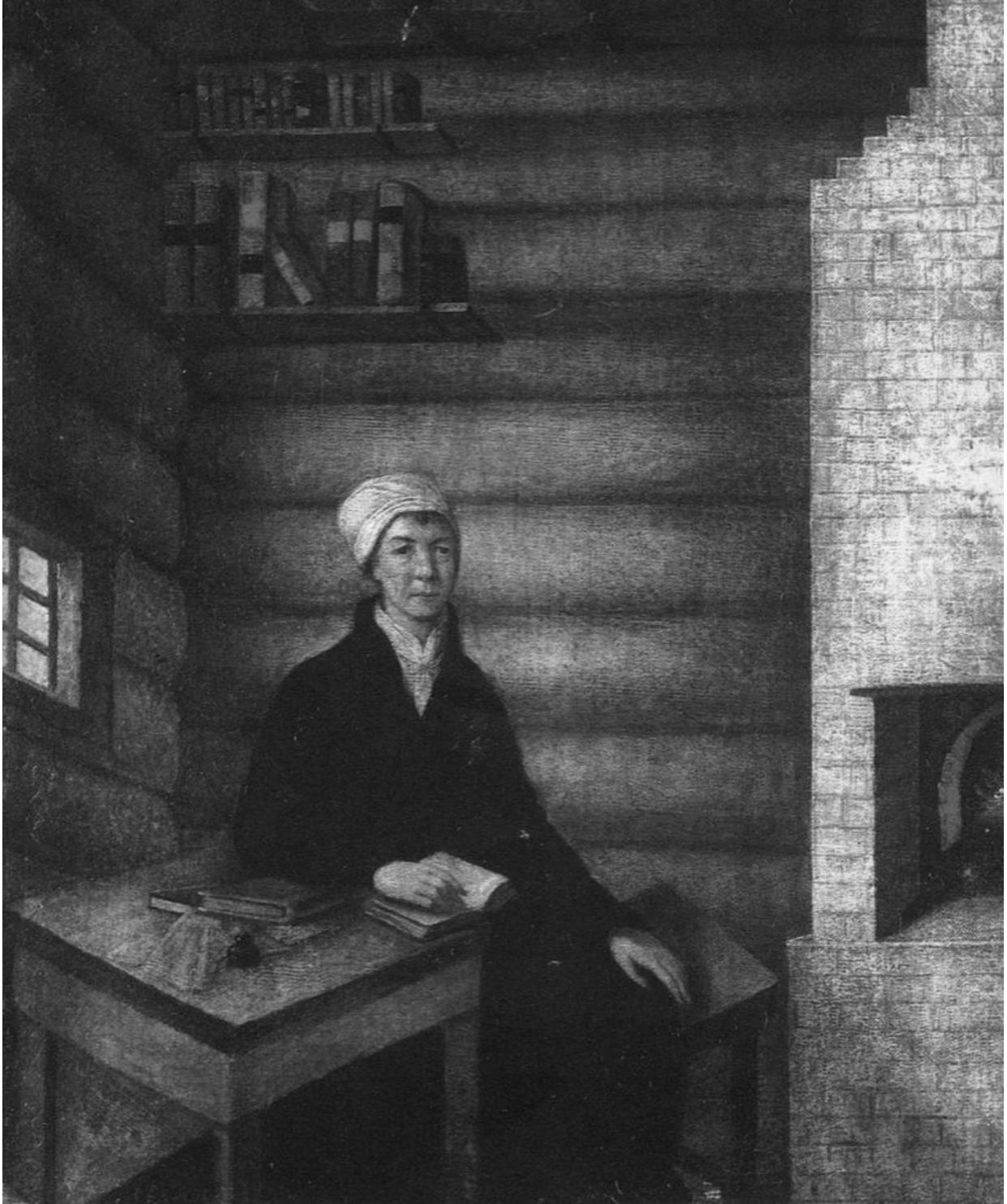
Monday 30 December 1793 “We also paid a visit to the Princess Dashkoff whom as usual we found at Cards.

Catherine II to the Princess Dashkova: Though I enjoy the Crown I know I have no right to it; and you are as much to blame as I am.

A suspicion was intimated that the Princess was connected with R[adishev] who has been sent to Ilinsk for writing the Journey from Moscow to Petersburg.

The Princess applied through Count Zeuboff for the order of the white Eagle which the father had had on behalf of her son. The Count wrote back that he had communicated her request to the Empress, who would speak to her about it herself. The Princess waited upon her Majesty the next day who expressing some surprise to see her ‘I am come, she said, Madame in consequence of the note received from Count Zeuboff’. ‘You don’t know, the Empress said, for whom you apply. Your son is a drunkard and a fool and borrows money of his Officers without paying them again.’”

Exile & Old Age



'Dashkova in Exile', after Salvatore Tonci

Catherine Hyde (1801/2), *Private Anecdotes of Foreign Courts*, vol. 2 pp. 78-9

“Though among the last objects of his resentment, Paul did not forget the conspicuous part played by the Princess Daschkoff in the dethronement of his father. This Princess, who had survived her ungrateful mistress, had retired to Moscow before the death of Catherine, and vainly imagined she had escaped the proscription, when orders were issued for her arrest and exile. One of the confidential female attendants of the Princess, who was present at the time, told me, that when the officer charged to signify the Emperor’s orders entered her room, she looked at him with an air of utmost contempt, and, turning to my informant, coolly observed, –‘Well! I have certainly deserved this, for having prevented his mother from strangling the ugly monster in his cradle!’ Then going towards the fire for a few minutes, and rubbing her hands, she rang the bell, and on the entry of her valet-de-chambre said, with the greatest composure, –‘Prepare every thing for a long journey.’ Upon which she hastened to take leave of those friends who were immediately about her person, and set out for Siberia, as if she was going on an ordinary visit.

This enterprising woman, to whom Catherine was so mainly indebted for her elevation to the Imperial throne, had been on terms of the most confidential intimacy with the Empress, ever since her marriage with Peter. When introduced to her by the Princess Walkonski, at Saint Petersburg, I was particularly struck by the elegance of her address and polished manners, and not less astonished at observing all the vivacity of youth in a woman who had then attained her seventieth year. I was afterwards frequently amused by the unreserved manner in which she spoke of the ingratitude and ill-treatment experienced from her Imperial *protégée*, as she would call Catherine. She deeply lamented the part she had taken in the revolution, and was so full of resentment at the return made by the Empress, that she often congratulated me on not having come to Russia before Catherine’s death, lest my connexion with the royal family of another country, and the mission with which I had been charged, might have also made me an object of jealousy or suspicion.”

Thomas K. Carpenter, *Revolutionary Magic*, Blurb & pp. 6-40

Thomas K. Carpenter is a contemporary American writer of fantasy novels.

“Exile. Princess. Thief.

After years of running from the Emperor of Russia’s assassins, Ekaterina ‘Kat’ Dashkova has finally found an unlikely home in Philadelphia under the tutelage of Benjamin Franklin.

When a mid-level government official is found wandering colonial Philadelphia without his clothes – and his last two years of memories – Ben and Kat suspect otherworldly forces at work. Neither of them know that a dark revolution lurks beneath the veneer of civilization, ready to unleash its malevolent magic unless Kat makes a grim sacrifice.”

“In truth, my real name was Yekaterina Romanovna Vorontsova-Dashkova, sometimes called Princess Dashkova, or Catherine the Little. Ben liked to call me Kat, though only in private when we were discussing important matters. We weren’t amours, but I can’t say the thought hadn’t crossed my mind.”

“The alchemical mixture Ben Franklin had devised to extend life also made one’s appearance youthful in every way. Since I’d arrived in Philadelphia one year ago, under his tutelage and taking regular supplements of the powder, my fifty-seven year old body looked and felt half that age.”

“‘Humor an old woman [...] I do love a mystery,’ I said.

‘No wonder Empress Catherine gave you permission to travel often. You are relentless,’ said Ben.

‘I seem to recall hearing something like that from her lips once or twice,’ I said, staring longingly at the pale blue sky above the city. ‘I do sorely miss her. She was a good woman and a better sovereign.’

‘Good rulers are hard to find,’ said Ben.

‘No need to lecture me, Benjamin,’ I said, putting emphasis on his name. ‘I know the perils of an obtuse emperor firsthand. Though I have to admit this democracy thing can be quite messy.’

We rode in silence, not because we differed in opinion, but because the paths that we had traveled towards the ideals of the Enlightenment had been quite different. Ben had come upon these precepts through long discussions with the great thinkers

of our time and through the creation of this great nation, while I'd seen the dark and destructive nature of a capricious ruler and fled to these shores for safety.”

Aleksandr Gertsen, ‘Princess Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova’ (1857), translated from Russian by G. Barker

“Чувство дружбы, самой пламенной, самой деятельной, чуть ли не было преобладающим в этой женщине, гордой и упрямой. Глубоко обиженная поведением Екатерины, она преждевременно состарилась. [...] Любила ли она кого после смерти мужа, была ли любима – того не видеть из записок; но наверно можно сказать, что ни один мужчина не играл никакой значительной роли в ее жизни. После Екатерины она со всем пылом голодного сердца привязалась к Гамильтон. И под старость дружба, материнская, бесконечно нежная, согрела ее жизнь; я говорю о мисс Вильмот, издательнице ее записок.”

“The feeling of friendship, utterly fervent, utterly practical, all but dominated this proud and stubborn woman. Deeply offended by Catherine’s behaviour, she aged before her time. [...] Whether she loved anyone after her husband’s death, whether she was loved – her Memoirs do not show; but it can be said in all probability that no man ever played any significant role in her life. After Catherine she became attached to Hamilton with all the ardour of a starved heart. And in old age a maternal, endlessly tender friendship warmed her life; I speak of Miss Wilmot, who published her Memoirs.”

Letter from Martha Wilmot to her father (Troitska, 25 August 1803), *The Russian Journals of Martha and Catherine Wilmot*, pp. 44-7

Martha Wilmot stayed with Dashkova for six years. She inspired, translated, smuggled, and published Dashkova’s Memoirs. Martha hoped a change of scene would lift her depression after her brother’s death in 1802. This, her sister Catherine’s example, and the stories of Catherine Hamilton, her father’s cousin and Dashkova’s dear friend, moved her to travel to Russia.

“At five o’clock yesterday I arrived accompanied by a M^{dme} Merlin and her daughter, near relations of the Princess’s. The daughter is young, the mother a friendly kind hearted Woman as I ever met with. As the Princess was out in her grounds, this Lady went to meet her first I really believe to prepossess her in my favor, for her reception of me was that of the kindest affection. She address’d me in

English which she speaks fluently, and in the course of the Evening we had a good deal of conversation; amongst other things she mention'd her acquaintance with you, my dear father, at Lord Sussex's, and appears to have the most perfect recollection of everything and everybody she ever met with in her travels. Her appearance is milder than I expected from what I heard at St Petersburg. Her Dress a Man's night cap and black hat with a sort of dark *robe de Chambre*. Her manners easy, and a certain something that distinguishes her not unpleasingly from the common herd. This is merely the *coup d'oeuil*. You now know I am in safety after all my Journeying by Sea and Land. I shall have leisure to write particulars in the course of a month or so.

I must tell you the Princess has been amusing herself preparing what she calls two English trunks for me which have arrived without her knowledge of my apartments – one containing Shawls, a piece of home made linnen, silks, and many other things; the other, paper. Sealing wax &c. &c. all of which marks a sort of goodnature and attention that is of a thousand times more value than the things themselves. This place is splendid. Her English taste provides, and she has really created from rather a barren situation one of the most lovely and magnificent places that is to be found any where! [...] The Princess is far from Well and her friends speak of her as breaking fast. Her Physician however (doc^r Rogerson) told me her life was a long one – Heaven only knows. At all events, 'tis a happiness to me that her son merits one's esteem; and already he has assur'd me that I shall always find him a brother, if I will consider him as such. A young Lady, a niece of the Princess's, lives in the House always. At Moscow she sees a great deal of company. Here she is very retir'd. [...]

After dinner. I told the Princess I had written to you. She requested me to add her best compliments to you and my darling Mother with some flattering speeches which you are to suppose on my account. However I must tell you that she bids me assure you she will study my happiness as if I were her own child. She remembers my grand Mother and all the Lota family perfectly and hitherto her manners to me are those of the most distinguish'd kindness."

Novella Matveeva, 'Сap', from *Champion of the Muses* (1993), *Sonety*, p. 72,
translated from Russian by G. Barker

Колпак

Подняв грозу переворота
С самой Великой наравне,
Через Петергофские ворота
Вы пронесли на коне.

Но щедрой молодости жемчуг
Разграблен времени рукой...
Мадам! А где домашний чепчик?
Мой Бог! На ней – колпак мужской!

Так, возвращаясь в лоно мира,
Остепеняется солдат,
Чтобы с гвоздя – взамен мундира
Мужского – снять **мужской** халат...

Герой (хотя и пола слаба)
Не должен быть одет как баба!

Сap

When you raised the storm of coup d'état
At the side of she herself, the Great,
As her equal through the Peterhof gate
You thundered on horseback.

But lavish youth's pearly sonnet
Has been stolen by time's hand...
Madam! But where's your indoor bonnet?
My god! On her head's a cap – a man's!

So, returning to the world's bosom,
The soldier mellows and settles down,
So as to take from its nail – rather than
A **man's** tunic – a **man's** dressing gown...

A hero (although of the weaker sex)
Should not be dressed like a heroess!

The Russian Journals of Martha and Catherine Wilmot, pp. 50-126

Letter from Martha Wilmot to her mother (Troitska, 5 September 1803)

“The Princess often gets the English papers and that is no small comfort. [...] The Princess is, you know, a red hot English Woman, so we read the papers and fight with a degree of Valour that would amaze you under the British flag, as we sit on Scarlet and Gold Sophas. This Evening she suggested an idea which I really think excellent, that the most perfect union wou'd be establish'd between England and Ireland were the King to reside and even call his Parliament in the latter Kingdom at Stated periods – thus becoming acquainted with Ireland and blending the interests of both Countrys by raising the consequence of the *little Green Island* and exciting the affections of his Irish subjects....”²⁰

²⁰ In reference to the Irish Rebellion of 1803.

Martha Wilmot's journal (23 September 1803)

“In the Eve^s the Princess talk'd a little of the wonderful scenes of the revolution in w^{ch} she acted so wonderful a part at the age of 18. The Empress Katherine was 16 years older than her. 'tis a curious circumstance that Peter 3^d was Godfather to Princess Dashkoff who as she says herself 'I dethroned'.”

Martha Wilmot's journal (25 September 1803)

“I accompanied the Princess & Anna Petrovna to Church. Mem: the Priest was oblig'd to employ a substitute to perform the service, being too tipsy to go thro' it himself. The Princess in an audible voice told the young Man who was reading prayers that *he* was not entitled to read certain portions of the service, & having with much devotion & even tears saluted two or three Images she would not wait for the remainder of their ceremonys but abruptly quitted the Church, call'd for Fidelle (as it would be an *abomination* that requir'd purification if a Dog enter'd a Church) and then proceeded to her *Plantations* where attended by several of her Vassels she *labour'd* till dinner time & again for several hours in the Eve^s.”

Letter from Martha Wilmot to her father (Troitska, 1 October 1803)

“The system of flattery has no bounds... Princess Dashkaw is one of the (no doubt numberless) exceptions to what I have been saying – that is, she does not flatter human being, but her establish'd opinion of herself is such that, if I can make you feel what I mean, it is as if she was distinct from herself and look'd at her own acts and deeds and character with a degree of admiration that she never attempts to express the expression of, and that with a sort of artlessness that makes one almost forgive her. Her principles are noble and possess'd of influence which extends to *absolute* dominion over the happiness and prosperity of some thousands of Subjects. She invariably exerts it for their welfare, entering into their circumstances; and by kindness as a Landlord and forbearance &c. &c. placing them in a situation of prosperity not very universally known in this country. As a relation she is everything to her family many of whom, even distant branches, she has push'd forward in life to situations that without her they wou'd never have known.”

Letter from Martha Wilmot to her mother (Troitska, 19/24 October 1803)

“The Princess is very unwell this Evening. She is sometimes extremely weak; again she rallies, and is as strong as Hercules. Sick or well, she is affectionate and kind to me – indeed her kindness and magnificence knows no bounds. Her partiality to me and her expressions of gratitude to you both for confiding me to her care are extreme. She charges me to present her compliments to you both, and says she only wishes you cou’d peep into her heart to read there her Sentiments for me. These are her own words....”

Letter from Martha Wilmot to her mother (Troitska, 17 November 1803)

“The Princess prides herself on her Butter which she pretends is unrivall’d, but I fight the Cork butter against it and enter’d the lists against both her and her son to the extreme amusement of a large company some of whom declared they must visit the renown’d City that presum’d to Challenge the whole World on a subject of such importance. Potatoes too she has in perfection....”

Letter from Martha Wilmot to her father (Moscow, 2 January 1804)

“I read to the Princess part of your dear affectionate letter which enchanted her. She says she means to enter the lists against you and my Mother to prove that I am her daughter not yours, and has sketched a ridiculous process to reclaim her rights which she declares you have usurp’d *ever since her visit to Ireland*, but which she will place before the courts of Justice. She desires me to give proper notice in her name. I promis’d. So here I proclaim the impending tryal. [...] Every one tells me the Princess does things on my account she was not known to do for years past. For example, she goes to the public Balls with us, and her eyes follow me when I dance with such interest and affection as you wou’d scarcely credit....”

Martha Wilmot’s journal (10 February 1804)

“The Princess has begun to write her life. Her motive for so doing is friendship to me, as she says she will give me the manuscript & liberty to publish it. It will probably be a most interesting work.”

Letter from Martha Wilmot to her father (Moscow, 25 February 1804)

“Talking of politics the other day and of the Irish disturbances which oblig’d us to quit Home so suddenly, she say’d, ‘I insist on your writing this to your father and mother. In the present state of the times, but should any thoughts of *Emigrating* occur to them, Russia is the natural place for them to resort to. I have a second House at Troitska and a Palace at Moscow, and while I have a House to shelter me or bread to share with those I already respect and value, ’tis from the bottom of my heart I offer both and my cordial friendship to everyone of your family.’ And that she felt what she say’d is as sure as fate. Heaven forbid our little Erin shou’d ever put such noble offers to the test, but while they shew her style of Character they must raise her in your opinion....”

Martha Wilmot’s journal (7 May 1804)

“This Eve^s we read the letters of the Empress Katherine 2^d to Princess Daschkaw. Many of them were written while she was G^d Dutchess & those letters are in the most graceful easy style of friendly correspondence. After she became Empress her style changed into more measured phrases & greater formality conceal’d under apparent respect & consideration. However her natural charming flow of language and the animated turn of her mind (w^{ch} the Princess assures me was often the unaffected playfulness of a Child) appears thro’ her affected reserve, sometimes too a sparkle of satire & always the dignity of a great personage who felt she had every eye fix’d upon her and was resolv’d to be everything she thought worthy of her. They are written in french.”

Martha Wilmot’s journal (20 August 1804)

“This Eve^s the dear Princess had a most blessed escape. [...] one of the great stands loaded with oats up to the very top, *13 rows*, fell down flat & must inevitably have crush’d any Mortal who was within its reach. She was *barely out of it*, but thank God no harm was done. She says ’tis the 18 or 20th hair breadth escape which she has had, & that so many instances of a protecting Providence gives her a degree of confidence which some people might call *too much fearlessness*, but that the sensation of *fear* really is unknown to her.”

Martha Wilmot's journal (25 August 1804)

“The Princess is writing her History very diligently at present, but 'tis really astonishing to see with how little trouble it gets forward. She settled long accounts with her Steward, then writes half a page, then perhaps she settles a law suit between two peasants, then writes again; in short she does not stop half a minute to consider what she shall say or to compose her sentences every word flows as naturally from her pen as in common conversation & every event crowds to her memory in the most perfect State of *readyness* and *exactitude*. In short it would have been a million of sins if she had continued to withhold from the public the events of a life so interesting as hers or the sentiments of a heart so little known and so often misrepresented.”

Novella Matveeva, ‘To the *Memoirs* of Princess Dashkova’, from *New Sonnets in Defence of Princess Dashkova* (2016²), translated from Russian by G. Barker

К «Запискам» Княгини Дашковой

Её «Записки» – не святыня,
Не для паломничества Мекка;
В них безотрадная гордыня
Затравленного человека.

В них есть мечтание покоя
И умолчаний гордых пара.
(Так заслоняются рукою
И от вчерашнего удара...)

В них есть политика неволи
И дипломатия печали.
Но правды в них – *гораздо боле!*

Хоть и не *той*, какую ждали.
Какую ждал конвент потешный
И передёргиватель грешный.

To the *Memoirs* of Princess Dashkova

Her *Memoirs* are not holy,
Not for pilgrimage a Mecca;
They hold the dismal vanity
Of a hounded creature.

They hold daydreams of peace
And a couple of proud silences.
(So with their hand people shield themselves
Even from blows of bygone years...)

They hold politics of powerlessness
And the diplomacy of sadness.
But the truth they hold – is *far greater!*

Though it's not *the* truth they awaited.
The one awaited by the mock convent
And by the sinful falsehood-merchant.

The Russian Journals of Martha and Catherine Wilmot, pp. 135-219

Martha Wilmot's journal (2 January 1805)

“She is preparing for me a most lovely little collection. They arriv'd in half an hour, & I found the dearest affectionate & most kind princess has collected above 100 volumes – Voltaire's Theatre, Diderot's Works, Florian's, Corneille's, Moliere's plays, Delille's works, Œuvres de Grisset &c. &c. &c. 'tis a most charming little library & invaluable as the *Gage d'Amitié* of my beloved princess whose goodness & tenderness is indeed quite unbounded & forms the happiness of my existence at present....”

Martha Wilmot's journal (2 April 1805)

“After supper the Princess sat down to the Pianoforte, & in a few minutes composed a very elegant little air which I wrote down immediately.”

Letter from Eleanor Cavanagh to Little Henrietta Chetwood (Petersburg, 20 August 1805)

Eleanor Cavanagh was Catherine Wilmot's maidservant, whom she brought with her to Russia.

“‘*Mai deer how doo you doo!*’ says the Lady of the House to me the other day! By that I made full sure that she was once at her birth from Ireland.”

Letter from Eleanor Cavanagh to her father (Troitskoe, 4 October 1805)

“P^{ss} Daschkaw that I heard talk of so much in Ireland & all through Russia! I look'd everywhere and down over the Bannisters when we were coming up stairs to bed! But tho' I seen plenty of people I could not make her off at all. Just before my Mistress went into her room, bounce, the door open'd & in walk'd the Princess with a large Star upon her breast and as good a Face smiling & looking as good natured as a Child! She did not see me at first at all, but it came into my head she had just the look of M^{rs} Chetwood the day she gave me the White Wine up at the House for you. She staid some time, & the minute she spied me out (for I kept standing at the bedroom door) she took me by the hand, & ‘I'm glad to see you’ sais she, & kiss'd me as kind as if I had belong'd to her. ‘I'm oblig'd to you Ma'am,’ sais I, & turn'd as red as a rose. ‘Ellen’ sais she ‘are you alive after the Journey?’ ‘Faith I am Ma'am,’ sais I. (‘What would kill me?’ thought I, but I did not say so out

loud.) May I never stir but she is the pleasantest Lady I ever seen in or out of Ireland! The next Morning she give me my choice of three of the handsomest Shawls as big as quilts, & I chose one, a purple in the inside & a scarlet border. Up I put it on my back & made a curtsey *as stiff as two pence!* [...]

There is 16 Villages all belonging to the Princess here, & them that lives in them comes to the number of 3000 Men & Women, all her subjects and loving her as if she was their Mother. There is 200 servants that lives in & out of the House. She one Morning sent for me, & she was sitting in her own room about 7 o'clock in the Morn^g. 'Ellen,' sais she, 'I believe you have none of the Money of my Country'. 'No Ma'am,' sais I. 'Well then,' sais she (looking as good humour'd as anything) 'you ought to know how to reckon, & so here are 20 roubles for you (each rouble is more than half a Crown), & they are in different kinds of Coin, you will learn to understand the value'. 'Ma'am,' sais I, 'I'm very much oblig'd to you,' & with that I kiss'd her hand. [...]

God knows I never seen such a good Lady since ever I was born, nor so kind, nor so generous I've reason to say dear knows!"

Letter from Catherine Wilmot to Anna Chetwood (Troitskoe, 24
September/1/2 October 1805)

Martha Wilmot's eldest sister Catherine (or Katherine) was a prolific travel writer and diarist.

"The Princess, lovely oddity, instantly set about manufacturing a prodigious Russian eulogium (which Matty understood & told me afterwards) puffing of my qualifications to such a pitch that the circle about her were completely mute [...] P^{ss} Daschkaw frequently talk'd to me in English & then translated everything into Russ for the benefit of the Widow embellishing to a marvellous degree for I was astonish'd at finding the most commonplace observation of mine receiv'd by virtue of my Interpreter with amusement & admiration of countenance on the part of the audience! These things I mention to give you a perfect notion of the Blessed Princess, & tho' she uniformly behaves to us in this manner she exacts (from Imperial habits I suppose) a sort of deference that surprised me excessively at first from her Country People! For example, No Man tho' cover'd with Stars attempts to sit down in her presence without being desired, & this not always being requested I have seen half a dozen Princes stand out an entire visit. Once I saw them *bow'd* out of the room when she got deadly tired of them, & after giving them her Hand to kiss they disappear'd. It never enters into her head or heart to disguise any

sentiment or impulse from either, & therefore you may guess what a privileged sort of Mortal she makes herself! The Truth is sure to come out whether agreeable or disagreeable, & lucky it is she has sensibility & gentleness of Nature, for if she had not she wou'd be a Public Scourge! She is the first by right, rank, sense & habit in every Company; & prerogative becomes such a matter of course that nothing appears extraordinary that she does. [...]

In the midst of this immense Establishment and in the center of riches and honours I wish you were to see the Princess go out to take a walk, or rather to look over her subjects! An old brown great coat and a silk handkerchief about her neck worn to rags is her dress, & well may it be worn to rags for she has worn it 18 years and will continue to do so as long as she lives because it belong'd to Mrs Hamilton. Her originality, her appearance, her manner of speaking, her doing every description of thing, (for she helps the masons to build walls, she assists with her own hands in making the roads, she feeds the cows, she composes music, she sings & plays, she writes for the press, she shells the corn, she talks out loud in Church and corrects the Priest if he is not devout, she talks out loud in her little Theatre and puts in the Performers when they are out in their parts, she is a Doctor, an Apothecary, a Surgeon, a Farrier, a Carpenter, a Magistrate, a Lawyer; in short she hourly practices every species of incongruity, corresponds with her brother, who holds the first post in the Empire, on his trade, with Authors, with Philosophers, with Jews, with Poets, with her Son, with all her Relations, and yet appears as if she had her time a burthen on her hands) altogether gives me eternally the idea of her being a Fairy! And I protest it is not jokingly I say so, for the impression never quits me for a moment. The marvellous contradiction too of her speaking like an Infant in her broken english and with her unaccountable expressions! She is unconscious whether she speaks French, English or Russian, and mingles these in every sentence. She speaks German and Italien equally well, but her pronunciation is not clear which takes from the pleasure I shou'd otherwise receive from her conversation. I have just finish'd reading Voltaire's, Diderot's, Garrick's & the Abbé Raynall's letters to her. She has promised me the Empress Catherine's, and I have also read a good part of her life written by herself. Indeed it is necessary to qualify oneself with the knowledge of public things and characters in Russia since the time of Catherine, since the Princess alludes to them perpetually and her mind wanders so naturally back to the Court & Study & Toilet & Boudoir of Catherine that I am beginning to fancy I recollect her habits of life & conversation & that *I* was a party concern'd in the revolution. By the by, the principal reception room at Troitska is ornamented with an immense picture of Catherine on Horseback in

Uniform taken the very day of her husband's destruction, & the P^{ss} says a perfect resemblance. Besides this there are Portraits of her in every room.

Yesterday Morn^g when I went down to breakfast I saw the Princess fuming over the Herring which she was preparing for me to swallow, as I had been heard to complain in the secret recesses of my Castle of an uncomfortable feel in my Stomach, and the Fairy knew it by inspiration & did cause a Fish to rise from its troubled waters and dissipate, perforce of Magic, my derangement! I happen'd to come down before Matty, and the flash of terror that appear'd in her Eyes frighten'd me out of my wits for a moment. On enquiry it proved to be her anguish at the notion of Matty's perhaps being unwell, and her expression was, '*de taugt cut my Heart like a sharp Knife*'. [...]

The Princess, sweet woman, has promised me – laughing most heartily at the thoughts of what with any one else would be nothing & yet from her methodical & clockwork habits of life is a real sacrifice – to leave Troitska *two days* sooner than she ever did before in order to go to Moscow & shew me the Lions. [...]

Don't irritate me by saying you suppose I am beginning to speak the language. No! Let that satisfy you for ever. I feel my power of *Duncishness* increase daily [...]. Not so Matty. She writes & speaks Russ wonderfully. The Princess teaches her & they correspond in Russian every day almost.

I must fly! I see the Fairy beckoning me with her Wand, & nobody knows what Necromancy she is after! Bog waves his beard at me!..."

Letter from Catherine Wilmot to her sister Alicia (Troitskoe, 2/7/8 December 1805)

"That portrait at the head of the room hanging over the Sopha is Princess Daschkaw's husband who was reckon'd the beauty of his time and who died when he was only six and twenty years of age! That commanding looking dame with eagles embroider'd on her train & and ermine Robe is Catherine the 2nd of Russia, & opposite is her grandson Alexander 1st in all his imperial dignities. So far for pictures. At the upper end of the Room sitting in an arm Chair with a little Table before her inlaid like a Chess board, lounging in a simple purple dressing gown & white cambric Man's nightcap, with her black Dog Fidelle sleeping on a cushion at her feet, is the Princess! She is waiting for our return home as this Evening is to be dedicated to reading over some dozen Letters she has tied up in that great paper parcel – the successive Correspondence that pass'd between her & Catherine 2nd

from the time she was 18 years of age till she resign'd the Academy. These subjects as ripping up a life that is almost past gives a painful sort of agitated animation to her Countenance, & I long till it is over. [...]

Now enter into the Drawing room, or rather public looking Ball room, for it is really magnificent. What a picture is that of Catherine the 2nd on a grey Horse dress'd in the Uniform of the Guards as large as life, as she appear'd the famous 28th of June 1762, the day of the Russian Revolution! Reflected in the opposite Looking Glass it appears galloping towards you, as your movements give it motion. That to the left is the King of Prussia, her contemporary; & that again the unfortunate Stanislaus King of Poland. [...] Only think of this extraordinary Princess, not only having plan'd the House herself but having assisted the Masons to build it with her own hands. [...] 'tis worth while going up stairs again to the Library which contains I know not how many thousand Volumes in half a dozen Languages. The room commands a view of all the encircling Country and is supported by pillars each of which is in itself a little Library. [...] if you feel it cold we can walk in the Orangerie. That winding walk among the birch trees is a favourite one of the Princess because of its leading to the Monument of Granite erected on a Mount and dedicated to the remembrance of the Catherine ascended the throne! [...]

sweet old Woman that she is! [...] The affectionate distinction & animated cordiality which has accompanied every word and action towards me ever since I first saw her has never had one moment's interruption. She calls me the sister of her choice [...] being Matty's sister is in her eyes everything to irradiate Humanity into the beatification of a Ministering Angel of Light. Sometimes she exclaims with devotion when she looks at her 'Dare is de mark of Heaven's best love to me. My darling Child sought me out on de credit of my name & came by herself from distant Country in de faith of my Character! Now do tell me Sister *Kaiety* what shall I ever do to prove my love and gratitude to her?' [...]

I have since I came here often thought what a task it would be to attempt to draw the Character of the Princess Daschkaw! I for my part think it would be absolutely impossible. Such are her peculiarities & inextricable varieties that the result would only appear like a Wisp of Human Contradictions. 'Tis the stuff we are all made of to be sure, but nevertheless nothing is more foreign from the thing itself than the raw materials of which it is made! And woe betide individuality the moment one begins to generalize. You will always conceive her a piece of perfection when you take my experience of her, just as you would suppose Europe a Paradise if you never lived out of Italy & judged of the rest accordingly. But she has as many

Climates to her mind, as many Splinters of insulation, as many Oceans of agitated uncertainty, as many Etnas of destructive fire and as many Wild Wastes of blighted Cultivation as exists in any quarter of the Globe! For my part I think she would be most in her element at the *Helm of the State*, or Generalissimo of the Army, or Farmer General of the Empire. In fact she was born for business on a large scale which is not irreconcilable with the Life of a Woman who at 18 headed a Revolution & who for 12 years afterwards govern'd an Academy of Arts & Sciences....

You will never believe me when I say the Princess has no sense of the ridiculous. I don't think She comprehends a Caricature even in language. A little instance pass'd yesterday at dinner. She told Matty it was a shame for her not to take snuff as she had 7 or 8 Imperial Boxes, & jokingly ask'd me what punishment she should inflict! Anna Petrovna & I profoundly suggested that the Princess should serve Matty's Nose as she does her favorite Trees in the Shrubbery – Crop it till as many Noses sprang up in a Copse as she had gorgeous Snuff boxes. The Princess look'd ready to cry & thought us no better than Butchers. She instantly turn'd the Conversation.”

Letter from Catherine Wilmot to her sister Alicia (Moscow, 18 February 1806)

“to use Princess Daschkaw's expression upon this subject ‘I do tink God Almighty himself ought to be proud when he sais, I have made de English Woman’. She is not however half so fond of English *Men*.... [...]

Look at the seal of this Letter. Yesterday the Princess gave it to me. The Seven Stars or Great Bear of the North is herself, & the flame on the Altar the sentiment she has lit up in me which is engraved upon the edge”

Reginald Heber (1806), *The Life of Reginald Heber*, vol. 1 pp. 195-6

Reginald Heber: English bishop and hymn-writer.

“the Princess Dashkoff, the friend and fellow-conspirator of Catherine the Second. We often visited her, and found her conversation, when she was disengaged from faro, very lively and interesting. She, of course, has lost her ancient beauty, but still retains her eccentricities; her usual dress is a man's great-coat and night-cap, with a star. We received both from her and her son many civilities; she speaks admirable English, and he, from his education, still better.”

The Russian Journals of Martha and Catherine Wilmot, pp. 220-360

Letter from Catherine Wilmot to Anna Chetwood (Troitskoe, 21/23 March 1806)

“We found Matty stretch’d in state upon the Sopha, she having arriv’d with the Princess before us, in all the solemnities of indisposition. She had got a violent sore throat & the House was ransacking for remedies! She has been in bed ever since tho’ now perfectly well, & scarcely a moment has that excellent Princess stir’d an inch from her side except when she help’d to smooth the bed with her own hands, to mix her drink, & to apply Cataplasms to her feet! It was with the most earnest entreaties alone that we could prevent her sitting up all Night (after such a journey too), & literally agonized attention & anxiety has made the service of a *Femme de Chambre* almost superfluous. One of her expressions was, ‘*Ecoutez, ma chère Kaity*, dis day my Jews in Poland *m’ont envoyé* deir rents, two towsand Guinea; & I wou’d fling it in de bottom of de River if dat wou’d make well my little Angel!’ Another time Matty told her not to forget that her illness was infectious, ‘Well, & what is dat to me? Only *un motive encore plus fort*, for I might take it off upon my own self. I have asked God Almighty dat prayer already.’ Her adoration of her surpasses anything I ever saw; her sentiments might dignify blank verse on this subject tho’ I let them go *in her own words* which are an eternal source of amusement to me.

What adds to her *naïveté* is the earnestness of countenance & manner which accompanies all she says & does. Speaking to me just now of this Place which she adores, after scrubbing the Windows with the Skirt of her Great Coat to get a glimpse of the view, she exclaim’d: ‘Now I pray you, dear Sister Kaity, admire with me my beautiful Troitskoe. Look have you seen or in Italy or in France (*mais c’est un très vilain pays*) *même en Angleterre* a ting so perfect or so magnificent as *cette superbe Prairie à l’autre Coté de la Rivière*? Tell me out true, is it not *un vrai Paradis*? ‘Indeed Princess I see nothing but snow. It was very green & pretty last October, but I can discern nothing, absolutely nothing of what you speak.’ ‘*Cependant, ma chère amie, avec votre esprit* you might give de Seasons changing upon de Earth! *Passons le dessus*, de Trees demselves will make dier Leaves significant soon & you will confess que *jamais jamais* nor for graces nor for perfections dier exists not so charming a Place in de World as Troitskoe! *Et pourquoi, mon enfant*? I did make it myself, I work’d with de Masons at de Walls, I put in de little trees in dier holes; ’twas mine own hands done dat. I draw de plans, and towsend of my Peasants help’d with their Hatchet. I was not rich den as I am now, & so I did make de oeconomist *en tout plein des choses*.’
[...]

I will take you down stairs into the Hall where dozens of Slaves are waiting with their offerings of Bread and Salt to greet the Princess! When she appears they fall down before her & kiss the ground with that senseless obeisance that stupefaction feels at the approach of superior Power! Her Lenity makes their Lot better perhaps than that of others, but that's saying very little for the System."

Martha Wilmot's journal (10 January 1807)

"Last night we had company here, but our intended gaiety was most compleatly paralysed by the shocking intelligence that Prince Daschkaw was at the point of Death!... The Princess imagined it was only an invention to surprise her into a reconciliation with her Son and treated it with incredulity! Unhappily she was too soon convinc'd of the sad reality. She cannot see him now, as he is lying senseless...."

Martha Wilmot's journal (22 January 1807)

"she heard it²¹ with a degree of Composure inexplicable!

The House was crowded with relations but the Princess saw only 2 or 3 – no hystericks, no faintings."

Letter from Catherine Wilmot to Anne Latham (Moscow, 15 May 1807)

"God knows, 't wou'd have been but to draw you under the Pall of Misfortune which has blacken'd this devoted House ever since the death of Prince Daschkaw had I written one syllable within the last 4 months! You may conceive the effects of such a loss to his Family, but I shou'd be sorry you suffer'd so far as even to imagine the scenes that it has occasion'd. To perpetuate her Name to the latest posterity has ever been the foible of the Princess (if Foible it can be call'd which originates in her wish of immortallising her friendship with Catherine the 2nd), & the sense of this aggravation became most keen at the moment of contemplating its utter extinction. [...]

Peradventure it will appear strange to you to hear that a new personage has appear'd upon the Scene in the interesting amiable & very charming Person of young Princess Daschkaw! But so it is! 20 years ago she enter'd at the age of 15 into

²¹ News of Prince Dashkov's death.

the Honors of this treacherous Life which smil'd upon her opening career in a splendid marriage with Prince Daschkaw that was soon however converted into a dreary monument in which this long period of her existence has been silently consumed! Not from the conduct of her husband but from the ceaselessness of his Mother's anger on the subject of an engagement form'd without either her knowledge or approbation at a period when her omnipotence at the Court of Russia might in every worldly consideration have ensured him a much higher establishment. 4 Years pass'd without any species of intercession availing with her even so far as to induce her to see her Son [...]

the Princess who immediately on the fatal event of her Son's death resolv'd on transferring to Her the material affections he cou'd no longer share. Then for the first time in her Life She wrote to her & [...] more dead than alive *brought her to Moscow a few weeks after the death of her Husband*. Conceive the meeting of the two Princesses for the first time in their Lives, & the first link of Sympathy being struck by their common mourning! [...] Thank Heaven I can speak of them *now* as of a mother & daughter seemingly born to fulfil the happiness of each other. The Young Princess occupies apartments under this Roof & will remain our inmate till October when she removes into a beautiful new House that has been purchased for her by the Princess. [...]

I contemplated with joy the period when my arrival at Home might be really eventful in domestic pleasure by the surprise of Matty's unexpected return, when the death of Prince Daschkaw plunged our Schemes into the common abyss which has been so fatal to the hopes of this entire household! In a revolution of such a Nature Matty wou'd not think of seperating herself from the Misfortunes of her Friend; & the Princess openly protested to me as well as all the World in an agony of tears that she cou'd not survive her Separation from one whom she consider'd as her own child & the strongest tye which held her to this miserable Life. [...]

we left the Princess at Home regulating & systemising her Cabinet of Natural History which she unpack'd for the first time, tho' it has been lying up stairs in trunks near 30 years, in order to make it a present to the University of Moscow. We have had therefore nothing before our eyes but Minerals & Fossils & Animals in every State of Hideosity; Tortoises, Shells, & petrifications; Stones, Marbles, & crystalizations; Corals, Agates, jems, mosses, ores, Skeletons, Butterflies & God knows what! 'Tis really a delightful destination of what may be call'd the Fruit of her Travels, for it was during her stay abroad that she made this collection herself. Besides the Museum of Moscow is extremely poor in specimens of this Nature. She has given Matty splinters from all these Rarities; & the Professor, who is overseeing

the removal of his precious Luggage safe & sound to his University, has taken Matty's ignorance to heart & most good-naturedly has made for her a Catalogue & the nicest classification imaginable of all the contents of her little atom of a Cabinet. In short the Princess has been acting of late precisely as if she was already Dead. Her Legacies to her friends She has already given in advance of those sort of memorandums which are to exist as monuments of her esteem”

Martha Wilmot's journal (27 June 1808)

“By the by, if the P. sometimes treats Men as boys (or as Dogs when they don't please her), she often treats Children as Men & Women, expecting the same intelligence & understanding & pursuits which occupy her own mind & putting her own mind into instant competition with theirs.”

Martha Wilmot's journal (2 July 1808)

“The Princess is simplicity personified & has no conception of what a love of dress means. Indeed her ideas & conversation upon the Subject are so comically original that 'tis almost like a native of Kamstchatska when she talks of fashions, & when she buys bargains 'tis droll but often vexatious to see the first Woman of the Empire distinguish'd for her understanding, duped by every bearded rogue who chases to dispose of his trash & call it fine merchandise. [...]

the dear Princess [...] makes it her pride not to have a debt in the World. She is too good a patriot not to feel shame on these subjects, & she always says out what she feels, so that having more than once lash'd the vice of borrowing she makes the guilty tremble by her mere presence. With regard to coming early to places it is a thing which may fairly be placed amongst her odditys. No experience can cure her of appearing at every ball she goes before the Candles are lit, & as she is the first personage wherever she goes, she sets the Master, Mistress, Children & Servants all running helter skelter, some to put the rooms in order, some to finish their toylets & the father of the family to wake from his Evening nap & go to meet her at the hall Door & conduct her in. Kitty told me an anecdote of her which Baroness Hoggeir, then M^{lle} de Poliansky, told her. One Court feast the Princess promis'd to be her Chaperone. Of course M^{lle} P. was oblig'd to be ready at the time appointed by the P., but the hairdresser had disappointed her. The P. was all impatience, the niece all distress, tho' Knowing they would be an hour or two before any other creature arriv'd. At length she hustled on her Clothes & in rather ill humour got

into the Carriage with the P. who order'd the Coachman to drive with all speed to the Summer Palace. They soon reach'd it; not a Coach disputed their passage. They wander'd thro' the rooms, the servants were dusting the chairs & tables. Fatigued with this sameness the P. bethought herself that a *walk in the Garden* would be very *refreshing*, M^{lle} P. did not dare deny it, & victime like follow'd her Aunt, who set seriously to walking for the good of their healths till the powder & frieze were blown out of M^{lle} P's hair & herself render'd as cross as the tongues to enjoy her Eve^s which did not begin for two hours after their arrival at the Palace! To the present hour 'tis the same thing & many a time have I pretended not to be ready to save A.P. a scolding, tho' after all we are sure to be the first everywhere."

Martha Wilmot's journal (11 July 1808)

"Yesterday was the Anniversary of the Empress Katherine's accession to the throne & of the most brilliant moment of Princess Daschkaw's life who still remembers it as such with a sentiment of pleasure & delight which beams over her countenance as often as the idea recurs."

Martha Wilmot's journal (13 July 1808)

"the compound of contradictions which form Princess D's character exceed belief. There are times when she is perfectly a Woman of fashion & very elegant in her manners, but she has learnt so little of the art of concealing her feelings, whatever they may be, that she often is settling according to her own fancy the dishes on the table at the moment that the guests are all waiting to eat them & a hundred other singularities which it would be foolish & even wrong to write where they are so thoroughly counteracted by the admirable qualities of her heart and understanding, by her invariable & comical love of truth (which makes her tell out things that set a large Company, staring, twittering, blushing, biting their lips, and betraying a thousand different emotions *not one of which she ever remarks*), by her Celebrity, her rank & age, all which give her a right to be an Oddity, & Nature has stamp'd her such in the very fullest sense of the word."

Letter from Martha Bradford to Lord Glenberrie recounting her time in Russia (1813), *Memoirs of the Princess Daschkaw*, vol. 2 pp. 215-307

“The Princess Daschkaw, when in Ireland, had been well known to many of my relations, and had often been, in my presence, the favourite theme of conversation with Mrs. Hamilton [...].

I had often listened with wonder and rapture, when a child, to various anecdotes with which her memory was stored, and to which her enthusiasm for the princess gave a charm that easily communicated itself to a young and ardent imagination. I longed to see this extraordinary woman, whose character dwelt upon my mind more like that of a kind fairy than anything human; but like other fairy tales, this was nearly forgotten, when, at the period to which I have alluded, Mrs. Hamilton [...] happened to mention that her friend, who had so often excited my admiration, was returned once more to her country place, after having supported, with her characteristic nobleness of mind, disgrace and exile during the reign of Paul the First. She even suggested the idea that, if I could prevail upon my parents to let me spend a year or two with the princess in Russia, it would make her the happiest of women, and that I should be received by her as by a mother, and considered as her child.”

“She was represented²² to me as a most cruel and vindictive person, violent in her temper, and destructive of the happiness of every creature who was unfortunate enough to approach her. I was told that she lived in a castle situated in a dreary solitude, far removed from the society of any civilized beings, where she was all-powerful, and so devoid of principle that she would invariably break open and read the letters which came to me, and those I sent to my friends, taking care to suppress any that might be displeasing to her. [...] I was repeatedly warned against putting myself into the power of a tyrant, from which it would be a species of miracle if I escaped.

As these stories came from both English and Russians, I could at best only suppose them exaggerations of the truth, and enough remained to terrify me. Again I thought of her as a fairy, but no longer as that beneficent being who showered blessings wherever she appeared.

Poisoned as my mind was, I shuddered at the idea of her; nor did the kind and maternal style of her letters undeceive me; on the contrary, all her expressions of

²² By Dashkova's niece Mme. Poliansky (and her family and friends), with whom Martha stayed in St Petersburg on her way to Troitskoe.

kindness appeared like snares to entangle me, and for a moment I was worked up to the resolution of returning to England while I was yet safe and beyond the fatal effects of her power.

At length, however, I reflected on the injustice I might possibly be doing her, on the injustice I was doing to Mrs. Hamilton, and on the foolish figure which I should present at home, chased from Russia by a phantom, embodied by my own credulity. [...]

At Moscow, I became acquainted with Prince Daschkaw, whose manners immediately assumed a friendly tone; and on perceiving that I was a good deal out of spirits, (of which I believe he had learned the cause from my companions,) he spoke to me of his mother in the most open manner, allowing that she possessed some peculiarities, and a degree of candour which created enemies for her, but mentioning traits of her character in which I recognised the being I had till lately believed her to be. He added, that he was persuaded she would love me as her child, and that I might depend upon his being at all times a brother to me.”

“we arrived, and I beheld with terror the solitary castle, the scene of my threatened imprisonment! Its gates and doors were all thrown open, and as we proceeded through suites of apartments, many a figure glided past us, and many a face peeped out of side doors to gaze upon the strangers. At last the sorceress appeared! and if the singularity of her dress and figure fully justified the title, so did the fascination of her countenance, where the noblest qualities of mind, blended with an expression of the softest sensibility, awed and attracted at the same instant.

She wore a long cloth coat, with a large silver star on the left side; her head-dress was a man’s nightcap, and round her neck was a coloured silk handkerchief, which *friendship* had consecrated to the same use for more than twenty years. It was the gift of Mrs. Hamilton, to secure her from taking cold one evening, and she would never, in her evening walks, wear any other.

There was something in her reception of me at once so dignified, so affectionate, so true, so warm, and so graceful, that it went to my heart; and before she had uttered a word, except “WELCOME,” I felt that I loved her more than any one I had seen since I quitted my own family; indeed, every one I had seen since then were utter strangers to me. With her I could strike one chord of sympathy, which in a foreign land vibrates to the heart! We knew and loved the same people; and I can never forget the delicacy with which she seemed to penetrate and play into my feelings, recalling circumstances and individuals familiar to my remembrance, and stealing me from myself by the charm of her conversation, heightened by her beautiful

expressions in broken English, which conveyed an idea of artless simplicity peculiarly delightful. A cloud of melancholy, which often shaded her fine countenance, inclined one to respect her for having known sorrow. It seemed to reproach me silently, for my cruelty in having harboured an unkind thought of her, even for a moment; and when I retired to my own apartments and to reflection, I was astonished at the power she already possessed over me. I believe I was not quite pleased with myself for being so quickly won, and formed resolutions to be very wise and very cautious before I gave her my implicit confidence; but when I saw her again the next day, every shadow of distrust vanished before a face which was ever bright with the radiant beams of *truth*. [...]

I was inexpressibly interested in trying to develop the character of the princess, whose countenance was more speaking and more varied than that of any other person I had ever beheld. The effect of time had only mellowed its expression, and softened into benevolence the pride of character which once distinguished her, and which still left its traces visible, though faint.”

“I used to delight in looking at the princess amidst a group of her contemporaries; – she was a creature of so different an order; for while they were bedaubed with red and white paint, and covered with jewels and finery, the freshness of her complexion, which had never at any period of her life been assisted by rouge, and the simplicity of her singular dress, harmonizing with the character of her countenance, at once distinguished her, with all her characteristic traits of truth, nobleness, and self-respect, accustomed to receive homage, but ignorant of the art of paying it.”

“One of her last gifts, which she bestowed with a remarkable mixture of pleasure and reluctance, was an old fan. This fan had been used by the Empress Catherine (then grand duchess) on the first evening that Princess Daschkaw ever met her, and when she was so enchanted by the peculiar charm of her conversation and manner as to make that evening the great hinge on which the events of her own future life turned. The grand duchess dropped the fan at the moment of rising to go home, and the princess took it up and presented it to her. The grand duchess, embracing her, begged the princess to keep it as a souvenir of the first evening they had passed together, and which she hoped would prove the beginning of a friendship which would only end with their lives. The impression made on the princess was so deep that she valued this first little gift more than any she received afterwards from the empress, however magnificent; and she had intended to have it buried in her grave. She told me this, and added, with a sort of triumphant affection so peculiar and

characteristic, ‘*Now, you must understand, and I will make you to feel what is my love for you – I give you dat which I did intend to bury in my own tomb!*’”

“There was something so very singular in her manners upon every occasion, that she could not fail to attract attention. There was a sincerity which marked her countenance so strongly, that her manner was often *naïf* as a child’s. I know but one way to describe her, and that is by saying that she united every characteristic of every period of life, from infancy to old age, and she was so truly each of these at different moments, that *schoolboy, lover, soldier, statesman, &c.*, seemed each by turns the only feature of her enthusiastic being. [...]

During the time when she was extracting as it were the spirit of a visitor, – which she did with as much ardour, and as *naturally*, as a distilling machine extracts the essence of vegetables, – age, sex, or condition were of no consequence; all was good for the still, and every power of her mind was at work. But alas! she was seldom occupied more than three minutes and a half, that time being ample for the purpose in hand.

This quality of the princess resembles one which is ascribed to Peter the First. He is said to have questioned all ranks and descriptions of persons with singleness of aim and energy, and thus to have caught flying very precious information and great variety of ideas.”

“I made all possible haste to rejoin my beloved princess at Moscow, and she greeted my arrival with a most affecting proof of her attachment. She told me that after having inquired into the cases of different prisoners, she had that morning procured the release of five insolvent debtors from the prisons of Moscow, who had been confined for years, and that she had desired each of them should offer up a *Te Deum*, to celebrate the jubilee of her friend’s return.

“This, my child,’ she added, ‘is a *fête* worthy of you, and worthy of your Russian mother; *I would not give nor ball nor concert upon the occasion, for I know to please you better.*’ However, not contented with this, she gave the Princess Anne and Mademoiselle Istlainoff magnificent presents, and money to every servant in the house. To all this I must add one more characteristic trait: she took me into her sleeping room, opened a drawer, and shewed me a pair of my gloves, worn till the character of my hand was impressed upon them. These gloves I had accidentally left on her dressing table a few days before I quitted Moscow, and she had from that moment fondly treasured them up.”

“my departure differed from the former in nothing but an agonizing embrace and a fervent blessing, which I received as if she felt it would be indeed the last.

I crept into her room an hour after this, as she slept with the smiling placid expression of infancy on her countenance – an expression which I never saw in any old person but herself. I gazed upon her dear face till almost blinded by my tears; and quitted her, never to see her more in this world!”

Vasilii Kliuchevskii, ‘Course in Russian History, Lecture 81: Typical representatives of educated noble society’ (1904-10), translated from Russian by G. Barker

“Достаточно несколько образцов из этого общества, чтобы видеть это, может быть, неожиданное действие просветительной литературы. Княгиня Дашкова шла впереди просвещенных дам своего времени, недаром она занимала президентское кресло в русской Академии наук. Еще в молодости, 15--16 лет, зачитывалась до нервного расстройства произведениями Бейля, Вольтера, Руссо. Кончив свою блестящую карьеру, она уединилась в Москве и здесь вскрылась, какой была; здесь она почти никого не принимала, равнодушно относилась к судьбе детей, бесцеремонно дралась со своей прислугой, но все ее материнские чувства и гражданские порывы сосредоточились на крысах, которых она успела приручить. Смерть сына не опечалила ее; несчастье, постигшее ее крысу, растрогало ее до глубины души. Начать с Вольтера и кончить ручной крысой могли только люди екатерининского времени.”

“A few examples from this society are enough to see the perhaps unexpected effect of enlightenment literature. Princess Dashkova was in advance of the enlightened ladies of her time, not for nothing did she occupy the president’s chair in the Russian Academy of Sciences. Still a child, at the age of 15 or 16, she read herself into a nervous breakdown on the works of Bayle, Voltaire, Rousseau. After the end of her glittering career she retreated to Moscow and here her true nature was revealed; she received virtually no guests, took no interest in the fate of her children, fought unceremoniously with her servants, and focused all her maternal feelings and civic impulses on rats, which she succeeded in taming. The death of her son did not sadden her; any misfortune that came to one of her rats moved her to the depths of her soul. Only someone of the Catherinian Era could begin with Voltaire and end with a pet rat.”

Elena Shvarts, 'Princess Dashkova's Old Age' (1967), *Sochineniia Eleny Shvarts*,
vol. 1 pp. 44-5, translated from Russian by G. Barker

Старость Княгини Дашковой

Княгини Дашковой нет
В Академии на острове –
Она под старость лет
Уехала в Москву.

Кто крыс пожалеет?
Кто крыс пожалеет?
Ведь крыса – она
И не жнет и не сеет,
И некрасива собой.

Эй, крысы, бегите
Скорее
В тот дом на углу –
Сначала по крыше, потом в трубу,
Но вы все равно опоздали –
Заступница ваша в гробу.
Поминки. На кухне судачат, судачат,
Никто, ну никто по ней не заплачет.
«С утра с поздравленьем крысенок к постели,
Он что-то ей пискнет, она ему тоже
И сахар ручкой белой
К его подносит роже.
Как сын-то ей помер,
Без слез хоронила –
Бог дал, Бог и взял,
Судить, мол, не нам,
А Машенька, крыса, хвост прищемила,
Так плачет и слуг цельный день по мордам».
Темнеет сознание,
Лампада дымится,
Вольтер и Руссо
В далеких гробницах.
О старость – свобода
То делать, что хочешь.
О чем же ты плачешь?
Чего ты бормочешь?

«Или это – стенки гроба,
Или это колыбель?
В черном вязаном платочке
Крыса надо мной теперь.
О милая! Как ты похожа
На бабушку – ты так нежна
И утешенья со слезами
Мешаешь так же, как она».
Качает крыса гроб опрятный,
Касаясь бедных желтых плеч,
Слова ее непонятны –
Как в детстве взрослая речь.
Дует шут в свою свистульку,
Доживи до той поры,
Когда ты свяжешь гроб и люльку
Причудливостью злой игры.

Princess Dashkova's Old Age

Princess Dashkova is no more
At the Academy on the isle –
In the autumn of her life
She has gone away to Moscow.

Who will take pity on the rats?
Who will take pity on the rats?
Because a rat, you know,
She does not reap and she does not sow,
And she is not fair of face.

Hey, rats, off you scurry,
Hurry,
To that house on the corner –
First over the roof, then into the chimney,
But you're too late, already,
Your Blessèd Protectress is six feet under.
The wake. In the kitchen they chitter-chatter, chitter-chatter,
Nobody, but nobody sheds a tear for her.
'A boy rat comes to her bedside to bid her good morning,
He squeaks something to her, and she to him,
And in her white hand she holds out

A lump of sugar to his snout.
When her own son upped and died,
She buried him and never cried –
God gave, and God took away,
To judge, she said, is not our place,
But when little Masha the rat snags her tail,
She weeps and weeps, and slaps the servants all day.’
Perception darkens,
Icon lamps sputter,
Voltaire and Rousseau
Are in far-off tombs.
O, old age – freedom
To do what you want.
So why are you crying?
Why are you mumbling?
‘Are these the sides of a casket,
Or is this a baby basket?
Now, in a black knitted headscarf
Looking down at me, is a rat matriarch.
Dearest! How much you resemble
My grandmother – you are as gentle
And you mingle comfort
With tears just as she would.’
The rat rocks the clean, neat coffin,
Touching the poor yellow shoulders,
Her words are unintelligible –
Like the speech of adults is to children.
The jester blows his tin whistle,
Live out your life until the time
You can tie up grave and cradle
On the whim of a cruel game.

The Last Word

Letter from Dashkova to Mrs Hamilton, *Memoirs of the Princess Daschkaw*, vol. 2
pp. 148-56

“What a task, my dear friend, have you imposed on me! You insist that I should describe the different portraits which have been made of me, and that I should add one from my own pencil. I have known, I assure you, more than twenty, which people have been at the trouble of taking; and if nineteen were flattering, and far above any pretensions of your friend, there were a few, from their extreme hideousness, as certainly below them.

That I shall speak candidly of myself, without concealing either virtues or failings, you express your conviction; but it is not candour or sincerity alone on these points that I shall find embarrassing. Think only that in what concerns my poor individual self there are matters involved touching great personages and great events.

However, it shall be my business to obey; and to begin, there is one portrait, let me observe, traced, as is pretended, by the hand of her majesty, who, in writing to the king of Poland after her accession to the throne, and speaking of that event, assures him that I had very little to do with it, and was in fact no better than an ambitious simpleton. Now I do not believe a word of this story; besides, I can never be led to imagine that so superior a being as the empress could have spoken thus of a poor individual, her subject, so soon after that very individual had testified a devotion to her without limit, and had risked the loss of life on the scaffold in her service. [...]

It has also been said that her majesty represented me to the Emperor of Germany as a most *capricious* person. I am as little disposed to believe this of the empress as what I have just repeated, knowing me as she did, and knowing that nothing could be more opposite to my real character. It would indeed be superfluous to shew – what almost every action of my life tends to prove – that one who for many years had borne with constancy not only the assaults of calumny, but all the difficulties of poverty, could not be governed by caprice. Such as are acquainted with me have no need to be informed, that without complaining of, or yielding to, the powerful enemies which I had about the person of my sovereign, I have kept an uniform, undeviating course, which can hardly be supposed to argue versatility in the mind or character.

But to proceed on the task before me, and finish it, if possible, before disgust or ennui cut it short, it will be as well to divide my paper into two columns, in one of which shall be written what others have said of me, and in the other what I think of myself.

Sense and a portion of genius have been pretty generally attributed to me. I do not think myself absolutely deficient in the former, but to the latter I have not the smallest pretension, unless it might be in respect to music; for, in spite of the refusals I experienced to allow me a master, vocal or instrumental, I nevertheless acquired such a tact for music, that I could feel and judge its beauties almost as much as if I were really a proficient in the art. My heart has, indeed, frequently warmed my imagination, although the power of imagination has never had the same effect on my heart.

Certain persons have considered me learned, and represented me as such. Not only have I invariably rejected such a claim, but I have frequently repeated to those who would listen to me, that it was impossible I should be so, unless learning came by inspiration. My education, which, in the time of my youth, was thought the best of all possible educations, was confined to the German, French, and Italian languages, history, geography, arithmetic, the dogmas of the Greek church, drawing, and dancing. This was its full extent. I had a very lively desire, it is true, for instruction, and there was scarcely a book which fell in my way that I did not devour. At thirteen years old, having a little more liberty than before, – for I then ceased to have a governess, – I spent all my pocket-money in the purchase of books; but reading of this desultory nature, without selection or method, could scarcely make me learned. At fifteen, I fell in love with him who became my husband. Then followed marriage, children, sicknesses, and afterwards sorrows; circumstances, it will be admitted, most unfavourable to the acquisition of those literary attainments I so much coveted.

Some have painted me as obstinately attached to my own opinions, and inordinately vain. I have been a slave, a voluntary one, it is most true, to every will of my husband, as I was to that of my mother-in-law, and afterwards to that of Mlle. Kamensky, as well as of other friends, as often as it was their pleasure to make me so. With regard to vanity, I believe it is none to say that I never could flatter myself that I possessed the power of pleasing. It was this diffidence, this distrust of myself, constraining as it were, if not my heart, at least my countenance, which produced a species of

awkwardness in my manner too readily interpreted, by ill-natured observers, into an expression of haughtiness or ill humour. Such was the effect of the timidity with which I was usually overcome amidst a great circle, so as to produce the very consequence I dreaded – a misapprehension of whatever I said or did. The retired life I led added to this sort of embarrassment; and many has been the time when my friends have remarked the nervous paroxysms into which I have been thrown by the attention of the company being turned upon me, when making the most trifling sort of exhibition, were it even in a dance or a song, though in fact I had the power of acquitting myself in either very decently.

Ambition has been made by others my ruling passion; and to vanity has been attributed the repugnance which I have shewn to a second marriage.

The only ambition which ever possessed my heart was that of maintaining the undivided love of my husband. After his death a violent illness, occasioned by despair at his loss, deadened in me every other sentiment but that of profound sorrow.

The state of poverty, if I may so speak, in which my children and I then found ourselves, led me to devote all my time, to sacrifice every taste, and to make every exertion, for the benefit of their health, far as it was from strong, and for the advancement of their education; and further, to pay my husband's debts, without lessening the funds which were to form their patrimony. For this purpose it became necessary to lower the style of living and dress suitable to my rank, and to the changed position in my circumstances; and so far, indeed, was I from encouraging sentiments favourable to a new engagement, which might render my children doubly orphans, that I assumed the mask of insensibility and coldness, whilst my heart confessed the painful void which the lost object of its warmest affection had too sensibly occasioned.

I have been represented also as violent, impetuous, and covetous.

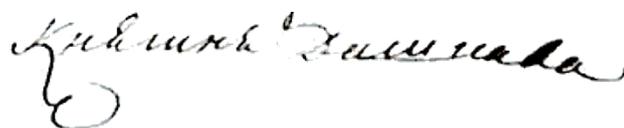
The grand canvas for these several portraits, stretched and prepared for the purpose, was presented to the public immediately after the event of the empress's accession to the throne; and to judge of these productions, it should not be lost sight of that I was then but eighteen years old; and in my estimate of human affairs and motives it should further not be forgotten that I laboured under two grievous disabilities – first, a total want of experience; and, secondly, a habit of judging every creature according to my own proper feelings, believing the whole human race infinitely better than what it is in reality – an error to which I am still too prone, in spite of many rude and convincing proofs to the contrary.

Remember too that, next to my husband, I looked up to and adored the empress almost as a second divinity – that the advancement of her glory to the highest degree of lustre, with which I conceived the happiness of my country to be intimately and inseparably connected, was my fondest and most ardent desire; and then you can understand that, with a sensibility on this subject most extreme, and a notion (shall I confess it?) that I was a principal instrument in the revolution, and that her glory was in some measure my own, the very idea of any stain which could impair its lustre was enough to excite an irritation, a fever of the mind, not the effect of a violent, impetuous temper, but of an enthusiastic nature easily wrought upon, but of which few would penetrate the motive. Think also of those who surrounded the empress; remember that they became my enemies from the first days of her accession to the throne; that these people were all powerful; and then it will be far from difficult to perceive how and wherefore artists were never wanting to apply their pencils and their palettes to the disfiguring of your friend, and why the colouring of their designs was so little in harmony, and consistent with the truth.

That I am not chargeable with violence of character, my acquaintance in general, and (what is better) my servants, I am sure, would be found to testify, in warmly repelling the assertion. I know but two subjects which could have stirred up the small portion of bile which nature had mingled in my composition; the infidelity of my husband would have been one, and whatever could tarnish the fame of my sovereign, Catherine the Second, the other.

As to avarice, which forms one of the features here referred to, it is a vice which can find its place only in the basest mind and narrowest heart. Of this I will only observe, that I rendered pecuniary assistance to my relations much beyond what my means could fairly justify; and it was not till after I had given up to my son the property of his father, with the reservation of what was due to myself, and after the year 1782, when the empress presented me with an estate at Mohiloff, that I could call myself independent, or possessed of an income strictly my own, amounting to one hundred pounds sterling.

Adieu: pardon my calumniators, and join with me in either pitying or despising them.”

A handwritten signature in cursive script, likely belonging to Catherine the Great, written in dark ink. The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized, with a large initial letter.

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Princess Dashkova, the Woman Who Shook the World

A historical verbatim play in three acts by Georgina Barker



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Princess Dashkova, the Woman Who Shook the World

A historical verbatim play in three acts by Georgina Barker

First performed at St Cecilia's Hall, Edinburgh on 29 November 2018, under the direction of Georgina Barker and with the following cast:

Ekaterina Dashkova	<i>Margarita Vaysman</i>
Catherine the Great	<i>Caroline Higgitt</i>
Alexander Herzen	<i>Robin Thomson</i>
Catherine Hyde	<i>Georgina Barker</i>
Novella Matveeva	<i>Eleanor Hardy</i>
Horace Walpole	<i>Ben Fletcher-Watson</i>
Frederick the Great	<i>Frank Stahnisch</i>
Mikhail Vorontsov	<i>George Ross</i>
George Macartney	<i>Roger Robertson</i>
Elizabeth Carter	<i>Inga Mantle</i>
Denis Diderot	<i>Peter France</i>
William Robertson	<i>Ewen Cameron</i>
Jean Duff	<i>Gillian Tait</i>
Judith Milbanke	<i>Liz Thomson</i>
David Garrick	<i>Gareth Jacobs</i>
Samuel Bentham	<i>Kate Simpson</i>
Benjamin Franklin	<i>Robert Pembleton</i>
Mikhail Kheraskov	<i>Robin Thomson</i>
Gavrila Derzhavin	<i>Jesse Gardiner</i>
Joseph Black	<i>David Purdie</i>
Martha Wilmot	<i>Hope Divine</i>
Catherine Wilmot	<i>Kate Simpson</i>
Eleanor Cavanagh	<i>Gillian Tait</i>
Elena Shvarts	<i>Georgina Barker</i>
Russian gossipers	<i>Jesse Gardiner, Robin Thomson, Peter France, Ben Fletcher-Watson</i>
Organist	<i>William Briant</i>
Les Danses Antiques	<i>Elaine Hughes, Talitha MacKenzie, Alena Shmakova, Steffi Weinraub</i>
Wardrobe & Props	<i>Anne Seaton</i>
Costumes	<i>Kate Duffield & Utopia Costumes</i>

Dramatis Personae

Ekaterina Dashkova	<i>Heroine and hostess – enlightener or virago</i>
Catherine the Great	<i>Empress of all the Russias</i>
Alexander Herzen	<i>Nineteenth-century liberal thinker, writer, and historian</i>
Catherine Hyde	<i>Socialite and travel writer</i>
Novella Matveeva	<i>Sixties bard-poet</i>
Horace Walpole	<i>Letter-writer and novelist</i>
Frederick the Great	<i>Emperor of Prussia</i>
Mikhail Vorontsov	<i>Dashkova’s uncle, the Vice Chancellor</i>
George Macartney	<i>British ambassador to Russia</i>
Elizabeth Carter	<i>Bluestocking writer, translator, and classicist</i>
Denis Diderot	<i>Philosopher and writer</i>
Voltaire	<i>Enlightenment writer famed across Europe</i>
William Robertson	<i>Historian and Principal of the University of Edinburgh</i>
Jean Duff	<i>Dowager Countess of Fife</i>
Judith Milbanke	<i>Aristocrat</i>
David Garrick	<i>Actor and celebrity</i>
Samuel Bentham	<i>Mechanical engineer, naval architect, and inventor</i>
Benjamin Franklin	<i>Writer, scientist, and founding father of America</i>
Mikhail Kheraskov	<i>Court poet and playwright</i>
Gavrila Derzhavin	<i>Court poet – with a poison pen</i>
Joseph Black	<i>Professor of Medicine and Chemistry at Edinburgh</i>
Martha Wilmot	<i>Young Irishwoman</i>
Catherine Wilmot	<i>Sister of the above, travel writer</i>
Eleanor Cavanagh	<i>Maid-servant of the above</i>
Elena Shvarts	<i>Seventies rebel poet</i>
Russian gossipers	<i>In Shvarts’ poem – at Dashkova’s wake</i>
Organist	<i>Plays Dashkova’s hymn</i>

ACT ONE

PRINCESS DASHKOVA Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to my salon. I am Princess Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova – perhaps you have heard of me. I have led a rather exciting life – despite my sex. My guests have gathered in my salon this evening to discuss their impressions of me and my adventures. Many of them knew me, they were my friends – or my enemies... Others only knew me by reputation. I will allow each of them to speak their piece – no matter if it be good or ill. But I beg you, do not give credit to all that they say of me!

My first and most honoured guest is the Grand Duchess Catherine of Russia, the woman who shaped the course of my life, and who is soon to become Catherine the Great, Empress of all the Russias:

CATHERINE II What verse and what prose! – and this at seventeen! I beg, nay, I conjure you not to neglect so singular a talent. Perhaps I may appear not quite an unprejudiced judge, since in this instance, dearest princess, it is your too flattering partiality which has made me the subject of your charming composition. Tax me, however, with vanity, or what you please, I must be allowed to say, that I do not know when I have read four such correct and poetical lines. Nor do I the less feel their value as a proof of your affection; for both my head and heart vie in offering you their homage. I only entreat you will continue to love me, and to be persuaded that the warmth of my friendship will never cease to correspond with that of your own.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA My biographer, the nineteenth-century writer and historian Alexander Herzen, saw our friendship in a different light.

ALEXANDER HERZEN From their first meeting, Dashkova loves Catherine passionately, ‘adores her’, like schoolgirls adore girls from the higher forms; she is in love with her, like boys are in love with thirty-year-old women.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA On my estate near Petersburg I stepped into a bog, taking it for a verdant meadow, and caught cold.

CATHERINE II I am really sorry that your sore throat prevents you from coming to me, and deprives me of the pleasure of enjoying your society. But pray, how comes it that you will enact the water nymph? I should certainly scold you, did I not recollect that at nineteen years of age I too had a tenderness for such adventures. To chastise you, however, a little for the injury you have inflicted, and with your eyes open, I will pronounce for your mortification, that a few years will

effectually cure you of all these frolics. Upon my word, I am ready to beat those *puppies* who compose your train into the mud and marshes, and do so little to discourage such giddy pranks; for I cannot afford to lose a friend like you. I love you sincerely, and will not permit you to say that it is an insignificant empire to rule over your heart.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA But Catherine did want an empire larger than my heart... as the travel writer Catherine Hyde recounts:

CATHERINE HYDE No sooner had the report that Peter intended to divorce and imprison Catherine reached the ears of the Princess Daschkoff and of Orloff, than these faithful agents of Catherine met for the purpose of consulting on the best mode of anticipating the intentions of the Emperor. Having apprised their emissaries and friends of what was about to take place, the Princess dressed herself in the uniform of the old Imperial Guard, and visited all the military quarters, where she harangues the soldiery on the degraded condition to which they were reduced; and by the aid of a plentiful supply of *woodka* (a strong spirit resembling gin, and of which great quantities are consumed by the Russians of all classes), great numbers threw their caps into the air, and said they were ready to execute her orders. Thus attended, she next proceeded to the house of the principal civil authorities, and invited them to join the soldiery; and with this accession of strength, she repaired to the Palace, whereto Catherine had been brought in the greatest haste from Peterhoff. The first step now adopted, was to dress the Empress in a suit similar to that assumed by the Princess Daschkoff; after which, both were placed on superb chargers, and the two modern amazons rode through the city amidst loud cries of 'Long live Catherine the Second!'

PRINCESS DASHKOVA During the coup, Catherine and I shared a bed one night, starting rumours as to the extent of our intimacy. Even in the twenty-first century, the bard Novella Matveeva was still trying to dispel speculation that we had an affair:

NOVELLA MATVEEVA

В часы мятежа'

Валяясь на одной полупоходной койке
(Раз не было другой) две дамы толковали
Не об эротике, не о двойной морали,
Но о политике и Царства перестройке.

То греясь кое-как (одна из них – в простуде),
То – выставив посты за дверью, для защиты, –
Спешили отдохнуть. Одетыми. Как люди
Служилые, – когда пути назад – закрыты.

Суди же ты о них, дурак, *по обстановке!*
По *смыслу* их речей! По той *экипировке!*
Но... не угонятся де Сад и Казанова

За грязью наших дней! Когда, запутав планы,
О кратких роздыхах Паллады и Дианы
Историк-пакостник судачит козлоного!

'What Goes on in the Rebellion'

Sprawling on one single makeshift camp pallet
(Since there wasn't a second one) two ladies chatted,
Not about erotics, not about moral dualism,
But about politics and reforming the Tsardom.

Warming themselves as best they can (one of them's caught a chill),
Then – after posting guards outside the door, on vigil –
They hurried to their repose. Fully clothed.
Like service men, when all the roads back are closed.

So judge them, you fool, *by the situation!*
By their *equipment!* By the *thrust* of their conversation!
And yet... not even de Sade and Casanova

Can keep up with today's filth! When, muddling their plan, a
Hooligan-historian blethers devilry over
The quick breather of Athena and Diana.

CATHERINE II As to your reputation, it is better established than that of
the whole calendar of saints.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA The coup was discussed across the whole of Europe.
The idea of two women seizing the throne particularly fascinated the English writer
Horace Walpole.

HORACE WALPOLE Our drought continues. I have been reading the story of Phaëton in the *Metamorphoses*; it is a picture of Twickenham... Yet this conflagration is nothing to that in Russia: what do you say to a Czarina mounting her horse, and marching at the head of fourteen thousand men, with a large train of artillery, to dethrone her husband? Yet she is not the only virago in that country; the conspiracy was conducted by the sister of the Czar's mistress, a heroine under twenty! They have no fewer than two Czars now in coops – that is, supposing these gentle damsels have murdered neither of them. This is the fourth Czarina that you and I have seen; to be sure, as historians we have not passed our time ill. Mrs Anne Pitt, who, I suspect, envies the heroine of twenty a little, says, 'The Czarina has only robbed *Peter* to pay *Paul*...'

PRINCESS DASHKOVA Others tried to diminish our role in events – including Emperor Frederick of Prussia.

FREDERICK II The Empress cannot in fairness be accorded *either the honour or the crime of this revolution*; she was young, weak, isolated, foreign, on the eve of being repudiated, imprisoned. The Orloffs did everything; the Princess d'Aschkoff was there only as the conceited fly, the backseat coach-driver. Catherine was not yet able to steer anything; she threw herself into the arms of those who wanted to save her.

CATHERINE II To King Poniatowsky of Poland – The Princess Dashkoff, the youngest sister of Elizabeth Voronzoff, although she wishes to arrogate to herself all the honour of this revolution, was in very bad odour on account of her connections, while her age, which is only nineteen, was not calculated to inspire confidence. She pretends that everything passed through her to reach me, yet I was in communication with all the chiefs for six months before she even knew one of their names. It is quite true that she has great talent, but it is spoilt by her excessive ostentation and her naturally quarrelsome disposition. She is hated by the chiefs, and liked by the giddy and rash, who communicated to her all they knew, which was only the minor details. Ivan Schouvaloff, the basest and most cowardly of men, has written, I am told, to Voltaire, that a woman of nineteen had overturned the government of this empire. Pray undeceive this distinguished writer. It was necessary to conceal from the Princess Dashkoff the channels through which others reached me, five months before she knew anything; and, during the last four weeks, no more was told her than was absolutely unavoidable.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA In siding with Catherine against Peter, I had gone against my family and their faction at court. My uncle, Mikhail Vorontsov, was displeased.

MIKHAIL VORONTSOV About your sister Princess Dashkova I can inform you that we get very little affection and use from her, and we have influence only in the name of our close connection, and we certainly get neither sincerity nor openness, still less any assistance or hope that she might take any pains on our behalf; and she, as far as it seems to me, has a corrupt and conceited character, preferring to spend her time in vain commotion and would-be high reason, in science and frivolity. I am afraid that with her caprices and her unchecked behaviour and opinions she will so anger Her Majesty the Empress that she will be distanced from the Court, and through this our family would be unjustly tainted in the eyes of the public by her fall. True, she played a large part in the successful ascension to the throne of our most merciful Monarch, and for this we must celebrate and respect her.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA The British ambassador Sir George Macartney took careful note of my standing at Court in the years after the coup:

GEORGE MACARTNEY The Princess Dashkoff, who has lived here extremely retired ever since the death of her husband, has at last taken the resolution of quitting this Capital, and going to reside at Moscow. She set out yesterday; but before her departure, had the honour of kissing the Empress's hands, and taking leave in form; she had been forbid the Court long since, but as She was now to leave it, perhaps for ever, Her Majesty consented to see her before she went. Her reception was such as she ought to have expected; it was cold and ungracious; every body seems pleased that she is no longer here; though scarcely twenty two years old, she has been already in half a dozen plots; the first succeeded, but not being considered, nor rewarded, as she imagined, according to her service, she engaged in new conspiracies which proved abortive; she was no otherwise punished than by a total loss of her Mistress's favour, who still had retained some degree of kindness for her; she is a woman of an uncommon strength of mind, bold beyond the most manly courage and of a spirit capable of undertaking impossibilities to gratify any predominant passion; a character highly dangerous in a country like this, especially when joined to an engaging behaviour, and a beautiful person.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA Catherine gave me permission to travel abroad with my children, visiting the major tourist spots of Europe... In Prussia I made some alterations to a pair of paintings.

NOVELLA MATVEEVA

Гостиница'

Стояла в Данциге гостиница одна.
И в ней (сочтя ее – для штучек – лучшим местом!)
Патриотическим, но не правдивым! – жестом
Хозяин вывесил два хитрых полотна.

Утихшая, на них виднелась война.
И войско русское (с просительным присестом,
С «пардоном» якобы!) – клонило знамена
Пред властью прусских сил победных... Мимоездом –

Княгиня Дашкова рискнула на авось
И... перекрасила тайком от всей квартиры,
Мундиры прусские – на русские мундиры,
А форму русскую – на форму прусских войск.

– Кто их передел?! вскричал хозяин грозно.
Но кони Дашковой уж дальше скачут... Поздно!

The Hotel'

There was once a hotel in the city of Danzig.
Thinking it the best place for a thingamajig,
In a patriotic – but not authentic! – gesture,
Inside, its owner had hung up two artful pictures.

Depicted on them was a battle, now ebbing.
And the Russian troops (with a suppliant posture)
Bowing their standards (saying “sorry”, for sure!)
Before the might of the triumphant Prussians... Travelling

Through, Princess Dashkova daringly took a risk
And... in secret from the whole house, with paint transformed
Prussian uniforms – into Russian uniforms,
And Russian war tunics – into Prussian war tunics.

“Who changed their clothes?!” shouted the owner, irate.

But Dashkova's horses already gallop onwards... Too late!

ALEXANDER HERZEN From Geneva she travels to Spa; there she lives in great intimacy with Mrs Hamilton, and on parting from her romantically swears to come to meet her in five years' time, if they do not see each other before, and, what is still more romantic, actually comes.

HORACE WALPOLE Who do you think is arrived? The famous Princess Daschkaw, the Czarina's favourite and accomplice, now in disgrace – and yet alive. Nay, both she and the Empress are alive! She has put her son to Westminster-school. The devil is in it, if the son of a conspiratress with an English education, does not turn out a notable politician. I am impatient to get well, that I may see her. Cooled as my curiosity is about most things, I own I am eager to see this amazon, who had so great a share in a revolution, when she was not above nineteen. I have a print of the Czarina, with Russian verses under it, written by this virago. I do not understand them, but I conclude their value depends more on the authoress than the poetry. One is pretty sure what they do not contain – truth.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA While I was in England the classicist and translator Elizabeth Carter wrote to the bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu about my significance to the women's movement.

ELIZABETH CARTER It is to be feared, notwithstanding your gratitude to the Czarina, that our general condition is not likely to be much improved by the appearance of a termagant genius of an Empress, once or twice in an age. I suppose you know that Princess Daschan, who at nineteen harangued the troops, and was the principal instrument of bringing about the Revolution, is now in England. She seems to be a most extraordinary genius. She rides in boots, and all the other habiliments of a man, and in all the manners and attitudes belonging to that dress. This might be accounted for, from the custom of her country, and the greater safety of managing her horse. But she likewise dances in a masculine habit, and I believe appears as often in it as in her proper dress. Would not one think from all this, that it would be quite terrible to meet her on Bagshotheath? But she is, in spite of this formidable appearance, remarkably gentle; has weak nerves, and low spirits, and great delicacy both of sentiment and conversation. She is very careful of the education of her son, and told him once, she had rather see his neck twisted, than that he should act unworthy of the memory of his father, of whom she always speaks with the highest esteem and tenderness. It seems she had seen herself upon the list of those whom the Emperor had marked for destruction. As instrumental as she was in bringing about the Revolution, it is said, she had no share in his death. It

is happy for her if this circumstance is true. The Russian ambassador has orders from the Czarina, to shew her all kinds of attentions while she is here; probably she may not be sorry to have her any where rather than at her elbow. As this lady seems an unusual kind of phenomenon, I have told you a good deal about her, and I have it upon very good authority.

HORACE WALPOLE Well! I have seen the Princess Daschkaw, and she is well worth seeing – not for her person, though, for an absolute Tartar, she is not ugly: her smile is pleasing, but her eyes have a very Catiline fierceness. Her behaviour is extraordinarily frank and easy. She talks on all subjects, and not ill, nor with striking pedantry, and is quick and very animated. She puts herself above all attention to dress and everything feminine, and yet sings tenderly and agreeably, with a pretty voice. She, and a Russian lady who accompanies her, sung two songs of the people, who are all musical; one was grave, the other lively, but with very tender turns, and both resembling extremely the Venetian barquerolles. She speaks English a little, understands it easily: French is very familiar to her, and she knows Latin. In short, she is a very singular personage, and I am extremely pleased that I have seen her.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA In France I met the writer Denis Diderot.

DENIS DIDEROT The Princess Daschkaw has spent a fortnight here... I am almost the only Frenchman whose visits she has accepted.

She is Russian through and through, full of admiration for the empress, of whom she always speaks with profound respect and veneration. Her taste for this English nation is so pronounced, that I fear her partiality for this anti-monarchical people may somewhat indispose her to render justice to our own.

The princess has a cordial aversion for despotism, as well as for everything which nearly or remotely tends to tyranny. When Catherine projected her code of laws, the princess, whom she consulted, said, ‘You will never witness its conclusion; but it will always be a great thing to have made the attempt; the very project will not fail to make an epoch.’ With the same undeviating veracity she would speak of the virtues and vices of her friends and enemies.

Princess Daschkaw is by no means handsome. She is little, with a high and open forehead, large puffed-out cheeks, eyes neither large nor small, a little sunk in the socket, dark hair and eyebrows, nose somewhat flat, a wide mouth, thick lips, a round straight neck of the national form, open chest, not much of figure; she has ease in her movements, without the graces, and much affability of manner. The

general expression of physiognomy is favourable. Her character is grave; she speaks our language fluently; all that she knows and thinks she does not say, but what she says she says simply and forcibly, and with the tone of truth. She has a heart lacerated by misfortune; and exhibits a decision and grandeur in her ideas, as well as boldness and pride in her mode of thinking. There is in her also, I am convinced, a profound spirit of rectitude and of dignity.

Her sorrows had brought on the appearance of age, and greatly deranged her health. In December this year, 1770, she will be only twenty-seven years of age, and she has the appearance of forty. She has sold everything she possessed in order to pay the debts of her husband, whom she loved to such a degree as to regard his death as the greatest of her misfortunes.

She is perfectly resigned to the obscurity of her life and the mediocrity of her fortune.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA I also met Voltaire – who I knew would be reporting back to Catherine.

VOLTAIRE Madame, I have had the honour of having the Princess Daschkof in my hermitage. As soon as she entered the living room she recognised your portrait in *mezzo-tinto*, embroidered in satin, encircled with a garland of flowers.

There must be some secret property in your image; for I saw the eyes of the Princess Daschkof become very moist as she looked at this fabric. She spoke to me four hours together about your imperial majesty, and I believed she had spoken to me for only four minutes.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA Five years later, in 1776, I came to Edinburgh to give my son the best Enlightenment education available. The Principal of the university, historian William Robertson, received many letters about the education of Prince Dashkov, from, amongst others, the lawyer and Earl of Rosslyn, Alexander Wedderburn, and the Professor of Natural Philosophy, John Robison.

WILLIAM ROBERTSON It's from Lord Wedderburn. What can he want?

My dear Robertson,

The Princess Daschkaw desires me to add a few lines from your old & sincere friend, not to introduce you to each other, for I would not presume to encroach upon the established right of introduction which Fame possesses amongst those she has once distinguished, but to explain a few things which Fame never publishes. Imagine to your self then a reasonable, frank, good-humoured Woman, warm in

her friendships, open in her dislikes, without suspicion or fear, one in short whom you will scarcely believe that you have not known all your life, & add to these qualities a clear & well cultivated understanding. I am apt to believe you will set a greater value upon the domestick, than the historical Character.

No Mother was ever more attached to a child than she is to a Son, who has never however been hurt by her Indulgence. Her determination to fix her residence in the place of his Education will be a great satisfaction to you, for the preference given to the University under your care is as hazardous, as it is flattering.

[receives a second letter]

Here's one from Professor Robison...angling to teach the Prince, no doubt!

Mr Wedderburn has most accurately delineated Princess Dashkoff, who is really a very uncommon character both for great natural parts, cultivated understanding and generous principles. This scheme of educating her son in Britain I have often heard her talk of, and when I was in town in July I was informed of her intention of coming with him. My high opinion of the mother makes me form favourable expectations of the Son.

[receives a third letter]

Yet another one from Wedderburn! It'll be about that Dashkova business, I expect...

You have no reason to be alarmed at the approach of your Princess. Tho' she does not speak English well, she understands it perfectly & converses without much embarrassment to herself in that Language; You will therefore need no interpreter to her.

She has uncommon Parts & a very strong mind which she has begun a little late & by her own exertions to cultivate, consequently you must expect to find a little roughness in It. I don't know whether I misapply a phrase of Scotch Divinity when I say that her Conversation tho' It is sensible & animated wants Unction. She has, & I don't know that It is a fault, some share of vanity especially on two Points, the fortitude of her mind is one, and the other is her rank. An Attention to her Condition is very proper and necessary. I have seen People who bestowed the *Highbness* upon her very liberally, & seemed to recommend themselves very much by It. In your case I should think it adviseable to observe a degree of ceremony. It will save you a great deal of time; her friendships & she has already conceived one for you are very ardent, & she can never see too much of those she regards. A little

distance & a total independence will preserve your friendship a long time. But I will not answer for its duration if you submit to be directed.

If there is a good Whist Party at Edinburgh, that Point will not be immaterial. She understands It & loves to play.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA I made quite a stir in Edinburgh; the Dowager Countess of Fife, Jean Duff, and Lady Judith Milbanke were both intrigued by me.

JEAN DUFF We have got a Russian princess here, many people are going to see her, perhaps Curiosity may make me go likewise. She was at the play yesterday, the Ladies were dissatisfied with her appearance, as they expected to see one uncommonly fine, but she despises dress, and was quite plain, only she wore a star on one side I suppose relating to some order, she desires that any Lady that come to visit her, may come in an undress. If Sophia and I go we will obey her. She has a son here, they say that he is heir to the Crown of Russia, they say that the Empress gives her plenty of money, provided, that she live out of that Kingdom, the reason is believed to be that she knows too much of her majesty's secrets.

JUDITH MILBANKE A Russian Lady of a very extraordinary Character has been here sometime, the Princess Daschkaw who had a great share in the last Revolution and was one of those principally concerned in the Czar Peter's Death. She wears an order of Diamonds which the Empress gave from her own breast as soon as she gained Possession of the Palace. She left Russia eight years ago, the Empress *advising* her to *travel for her health*, being I suppose of too enterprising a spirit to be agreeable to her. She has resided at Edinburgh the last two years for her Son to study under Robison and Dr. Blair. Her son about 15 and her Daughter 18 are here with her and Mrs. Hamilton the Archbishop of Tuams Daughter who has lived with the Princess these four years. They say she is very well informed & of a strong Masculine Spirit which I should guess was the case from her Appearance.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA One of my own musical compositions was performed at a concert attended by the actor David Garrick.

DAVID GARRICK May your highness long continue to be an honour to your own nation, and the delight of ours; and may that pure taste for nature and simplicity get strength from your highness's example, and drive from our theatres the present vocal and instrumental music, which astonishes the ears without ever touching the heart. I fear what one of our own poets once prophesied will come to pass —

‘Russia shall teach the arts to Britain’s isle.’

PRINCESS DASHKOVA Let us see if we can prove Garrick right! In your programmes you will find the words and music of my hymn ‘When Rising from the Bed of Death’. Please stand and sing:

Organist

Accompanies audience singing ‘When Rising from the Bed of Death’

DAVID GARRICK A most accomplished musician did all the justice in his power to your highness’s composition. [*gesture to organist*] The small audience was in raptures; [*gesture to audience*] the taste, harmony, and pathetic simplicity of the airs were felt from the heart. Indeed, madam, you were judged, not as a princess, but as a great artist. Not the least favour was shewn to your titles or rank, and though the musical jury sat upon you with the most critical rigour, yet your acquittal was as unanimous as their approbation.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA Wonderful! And now I feel you all deserve a break. There will be a five-minute interval, during which you may stretch your legs, or stay and enjoy music and dancing. When we lived in Edinburgh I hosted dances every week for my son. So this really takes me back...

INTERVAL

ACT TWO

PRINCESS DASHKOVA Welcome back to my salon! After my return to Russia, in 1783 I was appointed director of the Academy of Sciences – the first woman to hold the post, and the first woman to hold an equivalent position in the whole of Europe. The engineer Samuel Bentham told his brother Jeremy about this astonishing development:

SAMUEL BENTHAM I have written by this Post to Sir Joseph Banks President of the Royal Society to inform him of the late director of the Academy of Sciences being turned out of his place and Princess Dashkaw appointed directrice in his stead. Now you must bestir yourself to afford all scientific information, and as any proposals for the improvement of Science will at present stand an excellent chance of being forwarded you may rummage up all you have of that kind.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA I was even congratulated by the great Benjamin Franklin, whom I had met in Paris!

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN Madame, – It gave me great Pleasure to hear, that your magnanimous Empress had plac'd you at the Head of your Academy of Sciences. It was doing Honour to Learning.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA Later that same year I became the director of a second academy.

SAMUEL BENTHAM Princess Dashkoff seems to be in as high favour as ever; She has persuaded the Empress to Establish a new Academy of Belles Lettres to consist of Sixty Members of which the greatest Part are of the first nobility, The Princess is the President, – their business is to be to watch over the purity of the Russian language, and to set up a standard to judge it by.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA My directorship of the Russian Academy was hailed by the poets Mikhail Kheraskov and Gavril Derzhavin:

MIKHAIL KHERASKOV

‘Ее сиятельству княгине Екатерине Романовне Дашковой’

Сладко мне повиноваться
Председательнице муз,
Только должен я признаться,
Что к стихам исчез мой вкус.

Но мое стихотворенье
Будто бы поля весной,
Чувствует животворенье,
Внемя кроткий голос твой.

Пойте, росски музы, пойте,
Есть наперсница у вас;
Восхищайтесь, лиры стройте,
Вверен Дашковой Парнас.

‘To Her Excellency Princess Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova’

It is sweet for me to submit
To the chairwoman of the muses,
Only I am bound to admit
My taste for poems has vanished.

But my composition,
Like fields in spring-time,
Feels a vivification,
Hearing your gentle voice.

Sing, Russian muses, sing,
You have a confidante;
Rhapsodise, build your lyres,
To Dashkova is entrusted Parnassus.

GAVRILA DERZHAVIN

[to Dashkova] 'К портрету княгини Екатерины Романовны Дашковой, ВО ВРЕМЯ ЕЕ ПРЕЗИДЕНТСТВА В АКАДЕМИИ НАУК'

Сопутницей была,
Когда с небес на трон
Воссесть Астрея шла;
А ныне — Аполлон.

'To the Portrait of Princess Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova, DURING HER PRESIDENCY OF THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES'

Her companion she was
When from heaven Astraea
Went forth to mount the throne;
But now – she is Apollo.

[aside] 'К портрету Гермафродита'

Се лик:
И баба и мужик.

'To the Portrait of a Hermaphrodite'

This physique:
Both *baba* and *muzhik*.

This phizog:
Both bitch and dog.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA As head of two Academies, I was able to invite my friends from the University of Edinburgh to visit St Petersburg. The professor of medicine and chemistry, Joseph Black, replied to my invitation:

JOSEPH BLACK Those whom you honoured with your freindship here are in general well & often remember you with respect & affection. Poor Mrs. Hunter Blair however has lost her husband. Principal Robertson is well. Dr. Blair being at ease in point of fortune has publishd his Lectures & resigned his Professorship. Mr. Greenfield is now Professor of Rhetoric. Professor Stewart formerly of Geometry is now Professor of moral Philosophy in place of Mr. Ferguson who has retired. Dr. Hutton who assisted in making the Catalogue of your beautiful Collection of Derbyshire fossils has commenced author. He has read two Papers in our Philosophical Society which are soon to be published in the first volume of their transactions already printed. The first Paper is on the cause of rain, the other is a Theory of the terrestrial Globe or explains the formation & arrangement of Fossils. His reasonings and opinions on this subject have great merit & are much admired. He desires me to express his gratefull acknowledgements for your kind invitation it is very tempting on many accounts but he is not easily set in motion. Professor John Robison has read a Paper on the new Planet & this also will be published in the first volume. I am very sorry to add that he has been confined for many months with a most painfull & distressing disorder from which I am afraid he must suffer a great deal more without hopes of recovery. He informs me that when he left Russia the Empress was pleased to grant him a Pension of 400 Rubles in character of correspondent with the Marine Cadet Corps. This Pension was paid during the four years that the Russian Boys were with him but has been discontinued ever since and no reason assigned. Perhaps your Highness's goodness may incline you to be freindly to his Family in this matter. It gives your excellencys Freinds here the greatest satisfaction & pleasure to learn that your sons Character & progress corresponds so well to the hopes they had formed.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA But in the midst of my success, disaster struck. My son married beneath his rank and without my consent, and I was caught up in court intrigues, gossipped about and mocked.

CATHERINE II It would be good to keep distance from Dashkova out of delicacy, because of the sadness occasioned her by the marriage of her son to Alferova.

SAMUEL BENTHAM Princess Dashkoff requires the most servile obedience from her son, and imagines that all his merit is from her and expects he

should think so. She rails against him to me and represents him as the most infamous insensible Profligate Son imaginable; to others she speaks of him as an Angel. It is not easy to make her see that while she requires of him more obedience & respect than he is disposed to give her she is taking the most effectual means to root out all affection from his heart. The daughter who is submission itself she treats still worse.

GAVRILA DERZHAVIN

‘На Смерть Графини Румянцевой’
Не беспрестанно дождь стремится
На класы с черных облаков,
И море не всегда струится
От прменяемых ветров;
Не круглый год во льду спят воды,
Не всякий день бурь слышен свист,
И с скучной не всегда природы
Падет на землю желтый лист.

Подобно и тебе крушиться
Не должно, Дашкова, всегда,
Готово ль солнце в бездну скрыться,
Иль паки утру быть чреда;
Ты жизнь свою в тоске проводишь,
По английским твоим коврам,
Уединясь, в смущеньи ходишь
И волю течь даешь слезам.

Пожди, — и сын твой с страшна бою
Иль на щите, иль со щитом,
С победой, с славою, с женою,
С трофеями приедет в дом;
И если знатности и злата
Невестка в дар не принесет,
Благими нравами богата,
Прекрасных внучат приведет.

Утешься, и в объятти нежном
Облобызай своих ты чад;

В семействе тихом, безмятежном,
Фессальский насаждая сад,
Живи и распложай науки;
Живи и обессмерть себя,
Да громогласной лиры звуки
И музы воспоют тебя.

'On the Death of Countess Rumiantseva'

The rain does not strive relentlessly
To reach the crops from the black clouds,
And the sea is not billowing constantly
Away from changeful winds;
The waters do not sleep in ice all year round,
The piping of gales is not heard every day,
And the yellow leaf is not falling always
From tedious nature to the ground.

Likewise you too, Dashkova,
Should not sorrow forever,
Whether the sun is ready to hide in ocean,
Or 'tis once again morning's turn;
You spend your life in regrets,
A recluse, you pace to and fro,
Bewildered, over your English carpets
And allow your tears to freely flow.

Just wait – and your son from fearsome fray
Either on his shield or with his shield,
With victory, with glory, with bride,
With trophies shall come home to stay;
And if your daughter-in-law does not bring
Eminence and gold as her dowry,
Then, rich in good morals, she
Will provide fine grandchildren.

Take comfort, and shower tender embraces
And kisses on your brood of children;

In your household quiet and strifeless,
Sowing your Thessalian garden,
Live and propagate sciences;
Live and immortalise yourself,
And may the lyre's thund'rous-voiced strains
And the muses sing your praises.

CATHERINE II Dashkova and L. A. Naryshkin are at such odds, that when they are seated together, they turn away from each other and make a two-headed eagle. The dispute is over 11 feet of land.

I have thought of a new Russian morality play, called 'Swatting a fly with an axe-head'. This portrays Princess Dashkova's quarrel with A. A. Naryshkin, in the figures of Postrelova (or 'Scoundrelova'), who is constantly boasting about her travels, and Duryndin (or 'Nitwittin').

Dashkova has slaughtered Naryshkin's pigs [*laughs*] – the matter must be concluded in court as soon as possible, so it does not come to murder.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA There was worse to come, however. In 1796 Catherine died, and was succeeded by her son Paul.

CATHERINE HYDE Though among the last objects of his resentment, Paul did not forget the conspicuous part played by the Princess Daschkoff in the dethronement of his father. This Princess, who had survived her ungrateful mistress, had retired to Moscow before the death of Catherine, and vainly imagined she had escaped the proscription, when orders were issued for her arrest and exile. One of the confidential female attendants of the Princess, who was present at the time, told me, that when the officer charged to signify the Emperor's orders entered her room, she looked at him with an air of utmost contempt, and, turning to my informant, coolly observed, –'Well! I have certainly deserved this, for having prevented his mother from strangling the ugly monster in his cradle!' Then going towards the fire for a few minutes, and rubbing her hands, she rang the bell, and on the entry of her valet-de-chambre said, with the greatest composure, –'Prepare every thing for a long journey.' Upon which she hastened to take leave of those friends who were immediately about her person, and set out for Siberia, as if she was going on an ordinary visit.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA In an alternate universe, devised by Thomas K. Carpenter, I took refuge from Emperor Paul in America, with Benjamin Franklin.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN Her name was Yekaterina Romanovna Vorontsova-Dashkova, sometimes called Princess Dashkova, or Catherine the Little. I liked to call her Kat, though only in private when we were discussing important matters. We weren't amours, but I think the thought may have crossed her mind.

The alchemical mixture I had devised to extend life also made one's appearance youthful in every way. Since she'd arrived in Philadelphia one year ago, under my tutelage and taking regular supplements of the powder, her fifty-seven year old body looked half that age.

'Humor an old woman,' said Kat, 'I do love a mystery.'

'No wonder Empress Catherine gave you permission to travel often. You are relentless,' I said.

'I seem to recall hearing something like that from her lips once or twice,' she said, staring longingly at the pale blue sky above the city. 'I do sorely miss her. She was a good woman and a better sovereign.'

'Good rulers are hard to find,' I said.

'No need to lecture me, Benjamin,' she said, putting emphasis on my name. 'I know the perils of an obtuse emperor firsthand. Though I have to admit this democracy thing can be quite messy.'

We rode in silence, not because we differed in opinion, but because the paths that we had traveled towards the ideals of the Enlightenment had been quite different. I had come upon these precepts through long discussions with the great thinkers of our time and through the creation of this great nation, while Kat had seen the dark and destructive nature of a capricious ruler and fled to these shores for safety.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA But in real life, after Paul's assassination, I returned to my estate to live out my old age in obscurity – but not in isolation... As we'll hear after a short interval, with more music and dancing.

INTERVAL

ACT THREE

PRINCESS DASHKOVA Welcome back to my salon!

ALEXANDER HERZEN The feeling of friendship, utterly fervent, utterly practical, all but dominated this proud and stubborn woman. Deeply offended by Catherine's behaviour, she aged before her time. After Catherine she became attached to Hamilton with all the ardour of a starved heart. And in old age a maternal, endlessly tender friendship warmed her life; I speak of Miss Martha Wilmot, who published her Memoirs. [*gesture to Martha*]

MARTHA WILMOT At five o'clock yesterday I arrived. The mother is a friendly kind hearted Woman as I ever met with. She address'd me in English which she speaks fluently, and in the course of the Evening we had a good deal of conversation; she appears to have the most perfect recollection of everything and everybody she ever met with in her travels. Her appearance is milder than I expected from what I heard at St Petersburg. Her Dress a Man's night cap and black hat with a sort of dark *robe de Chambre*. Her manners easy, and a certain something that distinguishes her not unpleasingly from the common herd. This is merely the *coup d'oeuil*.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA Soon Martha and I became very close.

MARTHA WILMOT The Princess says she means to enter the lists against you and my Mother to prove that I am her daughter not yours, and has sketched a ridiculous process to reclaim her rights which she declares you have usurp'd *ever since her visit to Ireland*, but which she will place before the courts of Justice. She desires me to give proper notice in her name. I promis'd. So here I proclaim the impending tryal.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA Martha was very concerned about the Irish Rebellion of 1803.

MARTHA WILMOT The Princess often gets the English papers and that is no small comfort. The Princess is, you know, a red hot English Woman, so we read the papers and fight with a degree of Valour that would amaze you under the British flag. This Evening she suggested an idea which I really think excellent, that the most perfect union wou'd be establish'd between England and Ireland were the King to reside and even call his Parliament in the latter Kingdom at Stated periods – thus becoming acquainted with Ireland and blending the interests of both Countrys by raising the consequence of the *little Green Island* and exciting the affections of his Irish subjects....

The Princess has begun to write her life. Her motive for so doing is friendship to me, as she says she will give me the manuscript & liberty to publish it. 'tis really

astonishing to see with how little trouble it gets forward. She settled long accounts with her Steward, then writes half a page, then perhaps she settles a law suit between two peasants, then writes again; in short she does not stop half a minute to consider what she shall say or to compose her sentences – every word flows as naturally from her pen as in common conversation & every event crowds to her memory in the most perfect State of *readyness* and *exactitude*. It would have been a million of sins if she had continued to withhold from the public the events of a life so interesting as hers or the sentiments of a heart so little known and so often misrepresented.

NOVELLA MATVEEVA

К «Запискам» Княгини Дашковой'

Её «Записки» – не святыня,
Не для паломничества Мекка;
В них безотрадная гордыня
Затравленного человека.

В них есть мечтание покоя
И умолчаний гордых пара.
(Так заслоняются рукою
И от вчерашнего удара...)

В них есть политика неволи
И дипломатия печали.
Но правды в них – *гораздо боле!*

Хоть и не *той*, какую ждали.
Какую ждал конвент потешный
И передёргиватель грешный.

'To the Memoirs of Princess Dashkova'

Her *Memoirs* are not holy,
Not for pilgrimage a Mecca;
They hold the dismal vanity
Of a hounded creature.

They hold daydreams of peace
And a couple of proud silences.
(So with their hand people shield themselves

Even from blows of bygone years...)

They hold politics of powerlessness
And the diplomacy of sadness.
But the truth they hold – is *far greater!*

Though it's not *the* truth they awaited.
The one awaited by the mock convent
And by the sinful falsehood-merchant.

MARTHA WILMOT The compound of contradictions which form Princess D's character exceed belief. There are times when she is perfectly a Woman of fashion & very elegant in her manners, but she has learnt so little of the art of concealing her feelings. Her invariable & comical love of truth (which makes her tell out things that set a large Company, staring, twittering, blushing, biting their lips, and betraying a thousand different emotions *not one of which she ever remarks*), her Celebrity, her rank & age, all give her a right to be an Oddity, & Nature has stamped her such in the very fullest sense of the word.

I delight in looking at the princess amidst a group of her contemporaries; – she is a creature of so different an order; for while they are bedaubed with red and white paint, and covered with jewels and finery, the freshness of her complexion, which has never at any period of her life been assisted by rouge, and the simplicity of her singular dress, harmonizing with the character of her countenance, at once distinguish her, with all her characteristic traits of truth, nobleness, and self-respect, accustomed to receive homage, but ignorant of the art of paying it.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA In 1805, Martha's sister Catherine came to join her, along with her servant, Eleanor Cavanagh.

CATHERINE WILMOT The Princess, lovely oddity, instantly set about manufacturing a prodigious Russian eulogium (which Matty understood & told me afterwards) puffing of my qualifications to such a pitch that the circle about her were completely mute.

Tho' the Blessed Princess uniformly behaves to us in this manner, she exacts (from Imperial habits I suppose) a sort of deference that surprised me excessively at first from her Country People! For example, No Man tho' cover'd with Stars attempts to sit down in her presence without being desired, & this not always being requested I have seen half a dozen Princes stand out an entire visit. Once I saw them *bow'd* out of the room when she got deadly tired of them, & after giving them her Hand to

kiss they disappear'd. Lucky it is she has sensibility & gentleness of Nature, for if she had not she wou'd be a Public Scourge!

ELEANOR CAVANAGH I was dying to see the Princess Daschkaw that I heard talk of so much in Ireland & all through Russia! I look'd everywhere and down over the Bannisters when we were coming up stairs to bed! But tho' I seen plenty of people I could not make her off at all. Just before my Mistress went into her room, bounce, the door open'd & in walk'd the Princess with a large Star upon her breast and as good a Face smiling & looking as good natured as a Child! She staid some time, & the minute she spied me out (for I kept standing at the bedroom door) she took me by the hand, & 'I'm glad to see you' sais she, & kiss'd me as kind as if I had belong'd to her. 'I'm oblig'd to you Ma'am,' sais I, & turn'd as red as a rose. 'Ellen' sais she 'are you alive after the Journey?' 'Faith I am Ma'am,' sais I. ('What would kill me?' thought I, but I did not say so out loud.) May I never stir but she is the pleasantest Lady I ever seen in or out of Ireland!

CATHERINE WILMOT I will take you down stairs into the Hall where dozens of Slaves are waiting with their offerings of Bread and Salt to greet the Princess! When she appears they fall down before her & kiss the ground with that senseless obeisance that stupefaction feels at the approach of superior Power! Her Lenity makes their Lot better perhaps than that of others, but that's saying very little for the System.

ELEANOR CAVANAGH There is 16 Villages all belonging to the Princess here, & them that lives in them comes to the number of 3000 Men & Women, all her subjects and loving her as if she was their Mother.

MARTHA WILMOT If the P. sometimes treats Men as boys (or as Dogs when they don't please her), she often treats Children as Men & Women, expecting the same intelligence & understanding & pursuits which occupy her own mind & putting her own mind into instant competition with theirs.

CATHERINE WILMOT Princess Daschkaw said 'I do tink God Almighty himself ought to be proud when he sais, I have made de English Woman'. She is not however half so fond of English *Men*....

ELEANOR CAVANAGH '*Mai deer how doo you doo!*' says the Lady of the House to me the other day! By that I made full sure that she was once at her birth from Ireland.

CATHERINE WILMOT In the midst of this immense Establishment and in the center of riches and honours I wish you were to see the Princess go out to take

a walk, or rather to look over her subjects! An old brown great coat and a silk handkerchief about her neck worn to rags is her dress, & well may it be worn to rags for she has worn it 18 years and will continue to do so as long as she lives because it belong'd to M^{rs} Hamilton.

MARTHA WILMOT The Princess is simplicity personified & has no conception of what a love of dress means. Indeed her ideas & conversation upon the Subject are so comically original that 'tis almost like a native of Kamstchatska when she talks of fashions, & when she buys bargains 'tis droll but often vexatious to see the first Woman of the Empire distinguish'd for her understanding, duped by every bearded rogue who chases to dispose of his trash & call it fine merchandise.

CATHERINE WILMOT Her originality, her appearance, her manner of speaking, her doing every description of thing, (for she helps the masons to build walls, she assists with her own hands in making the roads, she feeds the cows, she composes music, she sings & plays, she writes for the press, she shells the corn, she talks out loud in Church and corrects the Priest if he is not devout, she talks out loud in her little Theatre and puts in the Performers when they are out in their parts, she is a Doctor, an Apothecary, a Surgeon, a Farrier, a Carpenter, a Magistrate, a Lawyer; in short she hourly practices every species of incongruity, corresponds with her brother, who holds the first post in the Empire, on his trade, with Authors, with Philosophers, with Jews, with Poets, with her Son, with all her Relations, and yet appears as if she had her time a burthen on her hands) altogether gives me eternally the idea of her being a Fairy! The marvellous contradiction too of her speaking like an Infant in her broken english and with her unaccountable expressions! She is unconscious whether she speaks French, English or Russian, and mingles these in every sentence.

MARTHA WILMOT Her manner is often *naïf* as a child's. I know but one way to describe her, and that is by saying that she unites every characteristic of every period of life, from infancy to old age, and she is so truly each of these at different moments, that *schoolboy, lover, soldier, statesman, &c.*, seem each by turns the only feature of her enthusiastic being.

CATHERINE WILMOT At the upper end of the Room sitting in an arm Chair with a little Table before her inlaid like a Chess board, lounging in a simple purple dressing gown & white cambric Man's nightcap, with her black Dog Fidelle sleeping on a cushion at her feet, is the Princess! She is waiting for our return home as this Evening is to be dedicated to reading over some dozen Letters she has tied up in that great paper parcel – the successive Correspondence that pass'd between

her & Catherine 2nd from the time she was 18 years of age till she resign'd the Academy. These subjects as ripping up a life that is almost past gives a painful sort of agitated animation to her Countenance, & I long till it is over.

MARTHA WILMOT Last night we had company here, but our intended gaiety was most compleatly paralysed by the shocking intelligence that Prince Daschkaw was at the point of Death!... The Princess imagined it was only an invention to surprise her into a reconciliation with her Son and treated it with incredulity! Unhappily she was too soon convinc'd of the sad reality. She heard the news of Prince Dashkov's death with a degree of Composure inexplicable! – no hystericks, no faintings.

PRINCESS DASHKOVA After my son Pavel's death, Martha stayed as long as she could, but eventually had to return to Ireland.

MARTHA WILMOT On my departure she gave me an agonizing embrace and a fervent blessing, which I received as if she felt it would be indeed the last. I crept into her room an hour after this, as she slept with the smiling placid expression of infancy on her countenance – an expression which I never saw in any old person but herself. I gazed upon her dear face till almost blinded by my tears; and quitted her, never to see her more in this world!

PRINCESS DASHKOVA It was in these last lonely years of my life, without my son or my beloved Martha, that I was pictured by the twentieth-century poet Elena Shvarts.

ELENA SHVARTS

'Старость Княгини Дашковой'

Княгини Дашковой нет
В Академии на острове —
Она под старость лет
Уехала в Москву.

Кто крыс пожалеет?
Кто крыс пожалеет?
Ведь крыса — она
И не жнет и не сеет,
И некрасива собой.

Эй, крысы, бегите

Скорее
В тот дом на углу —
Сначала по крыше, потом в трубу,
Но вы все равно опоздали —
Заступница ваша в гробу.
Поминки. На кухне судачат, судачат,
Никто, ну никто по ней не заплачет.

RUSSIAN GOSSIPERS

«С утра с поздравленьем крысенок к постели,
Он что-то ей пискнет, она ему тоже
И сахар ручкой белой
К его подносит роже.
Как сын-то ей помер,
Без слез хоронила —
Бог дал, Бог и взял,
Судить, мол, не нам,
А Машенька, крыса, хвост прищемила,
Так плачет и слуг целый день по мордам».

ELENA SHVARTS

Темнеет сознание,
Лампада дымится,
Вольтер и Руссо
В далеких гробницах.
О старость — свобода
То делать, что хочешь.
О чем же ты плачешь?
Чего ты бормочешь?

PRINCESS DASHKOVA

«Или это — стенки гроба,
Или это колыбель?
В черном вязаном платочке
Крыса надо мной теперь.
О милая! Как ты похожа
На бабушку — ты так нежна

И утешенья со слезами
Мешаешь так же, как она».

ELENA SHVARTS

Качает крыса гроб опрятный,
Касаясь бедных желтых плеч,
Слова ее непонятны —
Как в детстве взрослая речь.
Дует шут в свою свистульку,
Доживи до той поры,
Когда ты свяжешь гроб и люльку
Причудливостью злой игры.

Princess Dashkova's Old Age'

Princess Dashkova is no more
At the Academy on the isle –
In the autumn of her life
She has gone away to Moscow.

Who will take pity on the rats?
Who will take pity on the rats?
Because a rat, you know,
She does not reap and she does not sow,
And she is not fair of face.

Hey, rats, off you scurry,
Hurry,
To that house on the corner –
First over the roof, then into the chimney,
But you're too late, already,
Your Blessèd Protectress is six feet under.
The wake. In the kitchen they chitter-chatter, chitter-chatter,
Nobody, but nobody sheds a tear for her.

RUSSIAN GOSSIPERS

'A boy rat comes to her bedside to bid her good morning,
He squeaks something to her, and she to him,
And in her white hand she holds out

A lump of sugar to his snout.
When her own son upped and died,
She buried him and never cried –
God gave, and God took away,
To judge, she said, is not our place,
But when little Masha the rat snags her tail,
She weeps and weeps, and slaps the servants all day.’

ELENA SHVARTS

Perception darkens,
Icon lamps sputter,
Voltaire and Rousseau
Are in far-off tombs.
O, old age – freedom
To do what you want.
So why are you crying?
Why are you mumbling?

PRINCESS DASHKOVA

‘Are these the sides of a casket,
Or is this a baby basket?
Now, in a black knitted headscarf
Looking down at me, is a rat matriarch.
Dearest! How much you resemble
My grandmother – you are as gentle
And you mingle comfort
With tears just as she would.’

ELENA SHVARTS

The rat rocks the clean, neat coffin,
Touching the poor yellow shoulders,
Her words are unintelligible –
Like the speech of adults is to children.
The jester blows his tin whistle,
Live out your life until the time
You can tie up grave and cradle
On the whim of a cruel game.

CATHERINE WILMOT What a task it would be to draw the Character of the Princess Daschkaw! Such are her peculiarities & inextricable varieties that the result would only appear like a Wisp of Human Contradictions. She has as many Climates to her mind, as many Splinters of insulation, as many Oceans of agitated uncertainty, as many Etnas of destructive fire and as many Wild Wastes of blighted Cultivation as exists in any quarter of the Globe! For my part I think she would be most in her element at the *Helm of the State*, or Generalissimo of the Army, or Farmer General of the Empire. In fact she was born for business on a large scale which is not irreconcilable with the Life of a Woman who at 18 headed a Revolution & who for 12 years afterwards govern'd an Academy of Arts & Sciences....

PRINCESS DASHKOVA What a task indeed! But since you insist, I will describe the different portraits which have been made of me, and add one from my own pencil.

Sense and a portion of genius have been pretty generally attributed to me. Certain persons have considered me learned. Some have painted me as inordinately vain. Ambition has been made by others my ruling passion. I have been represented also as violent, impetuous, and covetous.

I do not think myself absolutely deficient in sense, but I have not the smallest pretension to genius, unless it might be in respect to music.

It was impossible I should be learned, unless learning came by inspiration. My education, which, in the time of my youth, was thought the best of all possible educations, was confined to the German, French, and Italian languages, history, geography, arithmetic, the dogmas of the Greek church, drawing, and dancing. I had a very lively desire, it is true, for instruction, and there was scarcely a book which fell in my way that I did not devour. At thirteen years old I spent all my pocket-money in the purchase of books; but reading of this desultory nature, without selection or method, could scarcely make me learned. At fifteen, I fell in love with him who became my husband. Then followed marriage, children, sicknesses, and afterwards sorrows; circumstances most unfavourable to the acquisition of those literary attainments I so much coveted.

I never could flatter myself that I possessed the power of pleasing. There is a species of awkwardness in my manner too readily interpreted, by ill-natured observers, into an expression of haughtiness or ill humour.

The only ambition which ever possessed my heart was that of maintaining the undivided love of my husband.

That I am not chargeable with violence of character, my acquaintance in general, and (what is better) my servants, I am sure, would be found to testify. I know but two subjects which could have stirred up the small portion of bile which nature had mingled in my composition; the infidelity of my husband would have been one, and whatever could tarnish the fame of my sovereign, Catherine the Second, the other. As to avarice, it is a vice which can find its place only in the basest mind and narrowest heart.

Adieu: pardon my calumniators, and join with me in either pitying or despising them.

Curtain.