Contents

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Introduction

Empress Catherine II produced a body of written material so vast and diverse that it seems impossible to provide a general characterization of the works contained in the authoritative twelve-volume collection assembled by A. N. Pypin from handwritten source material. This book does not attempt an all-embracing review of Catherine's entire literary output, which consists of works in multiple genres and languages. The Russian empress's writings have been the repeated subject of serious analysis for nineteenth- and twentieth-century researchers; all of these in one way or another demonstrate that across a variety of genres and formats, with a greater or lesser degree of independence and originality, the literary works of Catherine II always express her politics and ideology. These texts were carefully prepared, their publications and stage productions executed magnificently. As a rule, the most significant works were translated into French, German, and, in some cases, English. European readers, as well as the Russian public, were expected to be attentive witnesses to, and happy consumers of, the monarch's compositions. Amongst rulers, the literary productivity of the Russian empress has no analogue in history.[1] The number, diversity, and degree

1 In addition to her literary texts, Catherine was the author of a huge epistolary corpus; see detailed examinations of her private letters in Kelsey Rubin-Detlev's *The Epistolary Art of Catherine the Great* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019).

of originality of her works even that of Prussian emperor Frederick the Great, although his experience of court cooperation with the intellectual elite (in particular, the invitation of Voltaire to the court) obviously influenced her and, like Frederick, the empress endeavored to surround herself with philosophical celebrities.

At the same time, Catherine constantly stressed the frivolous, amateurish, entertaining nature of her writing; her letters to European friends always contain the rhetorical formula: "I write for my own pleasure":

> As for my works, I look at them as a trifle. I love doing experiments of all sorts, but it seems that everything written by me is rather mediocre, therefore, apart from entertainment, I did not attach any importance to it.[2]

The empress's "confession" follows the fashion in the period for addressing even the most serious issues in an ironic, playful, or amusing form. The empress quickly mastered the main thesis of her European correspondents who conceptualized the Enlightenment not as the sum of proclaimed doctrines and philosophical ideas, but as the form and nature of intellectual activity itself.[3] Catherine wanted to be an equal among her friends in Europe's philosophical elite, a full member of the "république des letteres,"[4] which judged the quality of any intellectual product according to its literary form, style, and manner. It was a kind of game. Within Russia, Catherine's works offered didactic, political directives in a humorous guise, delivered on behalf of abstract power. For the external, that is, foreign reader, she demonstrated the subtle, artistic, imaginary nature of this power, and, consequently, that she belonged to the European "republic of letters." Politics, philosophy, and ideology were supposed to wear literary clothing, and the Russian empress kept in step with European literary trends. From the beginning, then, the empress discussed her literary experiences in the most detailed manner (and almost exclusively) with her European friends.

Catherine II wrote for the theater most of all—comedies, comic operas, and historical plays. These theatrical performances presented Russia (and, of course,

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2 *Correspondance originelle et très intéressante de l'Impératrice de Russie Catherine II avec le chevalier de Zimmermann* (Brême and Zurich: M. H. Marcard, 1808), 378. Hereinafter, all translations, except where expressly stated, are mine—V. P.

3 Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 14.

4 Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

the Russian court) as an integral domain within the European cultural space and emphasized decidedly European values. Catherine's plays, luxuriously staged and accompanied by first-class music, turned Petersburg and the court itself into an aesthetic object. This theatrical splendor—in addition to its ideological and political meaning—served to announce that a new, enlightened, power was seeking to model the cultural space of its capital on European conventions.

The philosophy of laughter occupied a special place in Enlightenment culture, and key among the qualities of "Enlightenment Man" were particular attitudes towards laughter, wit, and satire. Counting herself amongst them, Catherine produced numerous comedies, comic operas, and satirical prose essays like "The Secret of the Anti-Absurd Society" ("*Тайна противо-нелепого общества*"), "The Daily Note of the Society of Ignorant Members" ("*Общества незнающих ежедневная записка*"), "The Truths and Fables" ("Были и небылицы"). Civilized advancement, in her view, was directly proportional to a tolerance of satirical ridicule, and the ability to make a joke became the mark of a member of the Enlightened community. Laughter had to perform many functions, correcting bad manners, uprooting ignorance, and even adjusting bad politics. The choice of the character of "laughter"—burlesque, parodic, gallant, or didactic—was closely linked with pressing political tasks (which I discuss in chapter 2).

Catherine's fairy tales, written at the peak of her conflict with Nikita Panin in 1781–82, made use of popular oriental motifs to turn her narratives into political and polemical texts in which real prototypes within the Russian court were legible in the actions of fairy-tale khans (which I analyze in chapter 3).

The empress's literary activity was also tasked with re-establishing the geographic boundaries of European culture. As Larry Wolff rightly observes, it was during the Age of Enlightenment that the mental-geographical division between Western and Eastern Europe took place, establishing invisible borders running somewhere between Prussia and Poland.[5]

Preceding Catherine's rule, Russia had almost always been interpreted as a barbaric and backward anti-civilization. When the French abbot Chappe d'Auteroche (1722–1769) published *A Journey into Siberia, Made by Order of the King of France* (1768), conflating Siberia with the whole of the Russian Empire and depicting Russia as a cluster of endless snowy plains, the empress replied with a two-volume folio she wrote in French and published pseudonymously as a young and educated Russian author. The very title of her

5 Larry Wolf, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 20–21.

book—*Antidote*—indicates that it was intended to be a "remedy" to distorted, "Western" understandings of the country (on which I elaborate in chapter 1).

It is significant that Catherine consciously filled her works with geographical points of reference, marked "unplowed" country with cultural and literary furrows, and outlined the completely new territory of "freedom of speech" (I explore this in greater detail in chapter 4). With her pen, she created a civilized landscape for the empire—an imaginary, mental, with little relationship to real space and time. Her first work was a group-effort translation of the philosophical and political novel *Belisarius* (*Le Bélisaire*) by J. F. Marmontel. The empress worked on the crucial ninth chapter with a team of twelve participants during her 1767 voyage on the Volga. The publication, which came out in 1768, has a significant "topographical" aspect in its title—*Velizer, the work of Monsieur Marmontel, member of the French Academy, translated on the Volga*.

The early comedies of 1772 also feature an important supplement to their titles: "composed in Yaroslavl." Catherine sought to renovate Russian cultural space, making it part of European civilization by inserting Russian toponyms into her literary works. Siberia, the focus of her polemical *Antidote*, became a vital topic of discussion and reconceptualization, and Catherine's 1786 comedy *The Siberian Shaman* (*Шаман Сибирский*) reflects the newfangled European preoccupation with "magnetism," freemasonry, and healing.

By the late 1780s, Siberian shamanism was no longer regarded as an exotic phenomenon of barbaric Russian life, as it had been in the abbot Chappe's travelogue, but was used on European stages to satirize fashionable European salons. Siberia and its shamans stood for changing European attitudes. Conversely, Russia, as represented by G. R. Derzhavin's image of Catherine as the "Minerva among the thrones" in his ode "On Happiness" ("На Счастие"), was championed as the sole defender of reason in the chaos of post-Enlightenment Europe (chapter 5). Voltaire noted this subtle mental and geographical reconceptualization in a letter to Catherine requesting a translation of her own play: "I have asked Your Majesty before for cedars from Siberia; now I dare to ask for a comedy from Petersburg."[6] The Swiss philosopher, writer, and physician Johann Georg Ritter von Zimmerman summed up this shift in cultural and political paradigm, writing to Catherine that "Nowadays the Enlightenment is coming to us from the banks of the Neva."[7]

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6 W. F. Reddaway, ed., *Documents of Catherine the Great: The Correspondence with Voltaire and the Instruction of 1767 in the English Text of 1768* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1971), 169.

7 *Correspondance originelle et très intéressante de l'Impératrice de Russie Catherine II avec le chevalier de Zimmermann*, 328. Letter from February 15, 1786.

The reorganization of mental-geographic spaces also required a sort of conquest of the historical past. Catherine composed historical chronicles, primarily *The Initial Administration of Oleg* (Начальное управление Олега), which "restored" Russia's relationship with the "cradle of humanity," Hellenic Greece, and with it the legacies of Byzantium and Rome.

Roman motifs appeared quite clearly in the scenery of *Oleg*'s 1790 performance, captured in the illustrations by A. N. Olenin that adorn the lavish print edition of the tragedy. The entire Greco-Roman national project developed in parallel with the actual annexation of the Crimea-Tauris and was meant to emphasize the successes of Russia's colonial politics and to solidify the claim of Russia-Rus' to the Byzantine-Roman cultural heritage (chapter 6).

If Catherine's policy had the transfer of imperial power to Russia, a kind of *translatio imperii*, as its strategic goal, then the literary and cultural accomplishments of the empress had to establish a *translatio studii*, that is, the transfer of the Roman cultural paradigm, knowledge, and civilization onto Russian soil. This book will be devoted to an analysis of these paradigms as they emerged between Catherine II's creations on the page and in the empire itself.

1

The Landscape of the Empire: The *Antidote* of Catherine II, or the Borders of European Civilization

> The Russians at the beginning of this century still lived withdrawn into their country's borders having no relations with civilized Europe, and very few people even knew that there were rude and ignorant people living there on the frosty spaces. The current influence of Russia on the policy of Europe makes obvious the benefit that can be gained from getting acquainted with this people and the country they inhabit.
>
> —Jean-Baptiste Chappe d'Auteroche, *A Journey into Siberia*, 1768

> I love the still unplowed countries. Believe me, they are the greatest. I have told you a thousand times that I am fit only for Russia.
>
> —Catherine II to Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, November 17, 1777

The book *Antidote* has been attributed to several authors, but first and foremost to Catherine II. Written in French and published anonymously in 1770 without any indication of place of publication, it has been the repeated object of serious examination.[1] This enormous volume was, quite simply, a rebuttal to *A Journey*

1 A. Lortholary, *Le Mirage Russe en France au XVIII-e siècle* (Paris: Éditions contemporaines, Boivin, 1951), 191–197; A. Monnier, "Catherine II pamphlétaire: *l'Antidote*," in *Catherine II et l' Europe*, ed. Anita Davidenkoff (Paris: Insitut d'Etudes Slaves, 1997), 53–60; M. Mervaud,

into Siberia, Made by Order of the King of France, composed in French by Jean-Baptiste Chappe d'Auteroche (1722–1769). Chappe d'Auteroche made his fifteen-month trip to Russia in 1761–62, spending only seven months in Siberia and the rest of the time in St. Petersburg. The occasion for the visit of the abbot and astronomer of France's Royal Academy of Sciences was the observation and description of a rare phenomenon—the transit of Venus across the Sun, which took place on May 26, 1761.

Chappe d'Auteroche left Russia in May 1762, just a few weeks before Catherine II came to power. Publishing the book six years later, the abbot intermixed temporal, geographical, and social boundaries. The book depicts not only Elizabeth's and Peter III's regime, of which the author was a direct witness, but also Catherine's reign (until 1767). Considering different periods of Russian history as a single, unified "despotic" rule in terms of Montesquieu's popular theory, *A Journey into Siberia* combines the philosophical concept with apparent political stratagems.

Russia as Siberia: Beyond the Boundaries of Civilization

An opulently printed folio conditioned readers of *A Journey into Siberia* to expect descriptions of distant and exotic places and peoples. However, the book implies that it is an exploration of the *whole* of Russian society. The everyday life of Siberian peasants, a highly specific and diminishing group, is given to represent the general, national features of *all Russians*. In other words, Siberia is Russia, and vice versa. Chappe d'Auteroche describes in detail the beginning of his journey in Poland up to the description of Riga, but drops practically all details of his voyage through European Russia. In accord with the generally accepted view, the traveler ceases to perceive any traces of civilization as soon as he departed Riga which, before the conquest of Peter I, belonged to the Swedes as the author does not fail to mention. Neither St. Petersburg nor Moscow receive any particular attention from the French traveler. Moreover, even when

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"L'envers du 'mirage russe': Deleyer et Chappe d' Auteroche," *Revue des études slaves* 70, no. 4 (1998): 837–850. See also: H. Carrère d'Encausse, *L'Impératrice et l'Abbé. Un duel littéraire indédit entre Catherine II et l'Abbé Chappe d'Auteroche* (Paris: Fayard, 2003), 11–66; as well as M. Mervaud's extensive article in Chappe d' Auteroche, *Voyage en Sibérie fait par ordre du roi en 1761*, ed. M. Mervaud (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2004), 1–122; M. Levitt, *Early Modern Russian Letters: Texts and Contexts. Selected Essays* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009), 339–357.

the abbot gives sporadic and cursory depictions of some lands in the European part of Russia, he regards them as parts of Siberia. Thus, roving through towns on the Volga River, the abbot meets only "sledges coming from Siberia."[2] Lost in his sleigh somewhere in the outskirts of Nizhny Novgorod, the traveler finds himself "alone in one of the darkest nights,"[3] one thousand four hundred miles away from the motherland, "in the midst of the frosts and snows of Siberia, with the images of hunger and thirst before me, to which I was likely to be exposed."[4]

The abbot did not open his notebooks until he had passed beyond the Urals. The Russia that appeared to European readers on the page was not its Europeanized façade, but an uncivilized, almost savage, backyard. *A Journey into Siberia* depicts Russia as semi-barbaric, buried beneath the impassable snows of Siberia. To prove it, there are drawings by the talented French painter Jean-Baptiste Le Prince of, for example, male and female peasants being whipped, and some striking pictures of men, women, and children bathing collectively.

One allegorical image stands alone among Jean-Baptiste Le Prince's expressive, quite naturalistic work. It features two fashionable, gallant ladies, who symbolize France and Austria. Embodying the triumph of civilization and civility, almost indistinguishable notions at that time, both ladies look with polite astonishment at a female figure, who symbolizes Russia, standing nearby. The woman is dressed in a barbaric fur coat that is belted with a rope, and holds an ax in her hands. Such is the political and ideological design of the volume; Russia has entered the arena of European life, but in barbaric, uncivilized dress. Chappe d'Auteroche's book establishes the borders of civilization along the banks of the Neman, its eastern shore representing, for Europeans, Russia as Siberia—a medieval country devoid of any capacity for civilization.[5]

> While describing the mostly peasant life of the peoples of Siberia, the abbot Chappe claims to provide his readers with a comprehensive, broad, account of all Russians. The abbot-astronomer was heir to a philosophical generalization quite typical of the Enlightenment. He tried to interpret diverse phenomena, the "chaos" of everyday life, with a single bold stroke.

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2 Abbé Chappe d'Auteroche, *A Journey into Siberia, Made by Order of the King of France* (London: T. Jefferys, 1770), 40.

3 Ibid., 46.

4 Ibid.

5 Nevertheless, Poland, allegorically depicted in the same picture as a female figure dressed as a peasant girl, with a male Sarmatian shaven head and a forelock, also looked beyond civilization.

> He attempted to measure them with a simple ruler and adjust a variety of facts to fit a single concept—a kind of neo-classical unity of action, place, and time.[6] In his book, the author avows knowledge of virtually all aspects of Russian life—the army and navy, finance and taxes, religion and education, demography, and geography—and insists that he has thoroughly analyzed, measured, and assessed them all. Nevertheless, the abbot's profession of such complete understanding of Russia raised doubts among the book's first readers.

The lonely traveler rushes in his carriage through monotonous snowy plains, and in front of him different characters arise to symbolize specific "vices," a priori inherent in all Russians who do not have, according to the abbot, any chance to be reformed or to reform their government. Their depraved customs (violence, drunkenness, immorality, prejudices), as well as a terrible, barbaric way of life, inevitably, according to the author, reproduce one and the same "despotic" political regime in Russia. The abbot, the scientist, however, does not limit his enumeration of Russian customs only to fundamentally ethnographic descriptions. He supplements Montesquieu's concept of despotism with his own extravagant theory based on his own "calculations." Mechanically connecting physiology, medicine, psychology, climatology, and the political typology of Montesquieu, the abbot Chappe comes to a particularly striking and extravagant conclusion about the defectiveness of Russian "nervous juice,"[7] or, rather, its "inflexibility" and "immobility" arising from the predominance of a flat landscape. This deficiency of a "nervous juice" (translated literally from the expression "le suc nerveux" in the original French text)[8] is held to result in eternal political apathy, making it impossible to liberate the Russian peasantry from slavery and Russian society from despotism.

While the abbot presents his huge folio—bulging with maps, exquisite illustrations, and various measurements and calculations—as a scientifically verified overview of the whole of Russia, it reads more like a verdict. Centuries of oppressive rule have rendered the nation barbaric and devoid of any

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6 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, 289.

7 Abbé Chappe d'Auteroche, *A Journey into Siberia*, 323.

8 "On conclut aisément de ce qui a été dit, que les Russes doivent avoir un suc nerveux grossier, sans jeu et sans activité, plus propre à former des tempreraments vigoureux que des hommes de génie" (Chappe d'Auteroche, *Voyage en Sibérie fait par ordre du roi en 1761* [2004], 437). For the origin of the term, see: Jules Soury, *Le système nerveux central ; structure et fonctions; histoire critique des théories et des doctrines* (Paris: G. Carré & Naud, 1899), 451–453.

prospects for civilizational advancement. By including numerous diagrams and calculations (taken secondhand, as critics noticed) the author of *Journey to Siberia* strives to create the impression of a scientific work and to undergird his theory with a material basis.

Ultimately, the abbot's book demonstrates the failings of Enlightenment method when taken to its logical limit. It reveals a fundamental contradiction. While maintaining that it is based on the observation of particulars and specifics, Enlightenment doctrine in fact relies on the *Ideal Pattern*, that is, the abstractions of Reason, the Idea, and the Concept. Any deviation from the *Ideal Pattern* can only mean barbarism, imperfection. The Enlightenment does not take into account the details or particulars of historical context. It was, however, a number of years before Johann Gottfried von Herder argued that different cultures do not share a universal origin and leveled criticism at the Enlightenment's neglect of the individuality of a nation's spirit.

Yet, despite its tendency to generalize, *A Journey into Siberia* departs from its Enlightenment patterns of thought from time to time. While the abbot unexpectedly compliments Catherine—"Happy the nation, if sensible of the blessing of being governed by such a prince"[9]—he creates such a grim picture of a tyrannical, slavish country, that the high assessment of Catherine looks more like sarcasm: "This people, thus oppressed by slavery, is now governed by the empress of *Anhalt-Zerbst; a woman of an extensive genius, who is sensible of the defect of such a kind of government, and is wholly employed in reforming it.*"[10] Referring to the Russian empress by her maiden name, and thereby to her connection with the supernumerary German court, is especially offensive in the context of his general presentation of the country as despotic and beyond reform.

Chappe's book was written for the European reader as there was not yet a suitable audience for such a book in Russia. Not by chance, Catherine II was practically the only interested reader capable of giving a critical evaluation of it. According to later circulating gossip, the empress first turned to a specialist in Siberia, Gerhard Friedrich Müller, and to historian Ivan Boltin for help. In 1836, Alexander Pushkin, while drafting an article on this controversy, remarked: "In 1768, the abbot published his notes of the journey, which with its reckless and frivolous remarks severely offended Catherine, and she ordered Miller and

9 Ibid., 278.
10 Ibid. My italics—V. P.

Boltin to answer the abbot."[11] Rather than waiting for a long-delayed response from the academicians, Catherine herself took up the pen. A huge two-volume book written in French under the title *Antidote, ou Examen d'un mauvais livre superbement imprimé, intitulé Voyage en Sibérie* was her response.[12]

Top Secret, or How the Antidote Was Made

Count Louis-Philippe Ségur, a French diplomat at Catherine's court in 1785–1789 confidently writes of Catherine's authorship of *Antidote* in his memoirs. Ségur was well informed about the literary enterprises of the empress, having taken part in some of them, and during all the years of his stay in Russia he was in the circle of her permanent companions. Writing about her controversy with Chappe, Ségur attributed, without a shadow of doubt, the authorship of the book to the empress:

> When the Abbot Chappe, in his *Journey to Siberia*, expressed malicious slanders against the morals of the Russian people and the reign of Catherine, she denied it in the book published under the title *Antidote*.[13]

Ségur's confidence was most likely based on conversations regarding the empress. It is also possible that the French diplomat had been sent to St. Petersburg to establish relations with the Russian court and could have possessed secret knowledge. In 1837, Eugene Bolkhovitinov asserted that Catherine was author of the *Antidote* in his *Dictionary of Russian Secular Writers*,[14] relying, like Pushkin's unfinished 1836 note, on gossip. A. N. Pypin, who thoroughly examined Catherine's manuscripts, convincingly demonstrated Catherine's participation not only in the strategic planning but also in the composition of the book. Some fragments of the *Antidote* are autobiographical in nature and could have been recounted only by the empress herself. They are filled with personal

11 A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 16 tomakh* (Moscow-Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1949), 12:207.

12 The book first appeared in 1770 without indicating the author and place of publication (presumably, St. Petersburg). The second edition, also anonymous, came out in 1771–1772 in Amsterdam.

13 Yu. A. Limonov, *Rossiia XVIII v. glazami inostrantsev* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1989), 323.

14 E. Bolkhovitinov, *Slovar' russkikh svetskikh pisatelei* (Moscow: V Universitetskoi tip., 1845): 1:208.

facts, such as a detailed account of the death of Elizabeth, the first day of the reign of her husband Peter III, and her first trip to Kazan in 1767. Analyzing common mistakes in French (which the young Count A. P. Shuvalov probably did not dare to correct every time), repeated turns of phrase, the extremely annoyed tone of the book, as well as the specific nature of the shaping of the manuscript by Catherine's state secretary G. V. Kozitskii, Pypin was convinced that the empress was directly involved in the process of writing this rebuke.[15]

However, there is no question that two extremely qualified assistants helped Catherine in this venture—the already mentioned A. P. Shuvalov and G. V. Kozitskii. The first was a young author of French poetry and disciple of Voltaire. He belonged to the most intimate circle of the empress and contributed to the translation of J. F. Marmontel's *Belisarius*, as well as to Catherine's magazine *All Sorts* (Всякая всячина). He was in charge of correcting Catherine's French texts at that time. The second aid was G. V. Kozitskii, Catherine's state secretary, the editor of her literary works, and a contributor to all of her outlets for literature and translation at the time. A leading scholar of eighteenth-century literature, V. P. Stepanov assumes that the work of assistants had a rather technical character (the compilation and verification of materials, the editing and copying of the final text, the supervision of the *Antidote*'s printing).[16]

The preparation of the book was conducted in extreme secrecy. The circumstances of writing were hidden even from those from whom the empress originally, rather imprudently in an outburst of emotion, requested assistance—for example, the famous St. Petersburg sculptor Etienne Falconet. In a letter to the empress written on November 9, 1769, Falconet mentioned their recent conversation about the abbot's book and a future response to the "slander":

> Your Majesty had the kindness to talk with me about the book by the abbot Chappe and about the most appropriate way to respond. Every day I hear accusations of this book's light-mindedness and lies. But the book earns only contempt and, therefore, does not deserve a formal rebuttal. However, it would undoubtedly not be wrong to expose the false slanders of the author in some work, which would not look like publishing with the purpose of refutation but would circulate all around. That was

15 A. N. Pypin, "Kto byl avtorom Antidota," in *Sochineniia imperatritsy Ekateriny II na osnovanii podlinnykh rukopisei s ob"iasnitel'nymi primechaniiami akademika A. N. Pypina* (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskaia Akademiia nauk, 1901), 7:i–lvi.

16 V. P. Stepanov, "G. V. Kozitskii," in *Slovar' russkikh pisatelei XVIII veka*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1999).

> my opinion when Your Majesty told me that. If I were a literary man, I would have asked for permission, and the response could be made in my correspondence with Diderot.[17]

Falconet offered Catherine the assistance of one Mr. Girard, a physician and an acquaintance of Diderot living in St. Petersburg, who composed his own history of modern Russia: "This brief history of Russia, I think, could answer much better than a direct refutation of the calumnies against Russia (besides, Girard is very unhappy with the abbot's book)."[18] Catherine replied to Falconet immediately, her letter is marked with the same date as Falconet's request: "I despise the Abbot Chappe and his book, and I do not consider him worthy of refutation, because all the stupidities he told will fall of themselves."[19]

Although Catherine declared that she "despised" Chappe's book and that she saw absolutely no need to respond to it, she was already working intensively on a retort. She did not follow the advice of Falconet, and her *Antidote* was specifically devoted to analysis of the abbot's book without "random" pretexts or beating about the bush. Catherine was so wounded by *Journey to Siberia* that she considered it necessary to bring full-scale war to her enemy. She took up her pen despite the obvious risk of appearing ridiculous if was revealed that she—an empress—had been provoked enough to respond to an "insignificant" man.

After the release of the *Antidote*, readers argued about the authorship of this anonymous book in the salons of Paris. Falconet, in a letter to the empress of 29 May 1771, passed on rumors about his own involvement in the composition and even asked Catherine to send a copy of the text:

> Diderot praises the *Antidote* against the lies of the abbot Chappe as well. In Paris, they think that I'm the author of this work, which I have not even seen, despite of my searches. I dare at least to beg Your Almighty Majesty to summon the copy of this book for my use, in turn, to get acquainted with the book, which has been attributed to me by mistake.[20]

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17 Catherine II, "Perepiska Imperatritsy Ekateriny II s Falkonetom," in *Sbornik imperatorskogo russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva* [1876], 140 vols, ed. Ia. Grot (St. Petersburg: Tip. Imperatorkoi Akademii nauk), 17:93–94; see also: Etienne Falconet, *Correspondence avec Catherine II. 1767–1778* (Paris: E. Champion, 1921), 108.

18 "Perepiska Imperatritsy Ekateriny II s Falkonetom," 17:94; see also: E. Falconet, *Correspondence de Falconet avec Catherine II. 1767-1778*, ed. L. Réau. Paris: E. Champion, 1921), 108.

19 *Sbornik imperatorskogo russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva* [1876], 17:95.

20 Falconet, *Correspondence de Falconet avec Catherine II*, 129.