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Catherine the Great and Her Empire in British and American Newspapers

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CATHERINE THE GREAT AND HER EMPIRE IN BRITISH AND
AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS

by

ARLEN CORDERO

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in History
in the College of Arts and Humanities
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ABSTRACT

This paper explores portrayals of Catherinian Russia in British and American periodicals during her reign, between 1762 and 1796. Catherine II had an incredibly eventful reign as she enacted important domestic reforms, engaged in two major wars with the Ottoman Empire, executed three partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and created the League of Armed Neutrality, among other accomplishments. Britain and America equally experienced momentous change during this period, most notably with the American War for Independence. This paper examines how British and American periodicals reacted to the significant events of Catherine's reign using published materials such as news reports, opinion essays, book reviews, poems, Parliament proceedings, and letters to the editor. This paper first discusses the image of Catherine II as a monarch and a woman in British newspapers. I analyze the transformation in the British perspective from a favorable view of the empress to a condemnatory one beginning in 1780 and juxtapose it to Catherine's portrayal in American periodicals in which the empress suffered from a negative reputation for a majority of her reign. I then shift focus from Catherine as an individual to Russia as a whole. I explore the derogatory views of the Russian nation and people largely expressed in British and American newspapers and identify how this prejudice, in turn, affected the image of Catherine II. The major themes of this analysis are foreign policy between Russia, Britain, and America, during Catherine's reign in the 18th century, gender constructs, and ethnocentrism.

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INTRODUCTION

Catherine II ascended to the Russian throne on July 9, 1762, upon the successful deposition of her husband, Peter III. This coup d'état sparked much conversation even beyond the boundaries of the Russian Empire as this change in regime would affect the Russian people and its allies and enemies. Reports of the new empress and the circumstances in which she obtained her title reached British newspapers later that summer with articles in papers such as the *London Magazine* and the *Scots Magazine*.¹ American papers, for instance the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, soon followed suit in the fall with similar reports of Catherine's palace revolution.²

Over the course of her thirty-four-year reign, Catherine expanded the Russian Empire to the Black Sea and into Central Europe, waged two successful wars against the Ottoman Empire, implemented much needed administrative reform throughout her vast territory, improved public education, carried out vast building and beautification programs, and proposed the introduction of a new law code through her "Instruction", or *Nakaz*, among many achievements that earned the empress the title of "Great".

¹ "An Account of the Late Revolution in Russia," *London Magazine*, August 1762; "Affairs in Turkey and Russia," *Scots Magazine* (Edinburgh), August 1762

² "Manifesto of the Empress Catherine II, on Her Advancement to the Throne of Russia." *The Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), October 07, 1762.

However, Catherine's "greatness" was heavily debated in American and British newspapers, journals, and magazines as they held mixed reactions to Catherine's policies and character. This thesis will analyze this complex response of the British and American public to the rise of Catherine II and the significant events that followed during her reign, as reflected in news media.

While scholars have researched the foreign relations of Catherinian Russia with England and the United States, the complete analysis of the media coverage of Catherine's reign in England and the U.S. is unavailable. In fact, until the 1960s, scholarship about Catherine II was scant. Most of these popular biographies produced in England and the U.S. about the empress focused on her famous "favorites" and her love life.³ From the 1960s onward, scholars started to draw greater attention to the government and rule of the empress as well as the evolution of her political ideology and the role of femininity in Catherine's reign. One of the most influential historians in this recent era of scholarship was Isabel Margaret de Madariaga. Madariaga published two books about the empress, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (1981) and *Catherine the Great: A Short History* (1990), in addition to a number of other works about Russia in the 18th century. Madariaga is especially important in the field of research about Catherine II as she highlighted the czarina's many achievements and enlightened policies as opposed to focusing on the more scandalous aspects of Catherine's reign, namely her love life. Madariaga paid special attention to Catherine's femininity and the ways in which it defined

³ For a discussion about the explanation of this lack of scholarship about Catherine II in the USSR, see Isabel de Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990), vii-viii. Madariaga attributes this absence to the disapproval of a biographical approach to history among scholars. Also see John T. Alexander, *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), vii-ix. Alexander adds that Catherine, being a female, foreign-born, pre-revolutionary sovereign, did not align with the male, officially Victorian historical establishment in the USSR, leading to a lack of biographies about the empress.

Catherine's life and the policies she enacted, many of which had positive effects on Russian society. Several scholars today look first toward Maradiaga's writing about Catherine.

Within this relatively recent area of scholarship about Catherine II lies works that examine foreign relations between Russia, Britain, and the U.S. during her reign. Anthony Cross is a historian central to this subject who examines the complex relationship between Russia and Britain during the 18th century. To gain perspective about relations between Russia and the West, Cross, and other scholars, employ various government sources such as treaties in addition to traveler's accounts, newspapers, pamphlets, and political cartoons among other forms of media and literature to inspect public opinion in foreign countries. According to *Anglo-Russica: Aspects of Cultural Relations between Great Britain and Russia in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (1993) by Cross, the British became much more interested in Russian history and culture during the time of Peter the Great and the exchange of ideas and people between the two nations allowed the British and Russian populations to become more familiar with one another, but certain biases continued into the reign of Catherine II, such as the idea of Russian inferiority in comparison to the West.⁴ Edward Grey has also made similar findings to this concept in his research regarding American views of Russia during the late 18th century. Grey claims that Americans often looked to Europe for inspiration in terms of state-building after they gained independence. However, the structure of the Russian Empire was used as an example to avoid as accounts by outspoken voices, such as explorer John Ledyard, revealed that the

⁴ See Anthony Cross, *Anglo-Russica: Aspects of Cultural Relations between Great Britain and Russia in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, (Oxford: Berg, 1993).

unfavorable view of Russia as an oppressive, immoral, and lesser nation traveled from Europe and into America.⁵

Although Cross and Grey are examples of scholars that have studied American and British views of Catherinian Russia, they do not specifically focus on the narrative created in American and British news media about Catherine II and Russia throughout her reign. Ruth Dawson has narrowed on this topic as she has researched the coverage of Catherine II's coup d'état in Russian, German, and British news publications.⁶ Dawson asserts that frequently, British and German newspapers framed the empress of Russia in a masculine light while feminizing Peter III when describing the circumstances of the coup to create a positive image of the empress. Meanwhile in Russia, news publications typically depicted the empress as a maternal figure to appeal to their audience.⁷ Dawson's claims reflect the move in scholarship about Catherine II since the 1960s to analyze Catherine's reign beyond that of her private love life and scandal to examine Catherine as a person and monarch, especially a female leader in a predominantly patriarchal setting. Brenda Meehan-Waters is another historian who similarly argues that British and French writers frequently criticized Catherine with the help of sexist

⁵ Edward Grey, "The Other Continental Empire: American Perceptions of the Russian Empire, 1776-1789," *Ab Imperio*, no. 2 (2008): 21-46.

⁶ Ruth Dawson, "Perilous Royal Biography: Representations of Catherine II Immediately After Her Seizure of the Throne," *Biography* 27, no.3 (2004): 517-534.

⁷ Dawson proposes that a reason for the difference in narratives between Russian and Western reports about Catherine's coup d'état was that the Russian population grew familiar with female rule because women ruled Russia for a majority of the period that followed Peter the Great's death in 1725. Therefore, Russian papers leaned toward a feminized, maternal view of Catherine. German and English newspapers that had the goal of creating a favorable opinion of Catherine could have felt the need to masculinize Catherine as there may have been more groups in these nations, compared to Russia, that were uncomfortable with female rule and needed further justification as to why a woman should usurp the throne. See Ruth Dawson, "Perilous Royal Biography: Representations of Catherine II Immediately After Her Seizure of the Throne," *Biography* 27, no.3 (2004): 521-522.

commentary, honing in on her gender as her greatest fault, while Russian critics were less likely to attribute Catherine's shortcomings and faults to her sex.⁸

In this thesis, I go beyond Dawson's scope, which was limited to news articles concerning Catherine's palace revolution in the West, particularly Germany and England. I will be examining American and British views of Catherine II and her empire as reflected in newspapers, journals, and magazines over the entire duration of Catherine II's reign from 1762 until her death in 1796. This thesis will identify the major trends in perceptions of the empress of Russia in both countries to compare the reactions of British subjects and Americans to Catherine II. While juxtaposing the opinions of these two societies, this study will also inspect the transformation over time of the image of Catherine II within each country as conflicts and new developments challenged the relationship between Russia, England, and America.

Numerous factors influenced public opinion of Catherine II in the West. Major conflicts, most notably the American Revolutionary War, divided the British and American colonists during this period in the mid-to-late 18th century. Catherine's support for either of these belligerents alienated certain groups in both nations. Other conflicts such as the French Revolution and Catherine's own wars against the Ottoman Empire and Sweden, warranted a watchful eye from the British and American public as Catherine's actions in these scenarios threatened their own interests. Aside from Catherine's diplomatic policies, Catherine's domestic policies were also frequently reported in British and American newspapers and equally received praise or criticism.

⁸ Brenda Meehan-Waters, "Catherine the Great and the Problem of Female Rule," *Russian Review* 34, no. 3 (1975): 293–301.

Views of the empress of Russia were influenced by forces beyond that of military conflicts and domestic policies. Ideological discourse and social constructions played a vital role in how Catherine was perceived in the West according to news media. Catherine was often deemed an “enlightened” monarch as a result of her extensive patronage of the arts and sciences. However, long-standing preconceptions of gender and reactions toward female rule in a predominantly patriarchal Europe and North America often challenged Catherine’s right to rule. Additionally, biased views of Russians as backward or inferior to Western Europe, which eventually spread to America, affected the narratives created about Catherine in British and American newspapers.

My research focuses on periodicals in Britain and the American colonies, then the subsequent independent nation of America, and while I categorize these sources by the physical location of the publications, I am aware that copies of these newspapers and magazines traveled between British and American borders. In fact, from the beginning of Catherine’s reign until roughly the post-Revolution period, many American papers would reprint entire sections of British periodicals, explicitly crediting the original magazine from which the report was taken from. Another aspect of U.S. newspaper publishing was that of a general lag in the time information reached the American continent. It is for this reason that the scope of the magazines and newspapers that are examined in this thesis extends slightly beyond the death of Catherine in November of 1796 to include publications from the spring of 1797, when American papers generally began to publish word of the empress’s passing.

In this thesis, I examine a broad range of different American and British publications. Some of the more prominent publications my research draws from includes American papers such as the *New York Magazine, or Literary Repository* (1790-1797), the *Boston Magazine*

(1783-1786), and the *Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine* (1790-1792), but smaller gazettes are also included, for instance the *Christian's, Scholar's, and Farmer's Magazine* (1789-1791). British publications that especially commented on Catherine II and Russia include the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1736-1820), the *London Magazine*, or *Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer* (1732-1782), and the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* (1751-1795). This paper samples 115 articles and clippings from thirty-four different publications in the U.S. and in Britain printed between 1762 and 1797. These publications were primarily chosen because of their accessibility through databases as a result of restrictions due to the current Covid-19 pandemic.

There is a wide variety in the types of sources included in these gazettes beyond that of articles that simply report news in terms of conflicts and foreign developments. This project analyzes pieces included in newspapers such as opinion essays, Parliamentary proceedings, published correspondence and letters to the editor, book reviews, and poetry. These works outside of factual reporting reveal much about popular sentiments concerning Catherine as authors could more freely comment on her character, policies, ideologies, gender, heritage, and lifestyle as opposed to news pieces that typically focused on the strict facts of events. By examining works outside of news reports contained in these periodicals, a more diverse range of voices and opinions can be heard beyond that of the staff writers of these periodicals. Additionally, I am aware that while this thesis draws conclusions about public opinion in America and Britain based on newspaper articles, my research does not necessarily speak to the reception of these periodicals by the readership. Only research of other sources, such as private correspondence, may elucidate this subject.

This thesis will answer the question of how British and American newspapers compared and contrasted in their portrayals of Catherine over the course of her reign. My research seeks to understand how perceptions of the empress shifted during Catherine's thirty-four-year rule in both British and American periodicals and how developments in Catherine's foreign policy played a role in these transformations. This thesis also will examine how other factors outside of Catherine's foreign policy contributed to changes in portrayals of the empress, namely how preconceptions of female rule and Russian inferiority affected the czarina's image in the British and American press.

The first chapter of this thesis examines the progression of Catherine II's image in British news publications as an individual and the roles she fulfilled as a female sovereign, policymaker, and diplomat. The events covered in British newspapers and magazines concerning Catherine's reign including her coup d'état, foreign wars, important domestic policy implementations, and the empress's death will be analyzed in chronological order to best exemplify the shift in public opinion of Catherine II according to newspapers from generally favorable accounts of the empress at the beginning of her reign until the start of the American Revolutionary War in which reports about Catherine soured. Additionally, I will analyze one of the most critical components of Catherine's experience as an individual and a monarch, that of her sex, and how British papers gendered Catherine's traits and achievements.

The second chapter of this paper focuses on the opinions of Catherine II expressed in American newspapers throughout her reign to compare the progression of the narratives about the empress in England and America according to newspapers. Similarly, major developments that affected the czarina's relationship to the U.S. will be examined in chronological order. American periodicals did not adopt a favorable view of the empress from the beginning of

Catherine's reign like British periodicals. Instead, a shift occurred primarily between 1780 and 1786 in which Catherine for the first time in U.S. newspapers generally held a favorable image. After this brief period, American newspapers shifted back to their original, critical stance on the empress. This chapter will explore the developments in the relationship between the U.S. and Russia that coincided with shifts in opinions of the empress and examine how such events were reported in newspapers. As well, I will discuss how the portrayal of Catherine's gender reflected changes in the way American periodicals perceived the czarina.

The final chapter of this thesis shifts the focus from American and British perceptions of Catherine II as an individual to opinions of Russia as a whole in newspapers. A stigma had existed for the entirety of Catherine's reign that viewed Russians as backwards and inferior. This chapter will explore how preconceptions against Russians affected Catherine's image in British and American newspapers. Because American and British periodicals consistently made demeaning remarks about Russians throughout Catherine's reign, both in times she was popular and unpopular, I will analyze how prejudices against Russians worked in Catherine's favor through certain narratives that placed her above the "barbarity" of her subjects, and how likewise, other narratives during periods in which she was attacked reduced Catherine to have simply been another inferior Russian. In conclusion, I summarize my findings offer additional observations based on them.

CHAPTER ONE: VIEWS OF CATHERINE II IN BRITISH PERIODICALS

This chapter explores the ways in which Catherine's image transformed over time in British periodicals through their coverage of major developments during Catherine's reign, especially that of Catherine's foreign policy, which British newspapers reacted to the most and therefore based a majority their views of the czarina on. Such developments included Catherine's wars with the Ottoman Empire, the American Revolutionary War, and the partitions of Poland. From the beginning of Catherine's reign, British periodicals favored the czarina, however as Catherine's foreign policy shifted during her reign away from the interests of the English, so did opinions of the czarina in British periodicals. Newspapers supplemented their views of Catherine's foreign policy with opinions on her domestic policies as well. Additionally, this chapter examines portrayals of Catherine's gender in British periodicals and how it was used to curry favor and belittle the czarina.

Praise for Catherine's Palace Revolution and Early Years

Catherine's coup d'état was significant news in Britain, as the overthrow of any sovereign was an especially shocking event during a period in which monarchies prevailed in Europe. British newspapers published lengthy articles detailing the events of the palace revolution in Russia, complete with copies of manifestos issued by Catherine II regarding her new crown and descriptions of the empress's background, character, and appearance. Reports of the new empress of Russia generally were favorable. Catherine was described as a beautiful, witty, and just figure. This praise of Catherine is also visible in news reports dated after the early fall of 1762, the time that British periodicals began to move forward from the initial reports of Catherine's coup d'état to focus on different stories about the Russian empress which continued to frame Catherine as

kind and charitable. While many newspapers and magazines lauded Catherine, some expressed unease about the empress's sudden seizure of power. These critical articles were few and far between and may have been linked to party politics, however they presented some of the earliest challenges to Catherine's reign in British periodicals.

The *Scots Magazine* published one of the earliest reports of Catherine's ascension to the throne in its July edition. Included in this article were three official documents from the Russian court that served to further solidify Catherine's new title: the *Manifesto of the Empress Catherine II on Her Advancement to the Throne of Russia*, a *Note Sent to the Foreign Ministers*, and a short official announcement of Peter III's death on July 17. The manifesto announced Catherine's palace revolution and more importantly, justified Peter III's deposition by stating that under the previous regime, a foreign religion threatened to replace Orthodox Christianity in the empire, an unpopular peace was made with Prussia, and the domestic regulations of the country were overturned to Russia's detriment.⁹ Catherine's *Note Sent to the Foreign Ministers* was a shorter document that served to notify foreign diplomats who resided at the Russian court of the change in the imperial throne at the "unanimous desire" of all faithful subjects of the empire.¹⁰ It is not surprising that official documents from the Russian court justified Catherine's revolution, and the route chosen by the court to execute this goal appears to have been to emphasize Peter III's shortcomings to legitimize Catherine's ascension. Nevertheless, the fact that British periodicals reproduced verbatim the documents from the Russian court that justified Catherine's coup is perhaps indicative of the sympathies British newspapers had toward the new czarina.

⁹ "Affairs in Turkey and Russia," *Scots Magazine* (Edinburgh), August 1762.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Following the court documents is a brief account detailing the events of the palace revolution from an unnamed source in addition to a description of the new empress. Thirty-three-year-old Catherine was described to be beautiful with a charming complexion and fine shape. The report lauded Catherine's intelligence and manner, "There is a commanding sweetness in her voice, expressive of great benevolence, which fixes the attention, and wins the heart; and it is with wonder that she is sometimes seen talking with almost every foreign minister, in his own language."¹¹ This article in the *Scots Magazine* would have left readers with a great impression of Catherine. In combination with the official Russian court documents, the highly praiseful description of the new empress's elegance, appearance, and intelligence in the *Scots Magazine* made it appear as though Catherine was the perfect replacement for the incompetent Peter.

The *Scots Magazine* was not the only periodical to offer an account of Catherine's coup that flattered the empress, especially at her husband's expense. Several other newspapers reported the palace revolution in Russia in a manner almost identical to that of the *Scots Magazine*. The August editions of the *London Magazine* and the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure* similarly published Catherine's original manifesto upon her ascension to the throne and her note to foreign ministers in their initial reports of the coup. The *London Magazine* and the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure* included similar accounts of the series of events of the coup to those in the *Scots Magazine*. The *London Magazine* even shared an identical description of Catherine's appearance and personality to that of the *Scots Magazine*, except for its inclusion of this statement in the former, "She [Catherine] has long been the delight of the people over whom she now reigns; she has studied their genius, and will make

¹¹ Ibid.

their good her principal care.”¹² While the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure* did not focus at all on her appearance or her traits at face-value, the magazine continued to promote Catherine’s values over those of Peter III’s: “The Czar, her consort, when he first came into Russia, was indeed not much disposed to embrace the manners of the people. She, on the other hand, acted quite another part. She studied their language, assiduously, complied with their customs in everything, and expressed, upon all occasions a great zeal for the Greek church.”¹³

While many British news reports suggested both through the use of official Russian court documents and via commentary by the newspaper staff, that the deposition of Peter III was beneficial for Russia, some periodicals argued Peter's case over that of Catherine's. For example, the *London Magazine*, although it published a fairly positive description of Catherine's beauty and benevolence, commented this in response to Catherine's official manifesto announcing the death of Peter III: “We shall leave our readers to make the proper reflections upon the whole; as it would not be prudent in us to say all that arises in our minds upon this latter event: ‘Tis even with some reluctance, that we subjoin the following character, which however we shall do, after exclaiming with the poet, *Tantaene animis caelestibus irae!*”¹⁴ This implies that there may have been foul play involved in Peter's death. Thus, there did exist unease about the convenient death of Catherine’s husband so soon after she ascended to the throne.

¹² “An Account of the Late Revolution in Russia,” *London Magazine*, July 1762.

¹³ “A Full Account of All the Particulars Relating to the Dethroning and Death of the Late Emperor of Russia,” *Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure* (London), August 1762.

¹⁴ “Account of the Late Revolution in Russia,” *London Magazine*, August 1762.

In December of 1762, the *London Magazine* published a letter written by an unnamed gentleman at Petersburg that hinted that the public may have held negative views about Catherine. The gentleman attacked Peter as a traitor to the Russian people, their culture, and their religion. In turn, he addressed the controversy that surrounded Catherine, “People abroad imagine, perhaps, that this revolution was accomplished by intrigue and faction. Perhaps, they think that the present sovereign labored to form a party to place her on the throne.”¹⁵ The gentleman defended Catherine as having acted only for the good of her people and not out of selfish desire. Catherine's ascension to the throne was not a proper one, rather, it bred scandal. Several newspapers defended Catherine's actions, yet, it can be observed in articles, especially those of the *London Magazine*, that the empress was a controversial figure.

Positive commentary of the empress continued in periodicals during the early years of her reign. This commentary often arrived in brief accounts and anecdotes that showcased Catherine's goodwill. In October of 1762, the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure* published an account by Duke Ernest John in which he graciously thanked Catherine for restoring his estates in Courland that were once lost.¹⁶ The *Weekly Amusement* ran a story in March of 1764 that demonstrated Catherine's sense of justice in which she protected a vassal of a gentleman named Carlowinski from the knout. According to this report, Catherine proclaimed to Carlowinski, “The poorest Wretch in my Empire, as a man, is entitled to my warmest Protection, and shall always

¹⁵ “Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman at Petersburg,” *London Magazine*, December 1762.

¹⁶ “News Foreign and Domestic,” *Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure* (London), October 1762. This account refers to Ernst Johann von Biron, a favorite of Empress Anna that had incredible power over her rule as he controlled the policy of the administration during her reign. Anna named Biron as the regent to Ivan VI but was swept out of power and into exile to Siberia shortly after Empress Anna died. Peter II recalled Biron from Siberia during his reign and Catherine subsequently re-established the Duke in the Duchy of Courland early in her reign. See Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History*, 171.

find a refuge in me..."¹⁷ Such anecdotes cemented Catherine as a benevolent, righteous leader which greatly assisted Catherine's reputation in surpassing the controversial allegations that existed about her.

¹⁷ "Noble Behaviour of the Present Empress of Russia," *The Weekly Amusement* (London), 03 March 1764.

“Queen of Arts and Arms”: Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774)

The Russo-Turkish War of 1768 to 1774 was the first major foreign conflict of Catherine’s reign. This war with the Ottoman Empire originally started as a result of Russian political intervention in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. On the 26th of August, 1764, through a combination of bribery and force by the Prussian and Russian governments, Catherine’s former lover Stanisław August Poniatowski was elected King of Poland, further strengthening Russian preponderance over the state.¹⁸ Not stopping there, Catherine wished to gain greater support in the commonwealth by appealing to religious minorities in Catholic Poland, who had gradually been stripped of their political rights since the 17th century. Catherine’s rallying of Protestants and Orthodox Christians in Poland, along with the presence of Russian troops in the commonwealth, eventually led to unrest among the Polish population. By February 1768, a confederation was created in Bar, near the Turkish border, by nobles in defense of Catholicism and Polish freedom.¹⁹ Civil war erupted, prompting Catherine to send large forces into Poland. The Ottoman Empire regarded this action as aggressive and was frightened of the presence of Russian troops in the buffer state of Poland. To the Turks, this anxiety was confirmed in the summer when Ukrainian Cossacks sacked the town of Balta, located on the border between Poland and Turkey and was then under the control of the Ottomans. On October 6th, 1768, the Turks declared war on Russia by imprisoning the Russian envoy Aleksei Obreskov.²⁰

¹⁸ Isabel de Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990), 43.

¹⁹ John T. Alexander, *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 129.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Catherine jumped at the opportunity to make great gains in what she confidently deemed to be an easy victory. The Russian and Ottoman armies fought until 1774 when the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji was signed in July. Russia emerged from the war successfully as Catherine's empire gained important ports on the Black Sea, as well as 4.5 million rubles in reparations from the Turks.²¹ Catherine triumphed not only in the war but also in British news media. British periodicals reported extensively on the war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, often defending Catherine's position in the conflict. There was ample opportunity to villainize the empress of Russia as the aggressor of the war and to accuse Catherine of trampling the rights of the Polish people through her intervention in Poland's politics, but British newspapers did not seize this chance. Instead, periodicals in Britain published pieces that argued the necessity of Catherine's war with the Ottomans. This approval partially was the result of British support for the Russians in the conflict, especially because France backed the Ottomans in the war effort. In fact, Britain offered facilities to the Russian navy as well as officers, which greatly assisted the Russian war effort in the Mediterranean.²²

British papers defended Catherine's war by painting the empress as a champion for Christianity against its Islamic enemies. Rather than an imperialist looking to tighten her grip on Poland, Catherine was hailed as an enlightened monarch who defended the rights of religious minorities in British newspapers. The praise of Catherine's kind and enlightened personality also continued beyond her early years and into the period of her first war with the Turks to supplement this positive narrative of the empress of Russia.

²¹ Ibid, 140.

²² Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History*, 44-45.

The Russo-Turkish War of 1768 to 1774 was significant news in Britain although it was not a belligerent power in the war. Information about battles and developments in the conflict typically was listed first in the foreign news sections of newspapers during this period. Reports were lengthy and even included entire manifestos and letters from the Russian and Ottoman courts and fronts regarding the war. A critical reason as to why British papers closely followed the war is revealed in this statement from a source at Petersburg in the *Town & Country Magazine* of January 1769: "...Our rupture with the Ottoman court is said to be the effect of the refined policy of the several Catholic powers in conjunction; and that the troubles in Poland are only a prelude to a general war in Europe."²³ There existed speculation that the conflict in the East could potentially spread to other parts of Europe, a prediction was reasonable considering the Turks partially were pushed to declare war on Russia by their traditional ally, France, who offered lavish bribes to the Ottomans.²⁴ Austria and Prussia also had their interests tied to the conflict as Russia was allied to Prussia and Austria was then allied to France, who supported the Turks.²⁵ As a result, it was possible that other powers allied to Russia and the Ottomans could join the war, which in turn may affect the rest of Europe, including Britain.

²³ "Foreign Occurrences," *Town & Country Magazine* (London), January 1769.

²⁴ Alexander, *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend*, 129.

²⁵ Austria, France, Prussia, and Russia all had their interests tied to the elections of 1764 in Poland and the Russo-Turkish War of 1768 to 1774. All four powers were interested in placing a figurehead that would be subservient to them in foreign policy when the King of Poland, Augustus III, died in 1763. As a result, Frederick II of Prussia co-operated with Catherine to place Poniatowski on the throne, primarily to keep out an Austrian candidate. During Catherine's first war with the Ottomans, France and Austria supported Turkey while Prussia was allied to Russia since an alliance was signed in 1764 between Catherine and Frederick II. Later, when the first partition of Poland was signed by a treaty in July 1772, Austria would abandon a prior treaty with the Turks made in July 1771 to come to their assistance in exchange for Turkish subsidies and territorial concessions to instead join Prussia and Russia in the spoils of acquiring Polish territory during the first partition of Poland. For a discussion on the royal elections of 1764 in Poland and alliances during the Russo-Turkish War of 1768 to 1774, see Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History*, 38-49.

While British publications sometimes reported the conflict in a neutral manner, giving both perspectives of the war and sticking to the strict communication of the facts, like the *London Magazine*, others made it clear that the British favored the Russian side of the war, which may have been the result of party affiliations. The reports on the war in the December 1768 and June 1769 editions of the *London Magazine* were mainly composed of official Russian and Turkish court documents, such as the first manifestos regarding the declaration of war by both powers and a letter by Prince Gallitzin to Catherine claiming a victory at Azoff.²⁶ This impartial, straight-forward report contrasts from the *Town & Country Magazine* of January 1769, which in addition to speculating the possibility of the Russo-Turkish conflict spreading, asserted: “There can be no question that the court of Great Britain will employ her best offices for her Russian majesty; and if any secret engagements subsist between us and Russia, or Prussia, we can make no doubt of their being made good by parliament, though we can have no idea of our furnishing any contingent in land forces.”²⁷

²⁶ “Russian Manifesto,” *London Magazine*, December 1768; “Foreign Affairs.” *London Magazine*, June 1769.

²⁷ “State of Europe for January 1769,” *Town & Country Magazine* (London), January 1769.

The *Town & Country Magazine* during Catherine's first Russo-Turkish war especially emphasized the existence of a friendship between Russia and Britain. Both the January 1769 and October 1770 editions of the magazine claimed that Catherine had identified Britain as her "favorite ally".²⁸ However, the declaration that Britain would most likely not send troops in the magazine reflects that while Britain and Russia were friendly, there was not a complete alliance between the two powers.²⁹ Although some facilities were provided to the Russian navy during the Turkish Campaign, the English may not have wanted to commit to an alliance with Russia namely because the British had important trade connections in the Near East and did not want to jeopardize this trade by joining the war.³⁰

Common distrust of the two Christian nations, Russia and Great Britain, of the Islamic Ottoman Empire might help further explain the British press's sympathy towards Russia. British newspapers highlighted the religious aspect of the Russo-Turkish war to further justify Catherine's actions and British support of the empress. A *London Magazine* article in 1768 published Catherine's manifesto declaring war with the Turks in which Catherine called on all Christian courts to approve of her actions in fighting the common foe of Christianity.³¹ The *Town & Country Magazine* also referred to the Turks as the "inveterate enemies of Christendom" in a 1770 report about the character of Catherine II.³²

²⁸ "State of Europe for January 1769," *Town & Country Magazine* (London), January 1769; "A Sketch of the Character and Heroic Virtues of the Empress of Russia," *Town & Country Magazine* (London), October 1770.

²⁹ "State of Europe for January 1769," *Town & Country Magazine* (London), January 1769

³⁰ Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History*, 81.

³¹ "Russian Manifesto," *London Magazine*, December 1768.

³² "A Sketch of the Character and Heroic Virtues of the Empress of Russia," *Town & Country Magazine* (London), October 1770.

The British support of Catherine's war against the Ottomans was highlighted in newspapers in more subtle ways than the explicit commentary of the *Town & Country Magazine* which claimed Britain would provide their best offices to Catherine II. British papers continued to compliment Catherine's character and enlightened policies during this time in which she held a favorable view in periodicals. In 1767, the Legislative Commission convened in Russia to modernize the empire's law code. Provided to the Legislative Commission was Catherine's "Instruction", or *Nakaz*, which contained enlightened views inspired by thinkers such as Montesquieu and Cesare Beccaria of how she wished Russia to be governed. Newspapers during the Russo-Turkish war praised Catherine for her progressive policies and actions, like her *Nakaz* and her revolutionary inoculation against smallpox in 1768.

The *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* in September 1770 published a poem titled *To Catherine II* by an anonymous source that glorified Catherine's reign. The poem compared Catherine, the "Queen of arts and arms", to a comet in a dark, backward Russia as she brought her people a new age with modern laws and looked to spread her "tranquil reign" into other areas.³³ This poem justifies Catherine's foreign conflicts as she represented a moral force that used war for civilizing purposes, not selfish ones. The *Town & Country Magazine* in 1770 also celebrated Catherine as an enlightened monarch in their piece solely about the empress, *A Sketch of the Character and Heroic Virtues of the Empress of Russia*. This report praised Catherine for her protection of the liberties of the dissidents in Poland, her brave inoculation, and her intention to bestow upon Russia a new a law code that would abolish the "dreadful tortures and punishments which disgraced a civilized nation," although Catherine eventually was not successful in passing such a code.³⁴ A letter from Voltaire was printed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1770 that commended Catherine for her expansion and advancement of Russia, "...Her genius has communicated itself to her subjects; the revolutions of the palace have not in the least retarded the happiness of the empire."³⁵

³³ "To Catherine II," *Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure* (London), September 1770.

³⁴ "A Sketch of the Character and Heroic Virtues of the Empress of Russia," *Town & Country Magazine* (London), October 1770. Catherine was especially praised in English newspapers for her inoculation against smallpox, a practice that was popularized in the eighteenth century in Britain and its North American colonies. Inoculation remained suspect in Russia, primarily out of fear of harming those who gave or received the inoculation or of infecting non-immune segments of the population. Catherine's inoculation was viewed as a step toward progress as she set an example for her people that the practice was safe. See Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History*, 144-148.

³⁵ "To the Judicious Observations in your Last, of the Present Operations of the Russians, and the Enterprising Genius of their Empress," *Gentleman's Magazine* (London), January 1770.

The positive image of Catherine in British publications as a progressive and just empress survived from her early years on the throne and into her first major war. Catherine continued to receive praise for her kindness and policies she began to implement in the late 1760s, such as her motion to modernize the Russian law code and to intervene in Poland against what she argued to be oppression against religious minorities. Besides the flowery compliments of Catherine's character and policies, British newspapers reflected approval of Catherine's Russo-Turkish war of 1768 to 1774 by explicitly claiming that Britain would support Russia in its war against non-Christian enemies, however, this support did not extend to the deployment of British troops to assist Russia.

The League of Armed Neutrality as a Turning Point

The American Revolutionary War broke out in 1775, one year after Russia finished its war against the Turks. Catherine opted to stay out of the war rather than support the revolting colonists or her “favorite ally”, Britain. The relationship linking the British and Russians was not very strong, and most of this friendship was based on trade.³⁶ Therefore, it not surprising that when George III asked Catherine to supply troops to support the British in the war against the American colonists, a request that was logistically impossible in and of itself, Catherine refused, reminiscent of George III’s failure to militarily support the Russian forces in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768 to 1774.³⁷ Rather than provide military aid to the British, Catherine opted to follow a policy that protected her empire’s trade and would even increase Russian export trade in naval stores at the expense of the British.³⁸ This policy guided Catherine’s creation of the League of Armed Neutrality in 1780.

³⁶ Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History*, 81.

³⁷ According to Alexis S. Troubetzkoy, there are a number of reasons why Catherine II did not supply the British with troops. Catherine expressed that her forces were exhausted from the recent war with the Turks. Also, in addition to believing the British would most likely lose the war, Catherine was said to have had little personal affection for George III and his ministers. See Alexis S. Troubetzkoy, *The St. Petersburg Connection: Russian-American Friendship from Revolution to Revolution* (Toronto, Canada: Dundurn Press, 2015), 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

During wartime, British practices warranted the detainment and potential confiscation of neutral ships by the Royal Navy if they were found with contraband or enemy cargo, and in this case, the British blockaded American ports.³⁹ Catherine, upset with this practice by the British and other powers like Spain, challenged the belligerent nations in March of 1780 by declaring a list of principles that defined the terms in which the trade and seizures of neutral ships are rightful. The declaration of Russian armed neutrality promoted the rights of neutral ships to trade with belligerent nations without the confiscation of entire vessels per the concept of “the flag covers the goods” in which all property on a neutral ship except for contraband, regardless of origin, was to be considered neutral and therefore could not be seized.⁴⁰ As soon as the same month, other countries, including Denmark-Norway and Sweden, accepted these principles and joined into an alliance with Russia, resulting in the official formation of the League of Armed Neutrality that lasted until 1783.

British newspapers widely discussed this move made by the empress of Russia, especially as it would directly affect Great Britain in her naval pursuits during the American Revolutionary War. British papers published official state documents to keep readers up to date with news regarding the development of the League of Armed Neutrality, and on the surface, it seemed as though the empress and her people were still friends of the British Empire. In this coverage accomplished primarily through Russian, British, and even Spanish and French government sources in newspapers, Catherine’s creation of the League was done solely to protect her people, as one can expect from a good leader.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 83.

The April edition of the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* in 1780 printed Catherine's official declaration of Russian armed neutrality to the courts of London, Versailles, and Madrid, made in the prior month. Besides listing Catherine's principles guiding neutral ships and how they should be treated, the declaration from the Russian court framed Catherine's intentions in a positive light. The declaration reminded readers of Catherine's "sentiments of equity and moderation", seen during her recent war with the Ottomans.⁴¹ Before listing the principles of Russian armed neutrality, the declaration also emphasized that Catherine has had to put forth these points that protect the rights of nations to trade because Russian ships have often been "molested in their navigation" by foreign powers, hindering the peace and prosperity of Catherine's subjects.⁴² The declaration from the Russian court painted Catherine as not only acting in the best interests of her people, but also as a leader that stood for the natural rights of nations to trade. This idea fit well into the image of the empress that British newspapers had promoted for almost two decades of Catherine's status as an enlightened monarch.

⁴¹ "Declaration From the Empress of Russia to the Court of London, Versailles, and Madrid," *Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure* (London), April 1780.

⁴² *Ibid.*

While Catherine's stance of neutrality was not very beneficial to the English cause in the war against the Americans, some newspapers reported statements from British officials that showed admiration for Catherine as a monarch and her decision to remain neutral. The *Scots Magazine* in May 1780 printed the official responses from the English, Spanish, and French courts to Catherine's declaration. According to these letters, all three courts communicated their willingness to respect Catherine's declaration, often complimenting the empress for her fairness and equity. The British letter praised Catherine's spirit of justice and claimed that George III would advise the Royal Navy to do its best to adhere to the principles of Russian commerce as he was "Strongly attached to her Majesty of all the Russias, by the tie of reciprocal friendship and common interest."⁴³ The *London Magazine* in 1782 similarly featured a letter written by Charles James Fox, the Secretary of State at the time, in which Fox graciously thanked Catherine for her good offices in her proposal to mediate a peace between the warring English and the Dutch at the Hague.⁴⁴

⁴³ "Historical Affairs," *Scots Magazine* (Edinburgh), May 1780.

⁴⁴ "Foreign Affairs," *London Magazine*, April 1782.

Catherine's good image in British periodicals survived into the period in which she created the League of Armed Neutrality. Nevertheless, the view of the empress as a friendly, benevolent, and enlightened monarch began to wane in British newspapers during this critical time between 1780 and 1783. A few months after the Neutral League was announced, the *Scots Magazine* published a record of Parliament proceedings in October 1780 that expressed the souring of relations between Britain and Russia. The speaker, the Earl of Shelburne, explains that in the years prior to 1780, England was important in Petersburg, but in the current times, the "once amicable" Catherine had turned against Britain.⁴⁵ The Earl condemned the empress for passing a mandate the year before that limited trade in the Baltic exclusively to Russia, Denmark, Sweden, and other northern powers, then adding: "What has followed this despotic edict of 1779? Another memorial, as unjust but more pointedly inimical towards this country, in April 1780, wherein she declares it as her idea of maritime law that free ships make free property, and therefore that the laws of neutrality are nugatory and futile."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ "Parliament: On the Dutch and the Neutrality," *Scots Magazine* (Edinburgh), October 1780.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

This claim that Catherine was a despot that aimed to harm Britain with her Baltic trade policy and the League of Armed Neutrality contrasts greatly from the view of the empress as a friendly figure that George III was “strongly attached” to, according to the same *Scots Magazine* earlier that year. Although George III and some members of the British court may have continued to respect Catherine as a monarch, British periodicals, such as this article from the *Scots Magazine*, demonstrated that there existed negative views of the empress regarding her position on neutrality. These accusatory attacks on Catherine II in British newspapers only grew more common after the American Revolutionary War came to a close and Catherine embarked on her next conflicts with her Turkish, Swedish, and Polish neighbors.

Catherine's Foreign Conflicts of 1787-1795

After Catherine's journey through the Southern regions of Russia from January to July 1787, the Ottoman Empire declared another war on Russia in August of that year. The Russo-Turkish War of 1787 to 1792 primarily stemmed out of issues revolving around the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji that ended the previous Russo-Turkish war, especially Russia's annexation of the Crimea in 1783 and the creation of the Black Sea Fleet, which the Ottomans saw as a threat.⁴⁷ The war was difficult and only became more challenging when King Gustav III of Sweden took advantage of the Turkish conflict to declare war on Russia to recover land that once belonged to Sweden. The Swedish conflict ended in decent terms for Catherine as it was resolved in two years without any land losses or reparations for Russia. Subsequently, the Russo-Turkish War was a great victory for Russia as it resulted in the Treaty of Jassy that gave Russia strategic land gains on the Black Sea and in the valley of the River Dniester.⁴⁸ While Catherine navigated these conflicts successfully, Catherine's wars on two sides of her empire contributed to the persistence of the negative imagery of the empress in British periodicals that began when Catherine declared the League of Armed Neutrality. Catherine grew unpopular in the British press as she consistently was labeled as violent and imperious by the British periodicals between 1787 and 1792. These attacks partially may have been fueled by British support for the Ottoman side of the war. The relationship between Great Britain and Russia soured ever since Catherine's declaration of the League of Armed Neutrality, in addition to Russia's reorientation away from Prussia and toward Austria, an ally of France while the British opted to form a Triple Alliance with the Netherlands and Prussia in 1788.⁴⁹ The empress's reputation only suffered more as she executed her partitions of Poland with Austria and Prussia in 1793 and 1795.

Similar to Catherine's first Russo-Turkish war, British newspapers kept a close eye on the Russian conflict with the Ottomans in between 1787 and 1792. Newspapers, such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*, speculated the possibility of war as soon as June 1787 as they detailed Catherine's summer journey in 1787 through the South of Russia.⁵⁰ This summer before the war erupted in August contained some of the last positive commentaries about the empress in British periodicals before Russia was engaged in conflict. The *New Lady's Magazine* printed a piece entitled *The Character and Heroic Virtues of Catharine II, the Present Empress of Russia* in July 1787 that was almost an exact replica of the 1770 article *A Sketch of the Character and Heroic Virtues of the Empress of Russia* by the *Town and Country Magazine*. The *New Lady's Magazine* recalled Catherine's role as a champion of Christianity during her first quarrels with the Ottoman Empire as well as her protection of the rights of Protestants and Orthodox Christians in Poland.⁵¹ The timing of this publication during Catherine's Crimean journey could have given readers of the magazine a positive outlook on Catherine's upcoming foreign wars.

⁴⁷ Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History*, 162.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 166-169.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 163-168.

⁵⁰ "Foreign Intelligence," *The Gentleman's Magazine* (London), June 1787.

⁵¹ "The Character and Heroic Virtues of Catharine II," *New Lady's Magazine* (London), July 1787.

The *Gentleman's Magazine* similarly granted Catherine one of her final praises in British publications before her second war with the Turks erupted. The progression of the narrative about Catherine between 1786 and 1792 in the *Gentleman's Magazine* showcases how sharply and quickly newspapers turned against Catherine during her foreign conflicts in the last decade of her reign. In 1786, the *Gentleman's Magazine* commended Catherine for the expansion of her empire thus far, claiming she is, "Without dispute, the most opulent and munificent sovereign of the present age."⁵² Two years later, the December 1788 *Gentleman's Magazine* detailed the slow progress of the Russian army on the siege of Ochakov and remarked, "It may be happy for Europe, that the arms of this imperious woman have met with a check."⁵³ The attacks on Catherine continued into 1792 as the magazine published two separate pieces that harshly critiqued the empress. The first piece was a poem titled *Ode to Winter* by Jas. Moore that illustrated the turbulent state of Europe in the winter of 1790 to 1791. Moore condemned Catherine for her violence and oppression:

"Imperial Joseph first began,
[To] abridge the common rights of man,
While Russian Catherine flew to aid,
Athirst thro' scenes of death to wade,
Their blood and airy bubbles boil'd"⁵⁴

⁵² "Foreign Intelligence," *Gentleman's Magazine* (London), January 1786.

⁵³ "Foreign Intelligence," *Gentleman's Magazine* (London), December 1786.

⁵⁴ Jas Moore, "Ode to Winter," *Gentleman's Magazine* (London), June 1792.

The view of a blood-thirsty Catherine is expressed later in the same edition of the *Gentleman's Magazine* in a letter to the editor regarding the nature of man and government by an unknown author. The writer argued that the best states were Christian and prioritized the improvement of the welfare of its citizens as opposed to war. Catherine was used as an example of a poor head of state driven by warfare, "Why should the empress of all the Russias, impelled by ambition, be allowed with privileged impunity to massacre thousands of her fellow mortals, and the best creatures of her God?"⁵⁵

⁵⁵ "The Academic, No. 3," *Gentleman's Magazine* (London), June 1792.

Other publications, such as the *English Review*, also partook in the prevalent view of Catherine as a murderous tyrant among British newspapers. In May 1791, the *English Review* printed a review of a book written by Gustav III in 1790 titled *The Danger of the Political Balance of Europe*, which discussed the political systems of Europe and harmful developments that threatened European peace. The majority of the sections copied from the book in the review focused on Russia, a nation Gustav heavily criticized as violent and oppressive. Gustav asserted that Catherine's rise to the throne was a "tragedy" as she menaced the political balance of Europe through conquests at the expense of her neighbors.⁵⁶ Gustav opposed Catherine's bloody endeavors in Poland and with the Ottoman Empire. Gustav also claimed that the empress did not care for the well-being of her own citizens because Catherine, "in losing soldiers, only loses slaves."⁵⁷ This view from Gustav III is almost expected as Russia and Sweden were engaged in war from 1788 to 1790. Nonetheless, the *English Review* in printing these sections further contributed to the negative view of Catherine reflected in British publications. In fact, the reviewer even agreed with the commentary about the empress written by Gustav, "The ambitious views of Catherine II are here displayed in so striking and masterly a manner as to leave us no doubt in respecting them."⁵⁸ One year later in 1792, the *English Review* further solidified its stance on the empress when the paper labeled Catherine as "haughty and imperious" in forcing the King of Poland to renounce the new Polish constitution created in May 1791 that introduced new reforms which sought to create a more effective constitutional monarchy.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ "Art. XV. The Danger of the Political Balance of Europe. Translated from the French of the King of Sweden, by the Right Hon. Lord Mountmorres," review of *The Danger of the Political Balance of Europe*, by Gustav III, *English Review* (London), May 1791.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ "National Affairs for August 1792," *English Review* (London), August 1792.

Catherine's image in British publications significantly deteriorated in the later years of her life, especially as a result of her foreign conflicts. The beginnings of a critical view of Catherine in British newspapers could be seen when she formed the League of Armed Neutrality. By 1792, the number of papers that fully embraced the view of a blood-thirsty, tyrannical Catherine had significantly increased. Besides directly attacking the empress, British newspapers also contributed to this detrimental view of Catherine by including sources written by authors that were not part of the newspapers' staff, as seen with the printing of *Ode to Winter* and sections of *The Danger of the Political Balance of Europe*. The days of the celebration of the enlightened empress of Russia were largely left in the past by British newspapers upon Catherine's final conflicts.

Varied Reactions to the Final Months and Death of the Empress

After the end of her second war with the Ottoman Empire and the third partition of Poland in 1795, not much was discussed about Catherine II in British periodicals until the weeks following the death of the empress on November 17, 1796, of a stroke. British newspapers after 1787 were often highly critical of the empress, and this trend continued into her obituaries. However, many of these attacks were counterbalanced with praise for Catherine's achievements, particularly in her domestic policy and patronage of the arts and sciences. The degree in which newspapers celebrated or condemned the empress varied between periodicals. As a result, British newspapers displayed a mixed reaction to Catherine's death.

Obituaries of the empress appeared in British newspapers primarily in December of 1796. Newspaper articles about Catherinian Russia published in 1796 before word of empress's death arrived in England reflected much of what would be written in Catherine's obituaries. In May, *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* published a section from a book, *Letters from Scandinavia: On the Past and Present State of the Northern Nations of Europe* by a traveler, William Thomson. This section, titled *Government and Character of Catherine II*, defended Catherine from attack. Thomson professed Catherine not only headed a government that was much milder than that of Peter III, but she also made great efforts to improve the lives of her people, as demonstrated with her proposal of a new law code.⁶⁰ Thomson also argued against Catherine's critics: "Like most of our countrymen, you have formed your idea of her character from a few detached facts, which, as generally happens to such reports, have been embellished...with many imaginary circumstances, fashioned to the theories of those who have imported and rehearsed them."⁶¹ This advocacy for Catherine by Thomson highlights that a negative image of Catherine existed beyond what may have been written in newspapers as Thomson felt the need to defend the empress from attacks that spread through the general public, which in Thomson's opinion, were a result of false or exaggerated facts.

⁶⁰ "Government and Character of Catharine II," *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* (Dublin), May 1796.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

While *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* promoted a largely positive image of the empress based on this section from Thomson's book, the *Monthly Review* offered a different narrative of the empress, although it also reviewed the same book by Thomson. *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* printed a section of *Letters from Scandinavia: On the Past and Present State of the Northern Nations of Europe* without any commentary from the magazine's staff. The *Monthly Review* quoted lines from Thomson's work, however most of the article was composed of opinions from the unnamed author of the review. The article in the November edition of the *Monthly Review* claimed, "The writer's [Thomson] partiality for the Russians, indeed, has inclined him to praise, too indiscriminately, everything belonging to their nation."⁶² The author of the review found fault with Thomson's approval of certain aspects of Russia, especially in Catherine's "most perfect despotism". The reviewer pointed out the contradictory nature of Thomson's work, which claimed Catherine's first worry, besides that of foreign conquest, was the diffusion of liberty among her subjects.⁶³ The author of the review did not agree that Catherine's "vulgar" vices could be separated from the supposed moderation Thomson claimed she possessed. The image presented by *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* and the *Monthly Review* of the same material about Catherine, Thomson's book, in this sense demonstrates an important aspect of British newspaper articles written about Catherine in the months immediately before and after her death: newspapers displayed a split in how Catherine was presented. Catherine, by some, was praised for her certain features of her reign, such as her *Nakaz*, but criticized for other actions, especially her wars.

⁶² "Letters from Scandinavia, on the Past and Present State of the Northern Nations of Europe," *Monthly Review* (London), November 1796.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Catherine's obituaries especially reflected mixed feelings in newspapers about the reign of the empress. The *Gentleman's Magazine* offered some of the most condemnatory views of Catherine II during her wars from the late 1780s into the early 1790s, yet the magazine's obituary for the empress of Russia was quite the opposite as it reminisced fondly on her accomplishments. The magazine's obituary briefly discussed the defining events and accomplishments of Catherine's reign, including her coup, *Nakaz*, inoculation, funding of education, patronage of the arts, orders to explore the geography of her Empire, and both wars with the Ottoman Empire. This obituary did not dwell long on the controversial aspects of Catherine's three decades in office, including her coup d'état or even the motives for her wars, which dramatically contrasts from the many comments made in the magazine during Catherine's second Russo-Turkish war that labeled the empress as imperious and blood-thirsty. Regarding the Russo-Turkish war of 1787-1792, the obituary only remarked:

“In this war her Imperial Majesty possessed herself of [Ochakov], with the slaughter of only 12,000 men. The war between Russia and the Porte still continuing, Great Britain, whose mediation had been rejected by the former, began to arm in 1791, in defense of the latter. Peace was at length signed that year between the two rival powers, the Porte making large cessions of territory to the empress...”⁶⁴

⁶⁴ “Obituary of Remarkable Persons with Biographical Anecdotes,” *Gentleman's Magazine* (London), December 1796.

No further commentary besides this description was made about Catherine's second war with the Ottomans, in which the British opted to support the Turks. The description of Catherine's life in the obituary of the *Gentleman's Magazine* was characterized by this factual tone for most of the article except for one statement towards the end, "Whatever be the moral character of this great princess, she always exerted the most surprising talents and abilities..."⁶⁵ In this manner, the magazine alluded to the damaging events and traits that were associated with the empress, many of which the *Gentleman's Magazine* pointed out in the past decade.

The *Freemason's Magazine & Cabinet of Universal Literature* criticized the empress more explicitly in their obituary of Catherine. Similar to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the newspaper praised Catherine's "magnificence of her enterprise" as she strongly commanded her empire and made efforts to refine the culture of her people through her patronage of the arts and sciences.⁶⁶ However, this bright view of the empress was overpowered by harsh attacks made in the obituary, primarily of her foreign conquests. The article compared Catherine to Attila the Hun for her massacres of Poles and Turks, exclaiming, "What an unbroken series of horror and havoc did her immeasurable ambition create!"⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ "Obituary," *Freemason's Magazine & Cabinet of Universal Literature* (London), December 1796.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Catherine's death marked the end of a complex story in British newspapers regarding the empress. The empress's rise to the throne and early years was accompanied by adoration in British newspapers for her kind personality, enlightened ideas, and beauty. When these early articles are compared to newspaper pieces from 1796, a much different view is offered. Catherine continued to be praised for her progressive policies, primarily domestically, but attacks on her violence and tyranny counteracted this image. Newspapers reflected some of the feelings that existed upon Catherine's seizure of the crown, but many of these ideas diminished by the time the empress died.

Views of Catherine as a Female Monarch

One of the most evident indicators of the changes in perceptions of Catherine II as an individual in British newspapers can be observed with the discussion of the empress's gender from the time she seized power until her death. From the moment Catherine rose to the Russian throne, she represented a break from the status quo of a patriarchal European society. It was not completely rare for European states to have a woman in power in fact, when Catherine's palace revolution took place, Maria Theresa had been the Holy Roman empress of the Hapsburg Dynasty for a little over two decades. British newspapers reacted positively to Catherine's seizure of the throne as they degraded Peter III and welcomed the young, beautiful, intelligent empress. Yet, Catherine was not a "proper" European ruler in that she failed to meet the male requirement. To counter this complication, British newspapers during moments in which periodicals held a favorable view of the empress often emphasized Catherine's masculine traits to promote her image further. In turn, British newspapers stressed Catherine's femininity as a factor that, more often than not, worked to her detriment when the empress did not have a good reputation in periodicals. Therefore, Catherine's gender in British newspapers can be characterized by a clear split between masculinity and femininity, with traits attributed to the former as better suited for positions of power.

Coverage of roughly the first half of Catherine's reign by British newspapers generally approved of the empress's policies and personality. Articles that celebrated Catherine's coup d'état, her *Nakaz*, and those that displayed support for her first Russo-Turkish war emphasized gendered features about the empress to further promote her public perception. Masculine traits were associated with strength and power, characteristics that a successful monarch required. The embodiment of these "male" traits was critical in the case of a female sovereign, such as Catherine, who needed to demonstrate her ability to lead an empire, although she did not fit the ideal image of an 18th-century European ruler. For instance, British newspapers that featured the news of Catherine's palace revolution, including the *Scots Magazine*, the *London Magazine*, and the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure*, all detailed that Catherine donned the uniform of a colonel of the Preobrazhenskii Guards, the rank Peter the Great had taken, to march toward Peterhof to unseat her husband.⁶⁸ The frequency of this information about Catherine's cross-dressing in periodicals that reported on the palace revolution reflects that her use of a male uniform was important news in these early articles that typically approved of the empress. Simultaneously, this detail presented Catherine with a more masculine image in the eyes of readers.

⁶⁸ "Affairs in Turkey and Russia," *Scots Magazine* (Edinburgh), August 1762; "An Account of the Late Revolution in Russia," *London Magazine*, July 1762.

Articles that favored Catherine explicitly noted the aspects of Catherine's personality that were masculine. The *Scots Magazine* attributed Catherine's education as a male trait she embodied upon her ascension to the throne, "Her Majesty excels in every accomplishment that adds grace and beauty to one sex, and is acquainted with most of the sciences that are useful and ornamental is the other."⁶⁹ The *Town & Country Magazine* in 1770 commended Catherine's "princely virtues" in combination with her sweetness and grace, or in other words according to the magazine, "She has all the accomplishments of her own sex, with the mental vigor of the other."⁷⁰ Both articles in the *Scots Magazine* and the *Town & Country Magazine* not only divided Catherine's character into male and female qualities, but attributed her intelligence as masculine and her beauty, grace, and kindness as feminine.

While newspapers wrote kindly about certain feminine traits the empress exhibited, more often than not, Catherine's femininity was used against her, especially during times in which her reputation suffered in British papers. The Parliament proceedings published in the October 1780 edition of the *Scots Magazine* condemned Catherine as a despot for her creation of the League of Armed Neutrality. The speaker Earl of Shelburne commented: "The empress, who had imbibed this partiality, was known to be, though a woman, of a decisive, determined cast of mind: she was not subject to the general levity of her sex, but was characterized by a steady adherence to resolutions she had once adopted."⁷¹

⁶⁹ "Affairs in Turkey and Russia," *Scots Magazine* (Edinburgh), August 1762

⁷⁰ "A Sketch of the Character and Heroic Virtues of the Empress of Russia," *Town & Country Magazine* (London), October 1770.

⁷¹ "Parliament: On the Dutch and the Neutrality," *Scots Magazine* (Edinburgh), October 1780.

The Earl explained that because Catherine typically made policies with a fixed mindset, her move to follow armed neutrality was not a light one and should be taken as a direct offense toward the British. The Earl's statement on the empress's sex characterizes Catherine as a woman first and a politician second. According to the speaker, women generally were carefree or indecisive, which are not the best traits to have when leading a country. Although the Earl claims that Catherine was not like other women in this sense, the Earl still drew attention to Catherine's sex and the weakness attributed to it, effectively criticizing Catherine and her femininity in a hidden manner.

The *Gentleman's Magazine* also contributed to the notion that Catherine was somehow restricted by her gender. In 1770, the magazine published this comment by Voltaire regarding the accomplishments of 18th-century Russian empresses: "A woman that could neither write nor read, completed what Peter the Great began. Another woman carried these noble beginnings still farther. Third empress has even gone beyond the two former; her genius has communicated itself to her subjects..."⁷² By omitting the names of these Russian empresses, Catherine I, Empress Elizabeth, and Catherine II, but instead referring to them by their gender, Voltaire undermined the achievements of these three empresses by creating a tone of awe that women played an important role in the development of Russia.⁷³

⁷² "To the Judicious Observations in your Last, of the Present Operations of the Russians, and the Enterprising Genius of their Empress," *Gentleman's Magazine* (London), January 1770.

⁷³ It should be noted that the comment by Voltaire in the *Gentleman's Magazine* specifically only named Catherine I, Empress Elizabeth, and Catherine II as the female empresses he was referring to, meaning that he omitted Empress Anna.

By the final years of her reign, newspapers such as the *Scots Magazine* more frequently focused on Catherine's sex as they attacked the empress during a period in which newspapers frowned upon Catherine's policies and character. The view of the empress as an almost hermaphrodite ruler that embodied the positive features of femininity and masculinity declined over the length of her reign, alongside her reputation in British newspapers.

Conclusion

Catherine's image in British newspapers underwent a significant transformation from the time the empress rose to power until her death. Generally, British periodicals shifted from a positive view of the benevolent, intelligent, and friendly empress to a negative perception defined by Catherine's imperious foreign conquests and despotism. This change occurred primarily during Catherine's creation of the League of Armed Neutrality. It is important to note that outliers did exist during these general trends, such as the existence of positive articles about the empress, like that published by the *New Lady's Magazine* praising her character, during Catherine's final years in which British newspapers tended to attack Catherine. These outliers would later prove to be reflective of the commentary that surrounded Catherine upon her death, a mixed reaction of British periodicals that both celebrated and criticized the empress of Russia. Additionally, upon examination of Catherine's gender as discussed in British newspapers, it can be seen that periodicals gendered Catherine's achievements and personality between masculine and feminine, which reflected views of female rule that existed in Britain during her rule.

CHAPTER TWO: VIEWS OF CATHERINE II IN AMERICAN PERIODICALS

During the reign of Catherine II, many colonists living in America witnessed extraordinary changes to their everyday lives upon the start of the American Revolutionary War in 1775. With this context in mind, this chapter will explore portrayals of Catherine II in American periodicals beginning in the fall 1762, when most newspapers reported the palace revolution in Russia, up until 1797, the year in which periodicals informed their audiences of the death of the czarina. This chapter will demonstrate how American newspapers from the beginning of Catherine's rise to power did not hold a flattering opinion of the empress until the War of American Independence was in full swing, when the czarina demonstrated her lack of support for her British ally and made attempts to mediate between belligerent powers in conflict. American periodicals reflected a favorable image of Catherine during this brief period primarily from 1780 until 1787, the year in which Catherine embarked on her second Turkish campaign and articles in American newspapers subsequently reverted to their critical portrayals of Catherine with a greater degree of severity. This chapter will examine the roles Catherine played over time according to American periodicals as a warmonger, mediator, patron of the arts and sciences, and a female monarch to assess the values Catherine exhibited in American newspapers that were admirable and those that were unfavorable.

Skepticism Around Catherine's Seizure of the Throne

The news of Catherine's coup d'état first reached periodicals across the Atlantic in October of 1762, about three months after the actual event occurred. During this time, the British Crown continued to possess its North American colonies, yet the reports of the summer Russian coup d'état were largely framed differently between the British mainland and its American colonies. American periodicals did not award the new empress the overwhelming praise shown by British periodicals. Instead, American newspapers abided by a more critical position when reporting on the character of the new Russian empress and her rise to the throne. Reports of Catherine's character and coup d'état were brief. In the lack of space given to the image of the new empress, American papers often allotted Peter III greater sympathy than that typically reflected in British periodicals. As a result, Catherine's early image in American newspapers was not as admirable as her portrayal in British periodicals.

American articles about Catherine's palace revolution appeared similar to those published in British newspapers in that they included many of the same basic facts about the event, however the similarities did not extend far beyond this aspect. The *Pennsylvania Gazette*, the *Maryland Gazette*, and the *South Carolina Gazette* published nearly identical initial accounts of the coup in Russia. This is not surprising considering that all three periodicals credited the same source, the *London Gazette*, to at least a portion of their information. American newspapers, especially early into Catherine's reign, often reprinted entire sections from foreign periodicals

into their own articles, even listing the name of the original source.⁷⁴ These sources were not exclusively British as American periodicals credited other foreign papers like the *Hague Gazette* and the *Paris Gazette*.

Much like British reports, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, the *Maryland Gazette*, and the *South Carolina Gazette* all included a copy of the *Manifesto of the Empress Catherine II on Her Advancement to the Throne of Russia* and Catherine's *Note Sent to the Foreign Ministers*.⁷⁵ These official Russian court documents served to justify Catherine's rise to the throne while explaining why Peter III was unsuitable for the throne. Additionally, the accounts of the coup in these three American newspapers described the basic facts of the event, including Catherine's march to Oranienbaum at the head of the Preobrazhensky Guards.⁷⁶

American periodicals did not embellish their accounts of Catherine's palace revolution with the immense praise that British newspapers bestowed on the czarina. Descriptions of Catherine's character during the first few weeks after her rise to power were lengthy in British newspapers as reports lauded the empress's intelligence and beauty. American periodicals lacked these descriptions of the empress that would have given Catherine a more grand, favorable image in the eyes of readers. The first reports of the coup by the *Maryland Gazette* and the

⁷⁴ Printing information from other newspapers was a common practice among eighteenth-century periodicals in America. The news that was printed in American periodicals depended on a number of sources besides other newspapers including letters from person arriving in town by land or sea, official government announcements, and correspondents for news. See David A. Copeland, *Debating Issues in Colonial Newspapers: Primary Documents on Events of the Period*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000), xii.

⁷⁵ "Hague, July 29," *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 07 October 1762; "Hague, July 29," *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 14 October 1762; "Hague, July 29," *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), 30 October 1762.

⁷⁶ "London, August 4," *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 07 October 1762; "London, August 4," *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 14 October 1762; "Hague Gazette, August 13," *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), 30 October 1762.

Pennsylvania Gazette only included this short statement to describe the new empress: “Catherine (Alexeivna) II who has been created empress of Russia, is consort to the dethroned Emperor Peter III and a daughter of the house of Anhalt-Zerbst. Some of the foreign gazettes say, that she is only to govern during her son’s minority.”⁷⁷ Catherine was summarized in an even briefer manner in the *South Carolina Gazette*, “Yesterday her imperial majesty the empress of Russia was proclaimed sole and reigning empress, and the sovereign of this empire, by the name Catherine the Second.”⁷⁸

In place of the lack of overwhelmingly complimentary accounts of Catherine’s personality and character, American newspapers commented more frequently than their British counterparts on the early issues and opposition to her rise to power. The first reports of the coup by the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, the *Maryland Gazette*, and the *South Carolina Gazette* all announced Catherine’s objection to Peter III’s alliance with Prussia and her desire to correct this political move. In response to this announcement, all three newspapers expressed early concerns about Catherine’s rise to power, “Those terms seem to announce a new change in the political system of Europe, and consequently fresh troubles.”⁷⁹ Three weeks after the *Pennsylvania Gazette* published its first report of Catherine’s palace revolution, the newspaper questioned Catherine’s ability to rule based on her birthplace:

“As she is a German by Birth, and was bred either Lutheran or Calvinist, she cannot be supposed to have any partiality to the Greek Church, whose doctrines are established in

⁷⁷ “London, August 4,” *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 07 October 1762; “London, August 4,” *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 14 October 1762.

⁷⁸ “Petersburg, July 7,” *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), 30 October 1762.

⁷⁹ “Hague, July 29,” *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 07 October 1762; “Hague, July 29,” *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 14 October 1762; “Hague, July 29,” *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), 30 October 1762.

that Empire; nor is it reasonable to imagine, that the Russians can naturally have more Love for her than for her Husband, on account of their being both Germans.”⁸⁰

After this comment, the newspaper even implied that Catherine’s religious upbringing and foreign birth might cause revolts against the empress.⁸¹

The *Pennsylvania Gazette* further pursued this story of early opposition to Catherine in Russia with this comment printed in November that was also published in the *Maryland Gazette* later that month: “It remains to be seen what measures the present Czarina will take to conciliate the affections of the Russians, and overcome the prejudices that must naturally arise against her as a foreigner, that [has] not a drop of the royal blood of the Russian czars in her veins.”⁸² It should be noted that this skeptical statement also appears in an August edition of the British *Public Advertiser* under a section entitled *Extract of a Letter from Ratisbon*. Although some articles in British newspapers were outliers against the general trend of positivity toward the new Russian empress, the extent to which most British articles celebrated Catherine was not reflected in American newspapers. American periodicals did not describe the empress with flowery compliments, but instead hinted more frequently at issues associated with Catherine’s coup that gave American audiences a less glamorous view of the empress when compared to British newspapers. For instance, this cynicism is especially visible in the manner in which American and British periodicals framed Peter III. While British newspapers such as the *Scots Magazine* and the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure* vilified Peter III, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and the *Maryland Gazette* printed identical anecdotes in which the “late, unhappy”

⁸⁰ “Extract of a Letter from the Hague, July 29,” *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 28 October 1762.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² “London, August 19,” *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 04 November 1762; “London, August 19,” *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 18 November 1762.

Emperor Peter III requested that one of his servants, Utowitz, attend him during the period in which he was confined after the coup, as Peter was certain the “poor fellow would pine himself to death, if he was to be separated from his master.”⁸³ Both magazines described Peter as “humane” for this action.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the *Maryland Gazette*, only one week after its initial report of Catherine’s palace revolution, pondered about the coincidental death of Peter III so soon after his deposition as it quoted King Charles I, “There is but a short interval between the imprisonment of princes, and their graves.”⁸⁵ The sympathy displayed in American periodicals toward Peter III in contrast with the sharp criticism the emperor faced in British newspapers further demonstrates the differences in the manner British and American newspapers wrote about the rise of the new empress of Russia. It is evident in the way that American newspapers discussed the issues associated with Catherine’s palace revolution and her husband’s deposition that these periodicals reacted to the empress with greater caution than that displayed in British newspapers.

The Czarina’s Dangerous Ambitions During the First Turkish War

Catherine returned to the spotlight in American newspapers during her first major foreign conflicts in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and with the Ottoman Empire. Although Catherine’s first war with the Turks began in the fall of 1768, reports of the conflict did not reach British newspapers largely until December of 1768, meaning that it was not until February that American periodicals began to print information about the war once word made it across the long

⁸³ “London, October 5,” *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 23 December 1762; “London, August 19,” *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 18 November 1762.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ “London, October 8,” *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 21 October 1762.

trip on the Atlantic. American newspapers widely discussed Catherine's first Russo-Turkish War as they kept audiences up to date with news of significant battles and developments. It is clear in these reports that Americans still held ties to the European continent and the British crown, however Catherine's portrayal, like articles about her coup, were still unfavorable compared to those in British newspapers. British newspapers primarily justified Catherine's war with the Ottomans as they presented the empress as a champion of Christianity and an enlightened monarch for her intervention in Poland. American periodicals pursued a different route in their portrayal of Catherine during her first major war. Newspapers in the American colonies more widely commented on Catherine's role as an aggressor in the war rather than validating her motives for launching the conflict.

American periodicals closely followed the story of the Russo-Turkish conflict in the east, although the colonies had little to do with the war. As soon as February 1769, American newspapers reported on the beginnings of the war. The *American Magazine* of February 1769 informed its readers of the Ottoman Porte's efforts to engage a peace with the Tartars and Montenegrins, along with its preparations to assemble an army to rival the Russians by spring.⁸⁶ In March of 1769, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and the *Virginia Gazette* published the declarations of war from the Russian court and the Ottoman Porte, both serving to justify the causes of each belligerent.⁸⁷ These magazines in the following years updated their audiences on battles, commanders, and developments, and similar to British periodicals, this quote by King George III in the *American Magazine* reveals a similar motive to British periodicals for American colonists

⁸⁶ "British and Foreign Intelligence," *American Magazine* (Philadelphia), February 1769.

⁸⁷ "London, December 20," *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 09 March 1769; "London, December 15," *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 16 March 1769; "London, December 29," *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), 23 March 1769

to stay updated on the Russo-Turkish conflict: “I shall not fail to use my good offices towards restoring peace between those [Russian and Turkish] powers; and I trust that the calamities of war will not extend to any other part of Europe.”⁸⁸ The fear of the war spreading to other areas of Europe beyond the east similarly was expressed in American periodicals as it was in British ones. If the Russo-Turkish conflict were to involve powers like England, it would directly affect American colonists as well. It is also important to note that American colonists were aware of the friendship that existed between Russia and England according to American periodicals, in fact the *Pennsylvania Packet* referred to Russia as England’s “only friend” during the time of Catherine’s first Russo-Turkish War.⁸⁹ Although American colonists lived an ocean apart from Europe, it is evident in the extensive reporting of events like the Russo-Turkish War of 1768 to 1774 that Americans still were tied to the European continent.

British newspapers tended to justify Catherine’s war against their religious enemy, the Turks, meanwhile American periodicals scrutinized the empress and more frequently printed reports that criticized Catherine’s role as an aggressor in the conflict. Much of this scrutiny appeared toward the end of the war, as seen in November 1773 when the *Pennsylvania Packet* commented:

“The Czarina, whose pride and ambition is gratified by having herself considered as the sole agitator of the present martial maneuvers on the continent, is nevertheless, we are assured, merely a cat’s paw to a certain artful and high-reaching Monarch, who has been

⁸⁸ “British and Foreign Intelligence,” *American Magazine* (Philadelphia), July 1769.

⁸⁹ “Extract From a Sketch of the Secret History of Europe,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 01 March 1773.

often heard to boast of his talents for fomenting and appeasing national differences at will.”⁹⁰

The article in the *Pennsylvania Packet* does not clarify the identity of the second monarch that was mentioned, but it was likely that it referred to King Louis XVI. Nonetheless, the comparison of Catherine to an aggressive ruler alongside remarks of her role as a prideful agitator was a damaging image for the empress.

Other American periodicals hinted at the bloody consequences of Catherine’s ambitions, such as the *Virginia Gazette* in January 1774 which printed information about a letter written by the Reis Effendi to Catherine II, “He likewise begs of her Imperial Majesty, not to sacrifice the best and most faithful of her subjects to her insatiable ambition, and not to boast of her numerous armies...”⁹¹ Catherine’s dangerous aspirations were regarded as vain by the Reis Effendi, who the gazette on the other hand praised for “his uncommon humanity and pacific disposition.”⁹² The *Virginia Gazette* in the year prior made similar comments on the bloody sacrifices made by Catherine to achieve her goals, “The empress of Russia is in the greatest distress for men and money in the midst of conquest.”⁹³ Following this statement, the gazette speculated that her scarcity will “every day be growing more and more distressing.”⁹⁴ American periodicals painted the empress as a warmonger in this image in which her pride and ambitions were of more importance to Catherine over protecting the lives of her subjects fighting the wars. This portrayal was especially negative considering the praise that periodicals at the time gave to efforts made

⁹⁰ “London, September 12,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 29 November 1773.

⁹¹ “Paris, October 29,” *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), 27 January 1774. Reis Effendi refers to a senior official of the Ottoman Empire that roughly translates to “head clerk”.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ “London, October 9,” *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), 30 December 1773.

by persons or powers that offered mediation for conflicts, like the kind remarks toward the Reis Effendi for his pacifist views.

“The Mediatrix”: Catherine and the American Revolutionary War

After the conclusion of the Russo-Turkish War of 1768 to 1774, news of Catherine II fell out of the spotlight in American newspapers as the American Revolutionary War began the following year. However, some reports of the empress of Russia continued to be published in American periodicals regarding her policies to the rebel Americans and their enemy, the British. Catherine II refused to supply her ally, the British, with troops to fight the American colonists. Instead, Catherine abided by neutrality during the war. During this period from 1779, many U.S. newspapers reported Catherine’s refusal to George III’s request for Russian troops. While this action aided the American cause, it was not until the following year that American newspapers briefly expressed approval of the empress, up until the start of Catherine’s second war with the Ottomans. For the first time since the beginning of her reign, Catherine generally had a positive image in American periodicals. Newspapers in the U.S. celebrated Catherine during this brief period for her “enlightened” policies, especially her attempts at mediation for the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War at the Hauge between 1781 and 1783.⁹⁵ As well, reports of Catherine’s achievements in her empire were more visible in this period from 1780 to 1787.

⁹⁵ Catherine’s attempt at mediation at the Hague not only was meant to bring the Dutch and the British to a peace, but also potentially mediate a peace between the British and Americans. No mediation of the American Revolutionary War was met at the Hague and the peace between the Dutch and the British also fell through in April of 1782 when the Dutch officially recognized American independence. For more about Russian mediation at the Hague for the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, see David Griffiths, “Mediation as a Diplomatic Weapon: Russian Attempts to Mediate among the British, the Dutch, and even the Americans, 1781-1783,” In *Reflections on Russia in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Joachim Klein, Simon Dixon, and Maarten Fraanje, (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2001), 19-31.

In 1779, American newspapers reported that Catherine refused to provide Russian troops to aid the British in their war against the rebelling Americans. The first demands for Russian support by the British Crown were made in 1775, and these requests continued until 1779.⁹⁶ Many reports of Catherine's refusal appeared in the spring of 1779, but continued throughout the year, especially as Catherine began launching her policy of armed neutrality that further damaged the British cause. The *United States Magazine* printed news about Catherine's decision not to support George III on three separate occasions in 1779. In April, the magazine printed a blunt statement that simply read that Russia had refused to send Great Britain troops.⁹⁷ The February and March editions of the magazines are particularly notable in that they suggest a weak relationship between George III and Catherine II. In February, the *United States Magazine* wrote, "In the summer of 1777, the empress of Russia rejected his [George III] application for a body of her troops, with such disdain, that her ambassador at Petersburg retired from the court, till he received instructions from London."⁹⁸ The following month, the magazine announced that the empress declined George's request by saying, "My glory shall never be tarnished by the infamy of oppression those who only contend for freedom and justice."⁹⁹ Other newspapers similarly made short statements of Catherine's refusal to supply the British with military support, including the *Pennsylvania Packet*, the *Virginia Gazette*, and the *Hartford Courant*.¹⁰⁰ The *Hartford Courant* in December of 1779 even mentioned the policies implemented by Catherine that lead to the creation of the League of Armed Neutrality the following year, as the newspaper

⁹⁶ Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History*, 81-82; Troubetzkoy, *The St. Petersburg Connection: Russian-American Friendship from Revolution to Revolution*, 5.

⁹⁷ "Political Diary," *United States Magazine* (Philadelphia), April 1779.

⁹⁸ "Political Diary," *United States Magazine* (Philadelphia), February 1779

⁹⁹ "Political Diary," *United States Magazine* (Philadelphia), March 1779.

¹⁰⁰ "Hartford, April 6," *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 27 April 1779; "Williamsburg, March 19," *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), 19 March 1779; "Hartford, April 6," *Hartford Courant*, 06 April 1779.

claimed the rumors that Russia would supply troops to Britain no longer had credit since Catherine ordered a squadron to protect her vessels and treat English ships like pirates if needed.¹⁰¹

While reports of Catherine's stance in the American Revolutionary War as of 1779 assured American newspaper audiences that she would not be supporting Great Britain militarily, Catherine did not receive much praise until after the year passed. In 1779, American newspapers still criticized the empress, despite news of Catherine's decision to not supply her ally Great Britain with troops, a move that benefited the American patriots in the war. The continuation of a negative image of the empress into 1779 is best exemplified by the *United States Magazine*, the magazine that reported Catherine's decline to George III's request on three separate occasions, as it still described Catherine using the terms "oppressive", "tyrant", and "ungenerous" in January of 1779 in an article that discussed tensions between the Russians and Turks. Later in July, the magazine also printed a poem entitled *The Loyalists* that labeled Russians as generally "destructive", or war-like.¹⁰²

In 1780, Catherine officially formed the League of Armed Neutrality, which stayed active until 1783. Also within this timeframe, Catherine offered her mediation at the Hague to the British and the Dutch. These actions briefly rebranded Catherine's image in American newspapers from an aggressive monarch to the enlightened, peacemaking empress of Russia that British newspapers portrayed from the beginning of Catherine's reign until she formed the League of Armed Neutrality. While British papers began to criticize Catherine during this

¹⁰¹ "London, August 20," *Hartford Courant*, 21 December 1779.

¹⁰² "Foreign Affairs," *United States Magazine* (Philadelphia), January 1779; "The Loyalists," *United States Magazine* (Philadelphia), July 1779.

period, American newspapers celebrated the empress. In 1781, the *Freeman's Journal* informed of the gratitude that the Spanish and French courts had for Catherine's offers of mediation as they were claimed to have been, "Truly sensible of the humane and generous offers of her Imperial Majesty."¹⁰³ The next year, the *Pennsylvania Packet* published the official declaration of armed neutrality by the Russian court followed by an anonymously written extract of a letter from the Hague that praised Catherine's "magnanimity" and "known equity".¹⁰⁴ The *Maryland Gazette* in 1785 even commented, "A new mediator or rather a mediatrix, is started up in the person of the czarina, or as she is otherwise called the sublime empress of all the Russias."¹⁰⁵ Only a few years prior to these reports, Catherine was painted as a prideful aggressor in Europe. American periodicals drastically shifted their terminology and tone to support the empress in her role as a neutral mediator. This praise for Catherine also reflected the admiration American newspapers had at the time for persons or powers that wished to bring about peace during times of conflict.

In addition to the praise visible in American newspapers for Catherine's equity on account of her role as a mediator during the American Revolutionary War, American newspapers reflected a positive image of empress as they more frequently published favorable stories of Catherine and her achievements as a monarch. The *Boston Magazine* in July of 1785 hailed Catherine as the "second foundress" of St. Petersburg in an article that admired the city's layout and structures.¹⁰⁶ Later in September of the same year, the magazine also celebrated the czarina

¹⁰³ "London, March 21," *Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia), 27 June 1781.

¹⁰⁴ "Edict, Just Published, Relative to the Principles of Navigation Adopted by the Empress of Russia, in the Armed Neutrality," *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 21 March 1782; "Extract of a Letter from the Hague," *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 14 March 1782.

¹⁰⁵ "Extract of a Letter from Paris, December 30," *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 07 April 1785.

¹⁰⁶ "Description of the City of Petersburg," *Boston Magazine*, July 1785.

in a detailed report regarding her orders for a crew to explore unknown territory in Eastern Siberia, “The great sovereign of the north, who has signalized every year of her glorious reign by acts of generosity for the advancement of science, and discoveries useful for mankind, is now about to give a further proof of her great attention in contributing to that end...”¹⁰⁷ American newspapers especially celebrated progressive elements of Catherine’s reign during this period, illustrated by the praise given to Catherine upon her orders of the exploration of uncharted land. American periodicals additionally applauded Catherine’s policies that recognized religious freedoms in her empire. The *Independent Gazetteer* in 1783 commented, “The measures adopted by the empress of Russia, for making her dominions the asylum for the Jesuits, is a stroke of policy perfectly congenial with the enterprising spirit of that extraordinary woman.”¹⁰⁸ Similarly, the *Pennsylvania Packet* in 1786 approved of the “enlightened empress of the north” for her policies of general religious toleration.¹⁰⁹

American newspapers from 1780 until the start of Catherine’s second war with the Ottomans greatly shifted the manner in which they reported information about the empress. Catherine was not the warmonger she used to be in the prior decade according to American periodicals, in fact the *Maryland Gazette* even congratulated the empress on her annexation of

¹⁰⁷ “Foreign News,” *Boston Magazine*, September 1785.

¹⁰⁸ “Foreign Intelligence,” *Independent Gazetteer* (Philadelphia), 31 May 1783. After the first partition of Poland in 1772, Russia adopted a large number of Jesuits. In 1773, the Pope was induced to suppress the Jesuit order, to which Catherine responded by not promulgating the papal bull because she decided the role of the Jesuits in education was too important for them to be disbanded. See Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History*, 142-143.

¹⁰⁹ “Modern Liberality,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 23 March 1786. It should be noted that Catherine never issued a single edict of religious toleration, however her reign did see the gradual dismantling of the apparatus of religious persecution in Russia. For instance, Catherine confirmed decrees that allowed fugitive Old Believers to return to Russia, gave the Jewish population legal equality to other citizens of the empire in 1786, and put an end to the forcible conversion of Moslem Tatars and Turkic tribes. See Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History*, 139-143.

the Crimea in 1783, describing it as “one of the greatest political strokes the world ever saw.”¹¹⁰ Had this information been printed in American articles prior to 1780, Catherine’s annexation of the Crimea likely would have been viewed as a result of the dangerous ambition that American periodicals used to attribute to the empress. For the first time in American newspapers since the beginning of her reign, views of the “truly illustrious czarina” thrived.¹¹¹ Catherine indirectly helped the American cause, which most likely was the reason for this new praise of her policies and achievements. As well, Catherine was viewed as honorable for her role as an enlightened monarch and mediator.

Foreign Conflicts from 1787 to 1795 of the “Haughty” Empress

In 1787, Catherine retired from her role as a mediator from the American Revolutionary War to pursue her own foreign conflicts. Between 1787 and 1792, Catherine was entangled in another war with the Turks in addition to a conflict with Sweden. In combination with two partitions of Poland by the empress that followed, news of the wars was not received well in American newspapers. Periodicals in the newly established United States reverted to their negative perceptions of the empress of Russia that they held prior to 1780, but in an even harsher manner. American newspapers closely followed developments in Catherine’s conflicts, and along the way criticized the czarina’s foreign and domestic policies.

American periodicals kept their audiences well informed on the conflicts Catherine was involved in throughout the later years of her life, reflecting the connections Americans had to the

¹¹⁰ “London, July 10,” *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 20 November 1783.

¹¹¹ “Hartford, November 21,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 21 November 1785; “Hartford, November 21,” *Vermont Gazette* (Bennington), 12 December 1785; “Hartford, November 21,” *Hartford Courant*, 21 November 1785.

European continent even after they gained independence. These ties between Americans and Europeans were partially a result of alliances or friendships the U.S. had across the Atlantic, which could be observed in reports regarding Catherine's foreign policy between 1787 and 1795. Similar to Catherine's first war with the Ottomans, there existed a fear that her new conflicts with the Turks and Swedes would spread across the continent, "A tremendous storm is gathering in the north. Heaven grant that it may not extend over the other parts of Europe."¹¹² This comment from the *American Museum* in August of 1788 referred to the rising tensions between Sweden and Russia that eventually would result in the Russo-Swedish War of 1788 to 1790.¹¹³ This issue of the magazine also illustrated the declining relationship that existed between Britain and Russia when the *American Museum* published an article that stated the British refused Catherine's request of ships and men to convey her troops for the journey around Europe from the Baltic to the Mediterranean to fight against the Turks.¹¹⁴ American newspaper audiences were aware of the deterioration of the friendship that once existed between the British and Russia. The *Freeman's Journal* in April of 1791 demonstrated the breakdown in Anglo-Russian relations vividly as it claimed the "haughty" Catherine was reported to have rejected British offers of mediation for the Russo-Turkish conflict although the English minister at St. Petersburg asserted that if she did not accept the offer, "The English nation, become your enemy with reluctance and regret, will support with all its forces the plans of its allies."¹¹⁵

¹¹² "Foreign Intelligence," *American Museum* (Philadelphia), 1 August 1788.

¹¹³ The Russo-Swedish of 1788 to 1790 resulted partially as a result of the Russo-Turkish War that began in 1787. According to Madariaga, Gustav III of Sweden declared war on Russia on a trumped-up issue in June 1788 to seize the opportunity of the Russians being distracted with the Turkish campaign in the south in order to recover land lost to Russia in earlier conflicts. See Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History*, 162-175 for more information on the Russo-Swedish War of 1788 to 1790.

¹¹⁴ "Foreign Intelligence," *American Museum* (Philadelphia), 1 August 1788.

¹¹⁵ "Foreign Intelligence," *Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia), 06 April 1791.

Other newspapers also demonstrated the alliances both Russia and the U.S. had in Europe at the time, especially with France, which was in turmoil on the onset of the French Revolution in 1789. The *Columbian Magazine* in March 1790 expressed the good relationship that still existed between the U.S. and France, dubbed the “friends of freedom”, even after the conclusion of the American War of Independence.¹¹⁶ On the other hand, Catherine was claimed to have plans to dispatch a fleet with some thousands of troops to act against the French in an April 1793 issue of the *Massachusetts Magazine* on account of her support of the French nobility, “The empress has manifested her detestation of rebellion.”¹¹⁷ Catherine had different alliances and interests in Europe compared to the U.S. and its friendly nations. The czarina’s anti-French Revolution stance contributed to the negative image the empress had in the U.S., considering that Catherine was acting against a nation the U.S. had a good relationship with. Catherine’s inability to maintain good relations with nations that once were allied to Russia, like Britain, also may have played a role in the shift of views about Catherine in American newspapers from an enlightened mediatrix to a troublemaker or aggressor.

American periodicals reported Catherine’s renewed troubles with the Ottoman Empire and other foreign powers in a manner that damaged the portrayal of the empress. American newspapers were more critical of Catherine during this stage in her reign compared to her first Turkish campaign. Several reports of Catherine’s later foreign conflicts labeled the empress with the term “haughty”, especially when she refused offers of mediation to bring her wars to an end. The *Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine* emphasized the brutality of the Turkish campaign in March 1791, “Humanity shudders at the bare recital of the backwards manner in

¹¹⁶ “Progress of Liberty,” *Columbian Magazine* (Philadelphia), 1 March 1790.

¹¹⁷ “Foreign Occurrences,” *Massachusetts Magazine* (Boston), April 1793.

which the war between those two powers [Russia and the Ottoman Empire] is carried on. Quarter is seldom given.”¹¹⁸ This disturbing statement was made all the more effective as the magazine followed it with the information that Catherine refused mediation by the British to put the bloodshed to an end, “...The haughty czarina will not listen to them [the British] at present.”¹¹⁹ Similarly, the first sentence in the “Foreign Intelligence” section of the June 1791 *American Museum* concerned Catherine’s refusal of mediation for the Russo-Turkish War, “The empress of Russia continues to reject all overtures to a mediation with more hauteur than ever.”¹²⁰ The manner in which American newspaper reports during Catherine’s second Turkish campaign frowned upon Catherine’s willingness to continue to sacrifice her subjects for her dangerous goals, or as the *Aurora General Advertiser* put it, Catherine’s “insatiable desire of extending dominions”, jibes with American newspapers’ inclination to praise powers or rulers that played roles as peacemakers and condemned warmongers.¹²¹ Catherine was celebrated in American periodicals for her attempts at mediation at the Hague between 1781 and 1783. Therefore, her refusals for peace during the Turkish campaign helped earn Catherine some of the criticism she suffered in American periodicals between 1787 and 1795.

While U.S. newspapers admired Catherine’s achievements as a monarch primarily between 1780 and 1786, reports that praised Catherine’s enlightened domestic policies diminished in number upon her later foreign conflicts. Instead, periodicals more often described Catherine’s government as tyrannical. In May 1791, the *Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine* printed a moral essay entitled *Look at Home* by an author that simply signed their

¹¹⁸ “Intelligence,” *Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine* (Philadelphia), March 1791.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ “Foreign Intelligence,” *American Museum* (Philadelphia), 04 June 1791.

¹²¹ “Political Reflections,” *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), 08 April 1791.

initials, W.S. The essay criticized autocratic governments like Catherine's and referred to the empress and her foreign conflicts when it claimed that free Americans, "...condemn inordinate ambition, and lament the weakness of those who, enlisted under the banners of despotism, that pest of human society, may be insensibly induced to disperse it to other regions."¹²² In May 1792, the *New York Magazine* also harshly condemned Catherinian Russia, "Russia is almost the only country in Europe in which the people do not enjoy a show of civil privilege, or some kind of semblance of political right. The sovereign is not only despotic, but every individual subject is a slave."¹²³

Although Catherine was criticized for her absolute rule in many American newspapers, some still gave Catherine credit for certain programs she funded or enacted. The *Christian's, Scholar's, and Farmer's Magazine* in February 1791 compared Catherine to Oliver Cromwell and Louis XVI in the sense that she was a tyrant, however the same article reported that Catherine, "...has uniformly aimed to be great in both arts and arms. She honors and bestows honors and awards on men of distinguished character in the literary world, she pushes her conquest over the Turkish dominions, and she intrigues at all the courts of consequence in the world..."¹²⁴ The *American Apollo* similarly presented Catherine in a mixed manner as it criticized Catherine's warlike tendencies, the existence of serfdom in her empire, and lack of investment in manufacturing, yet praised the czarina's patronage of the arts and sciences, "She surveys with scientific accuracy the extremities of her empire; while its center and heart are wholly

¹²² W.S., "A Look at Home; A Moral Essay," *Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine* (Philadelphia), June 1791.

¹²³ "Present State of Russia," *New York Magazine*, May 1792.

¹²⁴ "Foreign Occurrences," *Christian's, Scholar's, and Farmer's Magazine* (Elizabeth Town), February 1791.

neglected.”¹²⁵ American newspapers underwent an abrupt shift in their portrayal of Catherine. Within the same decade, periodicals that once spoke highly of the enlightened and benevolent czarina later condemned her as haughty and despotic. This shift arrived with mixed feelings, as illustrated by the way American newspaper articles criticized the empress harshly for her foreign conflicts and absolute rule, yet often could not attack Catherine to a full extent as some admiration for the empress’s enlightened patronage of the arts and sciences still lingered from the era during the American Revolutionary War.

American Obituaries of Catherine

News of Catherine’s death on November 17, 1796, did not appear in American newspapers until February 1797. While British newspapers printed lengthy reports of the death of the empress, complete with commentary on Catherine’s life, both positive and negative, American periodicals presented to their audiences the news of Catherine’s death in a different manner. Reports of the empress’s death were often brief, only stating that Catherine had died without any further commentary on her achievements or character. A handful of U.S. periodicals included a discussion of the empress’s death and reign, and similar to their British counterparts, American newspapers were divided on their perspective of the empress as some newspapers reminisced fondly on Catherine’s life while others reduced Catherine to the less glamorous aspects of her reign, like her foreign conquests.

Many U.S. newspapers reported on Catherine’s death in a blunt, short manner. These brief reports included little more than the news of the empress’s death, the date it occurred, and named the successor to the Russian throne, Catherine’s son Paul. The *Maryland Gazette*, the

¹²⁵ “Character of the Present Empress of Russia,” *American Apollo* (Boston), 09 May 1792.

North Carolina Journal, and the *North Carolina Minerva and Fayetteville Advertiser* in March 1797 all printed the same, single sentence news of Catherine’s death: “It was said, that the empress of all the Russias the great Catherine, was dead.”¹²⁶ The *Maryland Gazette* particularly had a complex view of the empress over the course of her reign. The *Maryland Gazette* was established by the time Catherine rose to power and reported on her palace revolution in a skeptical manner. The gazette commented on the potential trouble the empress would face in the future as she had “not a drop of the royal blood of the Russian czars in her veins” and even pondered on the coincidental death of Peter III so soon after his deposition.¹²⁷ After Catherine’s coup d’état, the *Maryland Gazette* eventually printed more favorable views of the empress during the American Revolutionary War, even complimenting Russia’s acquisition of the Crimea under Catherine and praising the “sublime” empress for her efforts at mediation during the war.¹²⁸ Therefore, it is remarkable that the *Maryland Gazette*, with its history of reporting on news about the empress, often with subjective remarks, had nothing more to announce about Catherine’s life or death other than the fact that she had passed away. The *Vermont Gazette* shared a few more details about Catherine’s death, including the date she died, the age she was when she passed, and a few details about Paul I, the new emperor of Russia.¹²⁹ The *Rutland Herald* also included in its obituary of the late empress the date on which she died, listed the cause of death as a stroke, her date of birth, and Paul’s succession of the Russian throne.¹³⁰ These brief reports of

¹²⁶ “New York, February 20,” *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 02 March 1797; “New York, February 20,” *North Carolina Journal* (Halifax), 06 March 1797; “New York, February 20,” *North Carolina Minerva and Fayetteville Advertiser* (Fayetteville), 11 March 1797.

¹²⁷ “London, August 19,” *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 18 November 1762; “London, October 8,” *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 21 October 1762.

¹²⁸ “London, July 10,” *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 20 November 1783; “Extract of a Letter from Paris, December 30,” *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 07 April 1785.

¹²⁹ “Bennington, March 23,” *Vermont Gazette* (Bennington), 23 March 1797.

¹³⁰ “New York. Lansingburgh, March 7,” *Rutland Herald*, 20 March 1797.

Catherine's death contrast much from the lengthy obituaries British newspapers printed of the empress which discussed Catherine's death and reign in a far more complex and detailed manner. The short, factual manner of Catherine's obituaries in American newspapers is reminiscent of the reports American periodicals made upon her seizure of the throne in 1762, which also were unlike British reports in that they were far briefer and did not discuss details like Catherine's character.

A handful of newspapers in the U.S. printed short evaluations of the empress, both positive and negative, in their reports of Catherine's death. An especially favorable obituary of Catherine II was printed in both the *New York Magazine* and the *American Universal Magazine* with identical information. The obituary was lengthy and described the major achievements of Catherine's reign like her successful foreign wars, mediation attempts, *Nakaz*, and even her inoculation. Throughout the biography, the unnamed author praised Catherine's patronage of the arts and sciences, her humanity, and the czarina's intelligence:

“It would be impossible here to do justice to the character of this extraordinary sovereign. Born with strong natural capacities; she had neglected no means of their improvement; and from the moment she ascended the throne, she seems to have devoted her talents to the improvement and prosperity of her empire.”¹³¹

The obituary went as far as to defend the more controversial aspects of Catherine's reign, namely her palace revolution and bloody ambitions. The author asserted that readers should not dwell long on the manner in which she acquired her throne on account of the “weaknesses and

¹³¹ “Memoirs of the Late Empress of Russia, with Original Anecdotes of the Court of Petersburg.” *New-York Magazine*, April 1797; “Biographical Sketches: No. X. of the Empress of Russia,” *American Universal Magazine* (Philadelphia), 13 June 1797.

impudence” of her husband that surely would have caused more trouble rather than progress in the empire.¹³² The author frowned on the bloodshed in Catherine’s foreign conflicts, but quickly justified Catherine’s wars as they claimed Catherine’s foreign policy was beneficial not only to her empire in terms of expansion and improvement, but also to other European powers, like Austria and England, which also carried out wars for the same motives as Catherine:

“She has kept the Turks from falling upon Austria, prevented a confederacy from taking place in the north, kept Sweden and Prussia in awe, and extirpated the devoted Poles. Her policy was to exhaust her rivals, and to place herself in that situation which England once enjoyed, of being the umpire of the European states...”¹³³

This lengthy, celebratory biography of the empress was an outlier to the obituaries other American periodicals printed of the empress that were brief and excluded any evaluation of her life and rule. Catherine’s obituary in the *New York Magazine* and the *American Universal Magazine* actually appeared more similar to British obituaries of the empress, which were very detailed and included subjective commentary on the empress’s reign.

Other American newspapers that allocated to the empress more than a few short sentences about her death in their obituaries were not as favorable as the article in the *New York Magazine* and the *American Universal Magazine*. Catherine’s death was sometimes only mentioned in a political context instead of a commemorative one. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Aurora General Advertiser* made identical reports of Catherine’s death which informed audiences about the date she passed away and afterward commented, “This event is considered at Berlin as unfavorable to the interest of England. The new emperor of Russia [Paul I] has the character of a

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

philanthropist, without distinction of nations, and will make him the friend of peace and tranquility...”¹³⁴ This blunt report opted not to describe the empress’s reign, but instead the consequences of her death politically in Europe, specifically of the relationship between Russia and England, which at the time Russia was providing support to during the French Revolutionary Wars. As well, the claim that Paul I was a philanthropist could imply that Catherine was not a peaceful empress, reminiscent of the many attacks in American newspapers of the empress’s “warlike” tendencies. This take is not surprising, especially from the *Aurora General Advertiser*, which only a few years prior condemned Catherine’s “insatiable desire of extending dominions.”¹³⁵ In fact, in June 1797, the *Aurora General Advertiser* even printed a poem titled *Nothing & All* that commented on the nations of Europe and their monarchs, in which the poem alluded to Catherine’s tyranny and dangerous ambition:

“The Czarina decides all,
The empress dares all.”¹³⁶

Much like British periodicals, American newspapers were divided in the way in which they remembered the empress. Some periodicals summarized Catherine’s death in a short, factual manner that neither praised nor attacked Catherine for her character or the policies she enacted on the throne. There did exist newspapers, like the *New York Magazine* and the *American Universal Magazine* that celebrated the empress, but these were uncommon compared to the

¹³⁴ “Leyden, December 15,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 February 1797; “Leyden, December 15,” *Aurora General Adviser* (Philadelphia), 02 March 1797. The aspect that is “unfavorable” to English may refer to the assistance Catherine provided the British during the French Revolutionary Wars. Catherine did not play a direct role in the conflict, however she did provide some ships and men to aid the British in the struggle to suppress the French revolutionaries. For more information on Catherine’s policy towards revolutionary France, see James W. Marcum, “Catherine II and the French Revolution: A Reappraisal,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 16, no. 2 (1974): 187–201.

¹³⁵ “Political Reflections,” *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), 08 April 1791.

¹³⁶ “Nothing & All,” *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), 22 June 1797.

many others that did not discuss Catherine's life and death, or if they did, only placed it in a practical, political context. For the most part, Catherine's death was relayed to the public in American newspapers briefly, despite the complex, shifting history of her image in the U.S.

Shifting Ideas of Catherine's Gender During Her Reign

Catherine's femininity as illustrated in American newspapers practically mirrored the route British periodicals took to paint the image of the empress over the course of her reign. Like British newspapers, American articles drew a clear distinction between Catherine's personality traits and attributed some characteristics to be masculine and others feminine. American periodicals did not afford the empress the lengthy details that British newspapers did in their reports of Catherine's palace revolution, meaning that most articles in American papers about Catherine's coup d'état did not differentiate between Catherine's "masculine" and "feminine" traits simply because they did not go into detail about the character of the new czarina. However, throughout Catherine's reign, American periodicals printed articles that gendered Catherine's character and achievements. Also like British newspapers, negative commentary about the empress eventually became associated with her femininity, especially during the foreign conquests of her later years.

American periodicals attributed specific characteristics displayed by Catherine as either masculine or feminine. Before Catherine's second Turkish campaign, more articles that emphasized Catherine's masculinity could be seen. Upon her palace revolution, the reports of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and the *Maryland Gazette* excluded many details of the event and of the czarina's personal qualities that British periodicals like the *Scots Magazine* included, however

both American periodicals still detailed how Catherine wore the uniform of the Preobrazhensky Guards to march toward Peterhof.¹³⁷ Catherine's cross-dressing was viewed as a detail important enough to have been included in these first articles about the empress, which could have given Catherine the masculine image she originally wished to have embodied through the uniform she wore. Five years after her palace revolution had taken place, the *Virginia Gazette* printed another report that highlighted Catherine's masculinity. This article was printed in June of 1768 before war had broken out between the Russian and Ottomans. According to the *Virginia Gazette*, the King of Prussia, Frederick II, had written a letter to Catherine complimenting her *Nakaz*, claiming that the proposed law code was a "masculine, nervous performance, and worthy of a great man."¹³⁸ Frederick further elaborated on the accomplishments of other female rulers, like Queen Elizabeth who was a great politician, and praised Catherine because the world had not yet heard of a female lawgiver like her.¹³⁹ Frederick the Great's celebration of Catherine not only gendered Catherine's *Nakaz* as a masculine effort, but also reflected Catherine's particular struggle of having been a female monarch in a patriarchal Europe. Praise for Catherine's grand projects, like her efforts at legal reform, were outshined by comments that attributed her achievements to her masculine traits. Such remarks demonstrated the insecurities that existed around women in power as they were deemed unable to be successful simply as a woman, but instead were praised as a female leader with "masculine" traits.

More often than not, Catherine's femininity was weaponized against her in American periodicals, much like in British newspapers. On some occasions, Catherine's "feminine"

¹³⁷ "Breslau, July 23," *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 14 October 1762; "Petersburg, July 10," *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 21 October 1762.

¹³⁸ "London, March 30," *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), 30 June 1769.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

characteristics were celebrated, for instance the *American Museum* in 1789 applauded Catherine's humane opinion on the death penalty, which she believed was an unnecessary practice, and the magazine attributed this policy to Catherine's "female understanding".¹⁴⁰ Catherine's femininity during times in which British newspapers supported her was characterized by grace, benevolence, and compassion, however her sex was quickly turned against her when she became unpopular in periodicals. American newspapers demonstrated this same method of criticizing Catherine, as they also made the connection between Catherine's sex and disagreeable policies. The *United States Magazine* in 1794 linked Catherine's womanhood to her despotic practices in Poland after its second partition: "Russia continues her old practices, but with new devices. 20,000,0000 of inhabitants here governed by a woman, mirabile dictu! Poland, alas! Unhappy Poland!"¹⁴¹ The *Maryland Gazette* expressed that Catherine was an ungrateful woman that should be left to experience her weaknesses all on her own during her second Turkish campaign without any assistance from foreign nations.¹⁴² Catherine's femininity according to these claims contributed to her poor qualities as a leader, like weakness and a lack of ability to govern effectively. Masculinity was deemed better suited to govern in Europe and in the U.S. at the time, which explains much of why Catherine's admirable achievements were deemed masculine, and her shortcomings were the result of her femininity. The *Aurora Magazine* in 1791 elaborated on this concept that Catherine's womanhood impaired her ability to become a quality monarch. The magazine frowned on the czarina's dangerous ambitions and bloody wars, claiming that it would take a "resolution beyond her sex" to redeem herself and

¹⁴⁰ "Rejoinder to a Reply to the Inquiry into the Justice and Policy of Punishing Murder by Death," *American Museum* (Philadelphia), January 1789.

¹⁴¹ "Present State of Europe," *United States Magazine* (Newark), April 1794.

¹⁴² "Kingston, (Jamaica) June 14," *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), 21 August 1788.

become a favorable figure again.¹⁴³ Catherine's femininity in this context harmed her reign, making it almost out of her control to become a monarch that was respected solely as a woman and not a "masculine" woman. The amount that American periodicals emphasized Catherine's femininity shifted over the course of her reign as it was in the foreground during times she was supported in newspapers, however as soon as she lost her good image in periodicals, Catherine's femininity was brought to the forefront of criticism about the czarina.

Conclusion

Many factors affected Catherine's portrayal in U.S. newspapers. For one, developments in Catherine's foreign policy, both towards the U.S. and other European countries, played a major role in how the czarina was viewed in American periodicals and magazines. Reports in American newspapers about Catherine's foreign conquests generally condemned the empress for her aggression, especially when she threatened political stability in Europe and the welfare of U.S. allies like France. Along with attacks on Catherine about her violence, U.S. periodicals built on the negative image of the empress that was created during her foreign conquests by also criticizing her domestic policies and government. However, when Catherine abided by American patriots during the War of Independence, opinions about the empress greatly improved as reports in American newspapers commended Catherine for her peaceful stance as a mediator in addition to her enlightened domestic policies. While wars and foreign policy had much to do with how the empress was portrayed in U.S. periodicals, the values Americans admired, as reflected in newspapers, and how Catherine exhibited them also played a key role in how she was framed by

¹⁴³ Political Reflections," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), 08 April 1791.

the press. American newspapers valued Catherine's "masculine" achievements, patronage of education and the arts, and policies that promoted peace while they disapproved of tyranny, violence, arrogance, and Catherine's "feminine" traits that were deemed destructive, like weakness.

CHAPTER THREE: PERSPECTIVES OF RUSSIA ACCORDING TO BRITISH AND AMERICAN PERIODICALS

Since the beginning of Catherine's reign in 1762, commentary about the Russian people she ruled over often was included in British and American reports concerning the empress. These opinions typically were demeaning as periodicals in both countries criticized Russians for a perceived backwardness, often using the term "barbarians" to describe the nature of Catherine's subjects. Regardless of the image Catherine held in British and American periodicals, favorable or not, newspapers consistently printed overwhelmingly offensive and derogatory remarks about Russians throughout the thirty-four years Catherine was on the throne. This chapter will shift the focus slightly away from portrayals of Catherine as an individual to examine how prejudices against Russians affected Catherine's image in Great Britain and America. Similar to the ways British and American periodicals weaponized ideas of Catherine's gender for and against her during different periods of her reign, newspapers also used demeaning preconceptions of Russians as a people to cultivate favor or hostility toward the empress. This chapter will demonstrate how both British and American newspapers utilized the stigma of Russian inferiority to frame Catherine as an enlightened "civilizer" of her subjects during periods that newspapers from both nations supported the czarina. Equally, British and American newspapers associated Russian barbarity with Catherine's aggression during wars periodicals from each country did not approve of. This chapter will also explore the unique way British newspapers utilized ideas of Russian inferiority to point out shortcomings in Catherine's achievements from the League of Armed Neutrality onwards. American periodicals also had a distinct method of expressing dislike toward Catherine by relating Russian serfdom to slavery. Upon examination of preconceptions in British and American newspapers about Russian barbarism and inferiority,

much is revealed about the ideas of ethnocentrism that existed in each country in addition to the insecurities some felt in relation to Catherinian Russia.

Catherine's "Civilizing" Role in British Newspapers

British newspapers praised Catherine highly for roughly the first half of her reign. Besides complimenting her characteristics, like her beauty, intelligence, or benevolence, periodicals in Britain used the stigma of Russian backwardness to boost Catherine's image. Catherine was hailed as a civilizing force for her subjects, which was especially visible in the first few years of her reign when she wrote her *Nakaz* as a guideline to reform the Russian law code. The role Catherine played in the refinement of Russia as reflected in British periodicals can also be observed in the obituaries written about her that celebrated her efforts to progress Russia out of a state of barbarism.

The perception of Catherine II in British newspapers as a cultivator of civilization for her subjects was clearly demonstrated in the years following her palace revolution into the period in which she executed her first Turkish campaign. This era was arguably the height of her image in British periodicals. During this time, Catherine issued her *Nakaz* in 1767 as a guide for the Legislative Commission, composed of deputies representing Russia's different classes and ethnic groups to draft a new code of laws. Although the Legislative Commission was unable to produce a new code of laws because the Russo-Turkish War of 1768 to 1774 broke out the following year, British newspapers did not let this bold experiment go unnoticed.¹⁴⁴ British periodicals

¹⁴⁴ Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History*, 33.

praised Catherine's enterprising spirit exhibited in her endeavors to reform Russian laws at the expense of the depiction of her subjects.

In September 1766, the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure* printed an extract from a lyric poem about a Russian legislator-elect that discussed the need for a new law code in the empire:

“A bear's a beast, as times now go
Better to tame than man
Men I have try'd with prose and ode
And now I am drawing them a code
These bears shall the plan”¹⁴⁵

The author of this poem is unnamed, however the stigma towards Russians is evident in the way the author compared the Russian people to bears that needed taming. Catherine's law code was necessary according to this ode to establish order in the empire among a rowdy people. The *Town & Country Magazine* similarly reflected the harmful preconceptions that existed of the Russian population in 1770 and specifically applauded Catherine for her execution of “noble projects of civilization,” like her *Nakaz*.¹⁴⁶ The article in the magazine, *A Sketch of the Character and Heroic Virtues of the Empress of Russia* was lengthy and described the achievements and events of Catherine's reign thus far in a favorable manner, lauding her enlightened, humane, and generous characteristics. The *Town & Country Magazine* illustrated these traits in action as it discussed Catherine's ventures to reform Russian laws, “She has established a code of laws,

¹⁴⁵ “Extract from Ode to the Legislator Elect of Russia, on His Being Prevented from Entering on His High Office of Civilization, by a Fit of the Gout,” *Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure* (London), September 1766.

¹⁴⁶ “A Sketch of the Character and Heroic Virtues of the Empress of Russia,” *Town & Country Magazine* (London), October 1770.

which ascertain the rights of mankind against arbitrary power and corrupt judges; she has abolished those dreadful tortures and punishments which disgraced a civilized nation.”¹⁴⁷ This statement by the *Town & Country Magazine* actively connected Catherine’s policies and achievements, like legal reform, to the progress of Russia from a “disgraceful”, uncivilized country to a developed one.

Other articles were less blunt about the aspects of Russia that were underdeveloped and Catherine’s place as a reformer of its issues, but still communicated the message that Catherine played a civilizing role in Russia. For instance, the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure* published a different poem about Russian backwardness in September 1770 entitled *To Catherine II: Empress of all the Russias* that glorified Catherine, comparing her to a bright star that appeared in Russia during the “darkest, loneliest hour of night”.¹⁴⁸ The poem not only praised Catherine’s foreign conflicts and patronage of the arts, but her “just laws” as well.¹⁴⁹ The idea of Catherine as an illuminated being above the dark, backward Russian people, guiding them toward civilization was incredibly favorable for the empress, almost as though she was doing charity work in her policies, and British newspapers utilized this concept to her advantage.

Catherine did not enjoy a positive image in British periodicals again after her formation of the League of Armed Neutrality largely until her death, however newspapers continued to employ preconceptions of Russian people as uncivilized to promote the empress in obituaries that remembered her fondly. The *Freemason’s Magazine & Cabinet of Universal Literature*

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. According to Madariaga, Catherine II detested the use of torture and included a strong denunciation of the practice in her *Nakaz*. In November 1767, Catherine issued an edict that ordered authorities to follow her ideas about the use of torture as illustrated in her *Nakaz*. See Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History*, 138-139.

¹⁴⁸ “To Catherine II: Empress of all the Russias,” *Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure* (London), September 1770.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

kindly remembered Catherine's reign: "We admire the magnificence of her enterprise, the commanding vigor with which she wielded the energies of her mighty Empire; the liberal encouragement which she afforded to the arts and sciences, and the attempts she made to polish the manners of her people."¹⁵⁰ While this remark was flattering for Catherine, it was at the cost of the view of Russian people, who were deemed uncivil. Catherine's obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* did not refrain either in its derogatory comments on Russians to in order to praise the empress when the magazine claimed that under Catherine, Russia advanced from weakness and barbarism to a mighty state with civilization.¹⁵¹

A particularly interesting view of Russia was made by traveler William Thompson, author of the book *Letters from Scandinavia: On the Past and Present State of the Northern Nations of Europe*, in which Thompson described the lives of typical Russians. An excerpt of his book was printed in the November 1796 *Monthly Review*, around the time of Catherine's death. This excerpt noted Catherine for her efforts at civilizing Russians, however the reviewer reacted harshly to Thompson's work, recall the statement: "The writer's [Thompson's] partiality for the Russians, indeed I, has included him to praise, too indiscriminately, everything belonging to their nation."¹⁵² Some authors held more uncompromising prejudices against Russians compared to others. The reviewer's unkind critique further demonstrated the existence of preconceptions against Russian people, at least in newspapers, and how almost convenient it was for newspapers staffs to utilize this stigma for or against the empress.

¹⁵⁰ "Obituary," *Freemason's Magazine & Cabinet of Universal Literature* (London), December 1796.

¹⁵¹ "Obituary of Remarkable Persons with Remarkable Anecdotes," *Gentleman's Magazine* (London), December 1796.

¹⁵² "Letters from Scandinavia: On the Past and Present State of the Northern Nations of Europe," review of *Letters from Scandinavia: On the Past and Present State of the Northern Nations of Europe*, by William Thompson, *Monthly Review* (London), November 1796.

Catherine's "Civilizing" Role in American Newspapers

American periodicals did not generally hold a favorable view of Catherine until 1780, almost twenty years after she rose to power. This era lasted until the beginning of Catherine's second Turkish campaign. A significant amount of time had passed since Catherine wrote *Nakaz* and called the Legislative Commission in 1767. When American newspapers began to express admiration for Catherine's foreign policy beginning in 1780, other favorable reports about the czarina's achievements domestically were available for newspapers to circulate. Rather than focus on Catherine's early endeavors to reform the Russian legal code, American newspapers instead printed many stories about other ways Catherine worked to civilize her subjects. From 1780 to 1786, a number of reports in American periodicals celebrated Catherine's more recent attempts to enlighten her subjects in fields such as agriculture, general education, arts and sciences, and military training. Often these stories depicted Russians as uncivil or barbarians and Catherine as their philanthropic monarch that sought to instill education and manners into her people. Unlike British periodicals, American obituaries of the empress generally were blunt and did not dwell much on her achievements, however Catherine's role as a civilizer can still be demonstrated in the 1790s, a time when Catherine was attacked in American newspapers for her foreign conflicts.

From 1780 to 1786, American periodicals lauded Catherine's "civilizing" goals and achievements in her empire. These reports presented the problem of Russian backwardness and the progress Catherine had made to resolve it. The *Pennsylvania Packet* in 1785 printed a lengthy article that discussed Catherine's role in the history of Russian sovereigns to introduce civilization to a population plagued by barbarity. The newspaper praised Catherine highly for her

patronage of literature and the arts as well as the czarina's efforts to secure the liberties of her subjects legally.¹⁵³ The *Pennsylvania Packet* glorified the empress: "She is the Argonaut of modern times, who opens or received the trade on the Euxine Sea, and fills its shores with people and the arts. The rising glory of Russia is a subject of boundless speculation."¹⁵⁴ This referred to the annexation of the Crimea by Russia in 1783. On the subject of the Crimea, Catherine's endeavors to integrate the Crimean Tatars into her empire was applauded by the *Pennsylvania Packet* in the same year as their previous article about the progress of the Russian Empire. The *Pennsylvania Packet* enthusiastically informed their audience of Catherine's encouragement of intermarriage between Russians and Tartars, her orders for school masters to settle on the Crimea to teach the Russian to the locals, and the direction of farmers to instruct the Tartars, who were referred to as "savages", to learn cultivation.¹⁵⁵ In this narrative, Catherine earned her praise by introducing culture to those deemed not to have any. In reality, these peoples, whether it be Russians, Tartars, or any other group in the empire, had their own lifestyles, but it was ignored by articles like those published in the *Pennsylvania Packet*, most likely because they did not align with Western European society.

Other articles in American newspapers gave their audiences more specific stories about Catherine's efforts to polish Russian society. The *Boston Magazine* admired the "glorious" Catherine for her order of an expedition to explore the coasts of Eastern Siberia, a project that would yield great scientific and geographic information.¹⁵⁶ The *Freeman's Journal* approved of Catherine's efforts to improve agriculture in Russia by sending young men to study cultivation

¹⁵³ "Foreign Intelligence," *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 05 November 1785.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ "Foreign Intelligence," *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 13 April 1785.

¹⁵⁶ "Foreign News," *Boston Magazine*, September 1785.

techniques in England.¹⁵⁷ Another article printed in the *Pennsylvania Packet* in 1783 discussed Catherine's request of George III to have British marine officers serve in her fleets to enhance her navy.¹⁵⁸ These anecdotes typically were brief, however they did not lack support for the empress. Numerous examples of Catherine's "civilizing" project only further served to promote her image in American periodicals.

Once Catherine embarked on her foreign wars in the later years of her life, American newspapers condemned the empress for her aggression, however, they still complimented Catherine for her role in leading Russians out of backwardness, mostly in her patronage of the arts and sciences. This praise sometimes faded to the background in articles that largely attacked Catherine as warlike, aggressive, and tyrannical, yet it is important to note their existence. Recall the ambiguous remark by the *Christian's, Scholar's, and Farmer's Magazine* in 1791 that commended Catherine for her patronage of the arts: "She honors and bestows honors and rewards on men of distinguished character in the literary world, she pushes her conquests over the Turkish dominions, and she intrigues at all the courts of consequence in the world — she assumes too, like Louis le Grand, a haughty and imperious tone."¹⁵⁹ The *American Apollo* in 1792 similarly noted Catherine's public patronage of literature, the fine arts, and sciences before characterizing the empress as a warmonger.¹⁶⁰ Much like British newspapers upon Catherine's death, articles in American periodicals soon before Catherine passed away exhibited conflicting emotions toward the empress. American periodicals praised her enlightened patronage of the arts

¹⁵⁷ "Encouragement of Agriculture, by the Empress of Russia. From Coxe's Travels, Lately Published," *Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia), 27 July 1785.

¹⁵⁸ "St. James, September 12," *The Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 08 November 1783.

¹⁵⁹ "Foreign Occurrences," *Christian's, Scholar's, and Farmer's Magazine* (Elizabeth Town), February 1791.

¹⁶⁰ "Character of the Present Empress of Russia," *American Apollo* (Boston), 09 May 1792.

and sciences to bring refine culture to her empire but juxtaposed these kind compliments with harsh remarks which argued that Catherine was not an “enlightened” monarch on account of her tyranny and aggression.

Russian “Barbarity” and Catherine’s Foreign Wars

Russian subjects were consistently viewed as inferior or backward throughout the entirety of Catherine’s reign. While British and American newspapers used preconceptions around Russians as a method to boost Catherine’s image by praising her civilizing efforts, they equally turned the idea of Russian inferiority against her during times that she was unpopular in the periodicals of both countries. In both British and American newspapers, Catherine was perceived as warlike during periods in which she was not supported by the press, typically as a result of her polarizing foreign conflicts. Consequently, British and American newspapers often related Russian barbarity to the aggressive tendencies Catherine exhibited.

Russians as a people were regarded as uncivilized and attached to this characteristic was violence. The *English Review* in 1789 demonstrated this association as it claimed that war typically was damaging for civilized nations, however Russia thrived during wartime because of its listless ignorance and barbarism: “Russia, (or the empress of Russia) is like a palm-tree, which flourished the more the more it is trod on and pressed!”¹⁶¹ Not only was violence attributed to Russian backwardness, but the *English Review* specially identified Catherine acting like her warlike people. The unfavorable article in the *English Review* was released during Catherine’s second Russo-Turkish war, meaning that the remark in the article likely referred to

¹⁶¹ “National Affairs,” *English Review* (London), November 1789.

her foreign conflicts of the time, during which Catherine was unpopular in British newspapers. The *New Annual Register*, another British periodical, also related Catherine to her subjects' perceived savagery in 1791 in its discussion of the brutality of Catherine's second Turkish Campaign: "...Whatever steps may have been taken by the present or other sovereigns of this empire to produce a forced civilization, both the monarchs and the people of Russia are still barbarians."¹⁶²

Other newspapers were not as direct as the *English Review* or the *New Annual Register* in the manner in which they reduced Catherine to a savage, like her people, when she was unpopular in Britain and America. For instance, in the U.S., the *Pennsylvania Magazine* in 1775 printed an essay by an anonymous author entitled *Thoughts on Defensive War*, which argued warfare was cruel and unnecessarily wasted human lives, therefore it should only be employed defensively if peaceful negotiations could not be made. Russia was mentioned in the essay as a power that was not civil enough to understand this concept: "Thus the peaceable part of mankind will continually be overrun by the vile and abandoned, while they neglect the means of self-defense. The supposed quietude of a good man allures the Russian."¹⁶³ Although Catherine was not explicitly mentioned, the remark attacked Russians in general, of which Catherine was the leader who decided which wars to involve her "barbaric" subjects in. Catherine in this sense was associated with the violent tendencies of her people, an idea that fit well into American newspapers in 1775, when Catherine had just completed her first Turkish Campaign and was attacked viciously in American newspapers for her role as an aggressor during the war. The *United States Magazine* in 1779 similarly printed a poem titled *The Loyalists* that claimed

¹⁶² "British and Foreign History," *New Annual Register* (London), January 1791.

¹⁶³ "Thoughts on Defensive War," *Pennsylvania Magazine* (Philadelphia), July 1775.

Russians were naturally on “destruction bent”, and the *English Review* in 1792 asserted that it was for the best that the Polish King Stanisław submit to the will of the empress when asked to renounce the Constitution of 3 May 1791 as to not “risk the fury of the barbarians”.¹⁶⁴

British and American newspapers utilized the stigma against Russians in Catherine’s favor when newspapers celebrated the empress as a civilizing force. Equally, British and American newspapers weaponized preconceptions of Russians against Catherine whenever she was no longer popular in periodicals. Rather than framing Catherine as an enlightened leader that was above her subjects, newspaper articles that attacked the empress in this manner placed Catherine on the same level as her savage subjects as a way to damage Catherine’s image. Some newspapers specifically labeled Catherine as a barbarian, while others alluded to Catherine’s aggression and its links to Russian backwardness. In this narrative, Russia was not only uncivilized and inferior, but Catherine was as well.

Russia as a “Measuring Stick” In English Periodicals

An interesting method used in British newspapers to weaponize preconceptions of Russian backwardness and inferiority was demonstrated during the shift that took place in opinions about Catherine when she enrolled Russia as a member of the League of Armed Neutrality. Catherine was beginning to suffer a poor image for the first time in British newspapers since her rise to the throne, however British periodicals did not attack Catherine as harshly yet in this timeframe, at least when compared to news articles that were published when she embarked on her later foreign conflicts. British newspapers during the time of the League of

¹⁶⁴ "National Affairs for August 1792," *English Review* (London), August 1792

Armed Neutrality did not condemn the empress for her violence or tyranny in a widespread manner, but they did demonstrate a loss of support for Catherine as a friend to the British. One of the ways this shift was visible was in the manner that British newspapers continued to compliment aspects of Catherine's reign, like her patronage of the arts and literature, but did so with remarks that alluded to Russian inferiority.

In 1781, the *Gentleman's Magazine* printed proceedings of the then-present Parliament in which its members ridiculed Russia, the county which only a few years prior British newspapers consistently emphasized the friendship that existed between it and England. Charles James Fox, the Secretary of State, made a point that although Catherine and George III ascended to their respective thrones around the same time, their reigns had been very different because Russia rose rapidly to its present eminence while Britain was lagging behind Catherine's empire. Afterward, Fox, "Glanced as if Russia was not in the very best humor; and asked if the ministry was sure the war with Holland might not draw other more formidable powers to league against us."¹⁶⁵ These comments by Mr. Fox were a double-edged sword that complimented Russia's progress, but also asserted that the Russian empire was not yet a formidable power. As well, Fox hinted at the scenario of Britain falling behind Russia as an issue, almost as though it should not be allowed. The following year, the *Gentleman's Magazine* printed another article that examined the progress of Russia from a state of weakness and barbarism to a civilization in a might state, describing the shift as a "general shock" to the whole political system of Europe and to the world.¹⁶⁶ This information was contrasted in the article with the image of a crumbling Britain

¹⁶⁵ "Summary of the Proceedings of the Present Parliament," *Gentleman's Magazine* (London), November 1781.

¹⁶⁶ "Miscellaneous Observations, Historical, Memorable, and Political," *The Gentleman's Magazine* (London), January 1782.

that was losing its territories and influence. While Catherine helped lead Russia toward progress, a positive aspect of her reign that British periodicals applauded, it was almost shocking to British newspapers that a nation that was uncivilized for so long was taking greater strides towards advancement than England. British newspapers reassured their audiences that Catherine's Russia was still inferior, however the threat of a lesser nation surpassing England was insulting or alarming as reflected in British periodicals.

Articles in British newspapers continued to both compliment Russia and pull it apart even after the League of Armed Neutrality ceased to exist. The *English Review* in 1787 wrote about the rapid progress of Russia in becoming cultured, along with its immense territories that expanded beyond those of the Roman Empire. The kind praise directed toward Catherine's empire did not extend beyond those remarks because the newspaper affirmed that England and France were still Europe's most "prominent" powers and that Russian advancement was only temporary as it was destined to fail.¹⁶⁷ The *English Review* in 1789 later asserted that Russia would never be a formidable rival but could potentially have use as an ally. The article claimed that Russia specifically had little chance of becoming a great maritime power because Russians were believed to have a "natural aversion" to the sea, hence why foreigners manned its fleets.¹⁶⁸ Russian culture was also attacked in the *Gentleman's Magazine* when it commended Catherine as a patroness of history on account of her orders for increased printing of historical books, but the compliment fell short when the author criticized England for not taking the same initiative: "Britain, a country from its wealth, free government, and superior abilities of its natives, entitled to take the lead of most countries, is here about a century behind all; nay yields to Russia, a

¹⁶⁷ "National Affairs for January 1787," *English Review* (London), January 1787.

¹⁶⁸ "National Affairs for November 1789," *English Review* (London), November 1789.

country where literature was unknown till the present century!”¹⁶⁹ Although Russia was praised in some aspects, British newspapers still found fault with many aspects of Catherine’s empire, like its government, military, and culture when the empress was starting to become unpopular in its articles.

Perceptions of Russian backwardness in British newspapers were used against Catherine rather than for her beginning around the time she declared armed neutrality and lasted for years after. In these articles, the Russian nation was portrayed as inferior, a view that reflected poorly on Catherine as a monarch. These ambiguous comments revealed a deteriorating image of Catherinian Russia while simultaneously exposing the insecurities some individuals felt about Britain, like its lack of progress. Russia in a sense can be compared to a “measuring stick” in newspapers as articles simultaneously assured British audiences of Russian inferiority but also to made readers aware of Britain’s own shortcomings.

American Views of Russian Serfdom

British periodicals manipulated perceptions of Russian inferiority to work in Catherine’s favor, but also against her. American newspapers also did the same as their British counterparts, and similar to how British periodicals used ambiguous commentary to demean the image of Catherinian Russia, American newspapers had their own method of denigrating Russians to attack Catherine further. One of the most striking ways American periodicals condemned Catherine when she was unpopular was to compare her subjects to slaves.

A number of newspapers in the U.S. equated Russians to slaves, sometimes even including the nobility in these assertions. Many of these remarks appeared when Catherine

¹⁶⁹ “On the Cultivation of Our Natural History,” *Gentleman’s Magazine* (London), June 1788.

embarked on her second Turkish campaign beginning in 1787. The *New York Magazine* in 1792 painted a lengthy, disturbing image of the lives of Russians under Catherine:

“Russia is almost the only country in Europe in which the people do not enjoy a show of civil privilege, or some kind of semblance of political right. The sovereign is not only despotic, but every individual subject is a slave. The first noble of the land is the immediate slave of the Crown; and the wealth of every man in Russia solely consists in the number of slaves in which he himself possesses. Thus the lower orders of the community are in the most abject state of being to which human nature can be reduced. They are the slaves of slaves, perhaps through several degradations.”¹⁷⁰

The article in the *New York Magazine* further elaborated on the miserable lives of the Russian peasantry and claimed that while Russians were not barbarians, they were still simple-minded, had no sense of reason, and were prone to commit crimes.¹⁷¹ The dreary state of the Russian population as slaves under Catherine was incredibly harmful to the image of the empress. Furthermore, the narrative that related Russian serfdom to slavery continued to emphasize the uncivil nature of Russians, even those that were not serfs. For instance, the *Literary Museum* claimed that even Russian citizens that were freed from serfdom still retained the manners of their “primitive” state.¹⁷² American newspapers reflected views of Russian inferiority as they insisted that Russians were not only naturally backward, but also that the nation itself was lacking because of the institution of serfdom. In turn, Catherine was viewed as having played the role of a slave owner relying on outdated, inhumane practices to uphold her empire.

¹⁷⁰ “Present State of Russia,” *New York Magazine*, May 1792.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² “Manners and Customs of the Russian Peasants,” *Literary Museum* (Philadelphia), March 1797.

It is ironic to witness American newspapers during Catherine's reign criticize the empress for the existence of slavery in her empire when chattel slavery was practiced in the U.S. at the same time. Slaves in the U.S. and Russian serfs experienced similar treatment and conditions.¹⁷³ As well, American chattel slavery and Russian serfdom as institutions developed in similar manners.¹⁷⁴ In these aspects, American slavery and Russian serfdom were similar, but one of the most striking differences between the two practices was the fact that Russian serfdom was not based on race in the manner that American slavery was.¹⁷⁵ This could potentially explain the horror with which American periodicals reacted to the conditions of white serfs in Russia. The *Aurora General Advertiser* in 1790 exemplified this idea: "The empress is said to have rewarded her victorious admiral with 2,417 peasants! It is not in Africa only where the horrors of slavery are to be commiserated."¹⁷⁶ This remark seems to only limit the atrocities of slavery to Africa, although chattel slavery existed in other parts of the world like the Americas but was not mentioned. The only real connection between slavery in Africa and Russia serfdom in terms of the remark by the *Aurora General Advertiser* was that enslaved persons could be of the same race as those that owned them. The exploration of opinions about Russian serfdom and inferiority in American newspapers in a sense also reveals fascinating emotions that existed around race and slavery in general in the U.S.

¹⁷³ William C. Hine, "American Slavery and Russian Serfdom: A Preliminary Comparison," *Phylon* 36, no. 4 (1975): 378.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 383.

¹⁷⁶ "Extract of a Letter from London, to a Mercantile House in This City, Dated August 4, 1790," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), 02 October 1790.

Conclusion

During times that Catherine was popular in Britain and the U.S., newspapers in both countries used prejudices against Russians as a people to further promote the positive opinions that existed around the empress. British and U.S. periodicals highly valued enlightenment ideas that celebrated the progress of logic and civilization. By stressing Catherine's enlightened character and policies that sought to bring knowledge and manners into backwards Russia, the czarina's image was boosted. Remarks about Catherine's "civilizing role" in periodicals usually also aligned with developments in Russia's foreign policy that British and American periodicals approved of. When Catherine acted in a manner that was not supported by British and American periodicals, like her foreign conquests, newspapers in both countries made the empress even more unpopular by associating the czarina's actions with Russian inferiority and backwardness. Catherine's wars were a result of Russian barbarity according to this negative narrative. Additionally, British and American newspapers had unique methods of manipulating preconceptions against Russians to deteriorate views of Catherine II. British newspapers emphasized Russia's inferiority in relation to England to further add insult to injury in terms of Catherine's reputation. American periodicals similarly stressed the backwardness of Catherine's empire as a result of the existence of serfdom in Russia.

CONCLUSION

Catherine II was a polarizing figure that reigned during an especially divisive period in British and American history. The empress presented the British and American reading public with a series of challenges. From the very beginning of her reign, Catherine ascended to the Russian throne on circumstances shrouded in controversy as a result of her overthrow of Peter III. Throughout her thirty-four years on the throne, the empress of Russia presented the world with greater dilemmas as she involved her empire in a number of bloody conflicts, primarily against her neighbors in the Ottoman Empire, Sweden, and Poland, even being responsible for the disappearance of Poland from the map. Catherine's domestic policies were not safe from criticism either, for instance, the controversy that surrounded the existence of serfdom which legally existed within the confines of her lands. Meanwhile, the practice had disappeared for the most part in Western Europe.¹⁷⁷ Even the czarina's sex was a complication for sceptics that were uncomfortable with Catherine who did not align with long established notions of power and gender roles in Europe. All of these circumstances of Catherine's reign sparked conversation among the British and American public, some opinions of which were well-documented in the newspapers of each country.

British newspapers from the start of Catherine's reign expressed admiration for the empress, despite circumstances they later found less agreeable about Catherine, like her sex. Periodicals in Great Britain lauded Catherine's enlightened characteristics and status as a friend to the British, which lasted through Catherine's first controversial foreign conflicts and up until she formed the League of Armed Neutrality, demonstrating that she was not the ally many

¹⁷⁷ Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History*, 15.

opinions in periodicals asserted that she was. Views of the empress quickly soured in British newspapers, as she was deemed as inferior as the people she ruled over. American newspapers, unlike British periodicals, were more skeptical of the empress from the moment she claimed her throne under questionable circumstances. Portrayals of Catherine, however, became more positive and attacks on Catherine's aggression disappeared when she declared armed neutrality and abided by a peaceful policy of mediation during the American War of Independence. Yet, just as quickly as British periodicals turned opinions against the czarina during the war against the American rebels, American newspapers followed suit and destroyed Catherine's good image largely when she pursued her later foreign conflicts, especially her second Turkish campaign. Although Catherine never fully recovered the image she once held before British and American newspapers started to condemn the empress on a widespread scale, there still existed conflicting emotions about czarina as some articles gave Catherine credit where it was due and complimented the empress's patronage of the arts and sciences, for instance.

Upon the examination of Catherine's portrayal in British and American newspapers throughout her reign, this study points out the importance of developments in Catherine's foreign policy in causing shifts in the portrayals of Catherine in newspapers. When Catherine's policies aligned with British or American interests, newspapers generally printed reports that favored and praised Catherine. On the other hand, when Catherine's policies were damaging to the British and American cause, her image plummeted in periodicals. Catherine's foreign policy may have caused shifts in her portrayal because of the strong beliefs and opinions the British and American public held as a result of the polarizing times these newspapers were printed in, especially during the American War for Independence and its aftermath. The British and American public were split into conflicting interests in this turbulent period, especially on debates of governments and

political rights during a time in which monarchies prevailed while revolutions, like the American Revolution and the French Revolution, challenged ideas about power and government.

Catherine's foreign policy was crucial during this time of polarization as her policy not only favored the British or the American cause, but also their core beliefs in areas like government. Therefore, shifts in Catherine's foreign policies were important in determining the opinions newspapers expressed about the empress in both countries.

Additionally, this exploration of Catherine's image illustrates the morals and preconceptions that existed in British and American periodicals regarding certain aspects of Catherine's rule. British and American newspapers divided Catherine's achievements and traits to better justify or criticize the empress, demonstrating manners in which individuals in both countries came to terms with female rule. Similarly, preconceptions about Russians as inferior were similarly manipulated to praise Catherine at times for her role as a civilizing force and to attack Catherine for her leadership of a backward country. Thus, the reactions of British and American periodicals to such a fascinating, polarizing figure like the empress is worth examining to grasp a better idea of the conversations, values, and prejudices that existed in each country during the mid- to late- eighteenth century.

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