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# The Enlightenment of Anna Labzina: Gender, Faith, and Public Life in Catherinian and Alexandrian Russia

Gary Marker

In recent years the historiography of Catherinian Russia has made small but perceptible strides toward engendering or at least toward discussing women as historical subjects outside the specific context of the household. Beginning with Brenda Meehan's 1976 article "Catherine the Great and the Problem of Female Rule," most attention has focused, appropriately, on female rule and the question of how a patriarchal culture accommodated itself to the preponderance of female rulers in the last three-quarters of the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> In the interim, several scholars have had occasion to expand upon this theme, and yet most would agree that much remains to be explored on this topic.<sup>2</sup>

Meehan subsequently opened up a second front by examining convents and women's religious communities, arguing in essence that for many displaced nuns and lay women these communities constituted an alternative to domesticity, a way of achieving independence by serving God while in the exclusive company of other women.<sup>3</sup> Adele Lindenmeyr's book on institutions of charity in imperial Russia makes a similar point: in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the nexus of charity and religious self-sacrifice constituted virtually the only extra-domestic outlet (ex-

1. Brenda Meehan-Waters, "Catherine the Great and the Problem of Female Rule," *Russian Review* 34 (July 1976): 293–307.

2. See, for example, David Griffiths, "Catherine II and the Problem of Female Sovereignty" (paper, American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Honolulu, November 1993); Barbara T. Norton, "Historical Assessments of Russia's Eighteenth-Century Female Monarchs" (paper presented at the conference "New Understandings of the Experience of Women," Moscow, May 1994); Jehanne M. Gheith, "Introduction" to Kyril Fitzlyon, trans. and ed., *The Memoirs of Princess Dashkova* (Durham, 1995), 8–13; A. I. Iukht, *Ekaterina II i ee okruzhenie* (Moscow, 1996), esp. 118–278; Richard Wortman, "The Russian Empress as Mother," in David Ransel, ed., *The Family in Imperial Russia: New Lines of Historical Research* (Urbana, 1978), 61–63; Karen Rasmussen, "Catherine II and the Image of Peter I," *Slavic Review* 37, no. 1 (March 1978): 51–69; James Cracraft, "Great Catherine," *Slavic Review* 52, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 115; John T. Alexander, *Catherine the Great, Life and Legend* (New York, 1989), 62–65 and elsewhere. See, also, Lindsey Hughes, "Peter the Great's Two Weddings: Changing Images of Women in a Transitional Age," in Rosalind Marsh, ed., *Women in Russia and Ukraine* (Cambridge, Eng., 1996), 31–41 and, for a somewhat more popular narrative, Evgenii Anisimov, *Zhenshchiny na rossiiskom prestole* (St. Petersburg, 1997), 277–398.

3. Brenda Meehan, *Holy Women of Russia* (San Francisco, 1993); Meehan, "To Save Oneself: Russian Peasant Women and the Development of Religious Communities in Pre-revolutionary Russia," in Beatrice Farnsworth and Lynne Viola, eds., *Russian Peasant Women* (New York, 1992), 121–33; Meehan, "Popular Piety, Local Initiative and the Founding of Women's Religious Communities in Russia, 1764–1907," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1986): 117–42.

cept for singular figures such as Ekaterina Dashkova) to social or public service open to women.<sup>4</sup>

Michelle Marrese's recent dissertation has developed a third line of study, by examining women in the marketplace, specifically as buyers, sellers, and owners of property.<sup>5</sup> Much like Valerie Kivelson's and Robin Bisha's works on earlier periods, Marrese's dissertation concluded that noble women bought and sold property with increased frequency, often acting as the representative signatory for the household even when an adult male was available.<sup>6</sup>

This essay takes a highly microscopic approach to the question of women in public in Catherine's time. It offers a close reading of the memoir and diary of just one woman, Anna Evdokimovna Labzina, a provincial noblewoman who rose to considerable prominence in St. Petersburg's Masonic milieu during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It explores how she depicted her life amid prominent men of letters and whether her renderings support or challenge the prevailing scholarly image of a largely unitary Russian Enlightenment. More specifically, this paper inquires into how Labzina imagined a feminine presence, in general and for herself, within Enlightenment's realms of sociability, public activity, and civic virtue.

"The Enlightenment" survives as one of the most enduring of historical categories, denoting, in Andrzej Walicki's phraseology, "an ideology that stood for a rationalist universalism, that was antifeudal and freethinking by definition, and that set out to liberate the individual . . . by using arguments based on 'reason' and 'human nature,' which were thought to be common to all men and therefore superior to . . . superstitions sanctified by custom."<sup>7</sup> More recent scholars, however, deeply affected by Michel Foucault's antirationalism and skepticism, have challenged this comfortable model, imagining instead a more pluralist, ambiguous Enlightenment, characterized as disciplinary and repressive, the so-called dark side of formal egalitarianism and the rule of law.<sup>8</sup>

This general challenge to a unitary Enlightenment soon generated inquiry into the engendering of reason and law, specifically around the problem of "women and the public sphere," as Joan Landes termed it in her important monograph of the same name.<sup>9</sup> Embedded in this discus-

4. Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, 1996).

5. Michelle Lamarche Marrese, "A Woman's Kingdom: Women and the Control of Property in Russia, 1700–1861" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1995).

6. Robin Bisha, "The Promise of Patriarchy: Marriage in Eighteenth-Century Russia" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1993); Valerie A. Kivelson, "The Effects of Partible Inheritance: Gentry Families and the State in Muscovy," *Russian Review* 53 (April 1994): 197–212.

7. Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford, 1979), 35.

8. Jan Goldstein, "Framing Discipline with Law: Problems and Promises of the Liberal State," *American Historical Review* 98, no. 2 (April 1993): 366–67.

9. Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, 1988).

sion has been a controversy over the very meaning of “public sphere”: is it a structure, as Jürgen Habermas would have it, a “theater for debating,” an “arena in which private persons deliberated about public matters”?<sup>10</sup> Or, is “public” an intertextual category, less a concrete space than a claim made for privileging certain discourses as being participatory and free from the constraints of the state and domesticity? By extension, does “feminine presence” mean the specific participation of women, as Landes or Mary Ryan maintain, or does it suggest something textual, that is, a category within “the public” that is deemed somehow “feminine”?<sup>11</sup>

To date there have been rather few attempts to transpose these debates to eighteenth-century Russia; most of the literature holds firm in the belief that the Russian Enlightenment was simpler and more transparent, an uncomplicated blend of official utilitarianism and individualist sentimentality. In Nicholas Riasanovsky’s words, “Russian government and society followed the path of the Enlightenment in a remarkably united, conscious, and in many ways successful manner.”<sup>12</sup> Even Marc Raeff, who in recent years has come to stress the affective quality of Russian thought, in the end sees these various strains fitting into a coherent whole. “Russia’s educated elite . . . found themselves closer to the German *Aufklärung* than to the French *Lumières*, and we should speak of an ‘enlightenment of the heart’ as their most characteristic ingredient. This gave a more emotional tinge to the ethical goals they pursued in their efforts at a ‘Transfiguration’ of Russia and of its people.”<sup>13</sup>

Labzina’s memoir and diary convey both “consciousness” and “heart,” in abundance and with poignancy. In the process they offer a running commentary on the prevailing oppositions of male/female, public/private, freedom/discipline, and—most critically—faith/reason that also form the very basis of the contemporary debate over the Enlightenment. Distinctions between the private (“pertaining to intimate domestic or personal life, including sexual life”<sup>14</sup>) realm, to which she had access, and the public life of service, sociability, and print, from which she was largely excluded, constituted veritable obsessions to Labzina, defining boundaries to which she unhappily submitted. By her example, however, she subverted the irreconcilability of these oppositions and ultimately reconfigured them as paradoxes, boundaries to be blurred, if not eliminated. In a recent es-

10. Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 113, 128.

11. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, 7–13; Mary Ryan, “Gender and Public Access: Women’s Politics in Nineteenth-Century America,” in Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 261–86.

12. Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A Parting of Ways: Government and the Educated Public in Russia, 1801–1855* (Oxford, 1976), 49. Perhaps the most thoroughgoing statement of Russia’s uncomplicated Enlightenment is Hans Rogger’s, *National Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960).

13. Marc Raeff, “At the Origins of a Russian National Consciousness: Eighteenth Century Roots and Napoleonic Wars,” *Political Ideas and Institutions in Imperial Russia* (Boulder, Colo., 1994), 67.

14. Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 131.

say, Andreas Schönle has astutely remarked that patriarchy, which defined many of the boundaries that framed Labzina's world, is itself "predicated on blurring the line between private life and public order. It appeals to the warmth and intimacy of family life, in which the exercise of power is justified as a disinterested parental obligation."<sup>15</sup> Thus, Labzina's memoir in particular can be seen as part and parcel of the sentimentalism that surrounded her. But, uniquely among her contemporaries, she simultaneously observed and subverted this relationship between privacy and authority by making the personal public, the feminine powerful, and the sacred social.

An active participant in salons and literary life throughout her adult life, Labzina achieved little posthumous notoriety, and few documentary sources describe her early years other than her own memoir, which narrates her life from early childhood through most of her first marriage to Aleksandr Matveevich Karamyshev (the text breaks off some time in the late 1780s, while the marriage itself continued until her husband's death in November 1791).<sup>16</sup> Born in November 1758 into the family of Evdokim Iakovovich Iakovlev, a middling hereditary nobleman with a small estate, Labzina lived the first thirteen years of her life at home in the distant countryside around Ekaterinburg.<sup>17</sup> Most of the experiences that she described—her parents' religiosity, her first marriage, her travels, her husband's service in far away locales, and so on—are substantiated by service records and the accounts of contemporaries. Her chronology of events in the 1770s and 1780s is accurate, as is the roster of prominent acquaintances that she introduces in the text.

As best as one can determine from the spare documentation, Labzina did not omit the central transitions in her life, in contrast to other celebrated memoirists, such as Nadezhda Durova, whose *Cavalry Maiden* made no mention of the child and husband she left behind when she ran off to the cavalry. Unlike Ekaterina Dashkova's memoirs, there are no questions of provenance and authenticity. She published a fragment of one of the chapters in a journal during her lifetime (1817),<sup>18</sup> and the original manuscripts survive, bad spelling and all, in Labzina's distinctively untutored and frequently ungrammatical scrawl.<sup>19</sup> Thus, in comparison to the veritable

15. Andreas Schönle, "The Scare of the Self: Sentimentalism, Privacy, and Private Life in Russian Culture, 1780–1820," *Slavic Review* 57, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 727.

16. Mary Zirin's recent biographical entry, for example, is taken almost entirely from the published version of the memoir. See Mary Zirin, "Labzina, Anna Evdokimovna," in Marina Ledkovsky, Charlotte Rosenthal, and Mary Zirin, eds., *Dictionary of Russian Women Writers* (Westport, Conn., 1994), 355–56.

17. See her entries in Grand Price Nikolai Mikhailovich, ed., *Moskovskii nekropol'* (St. Petersburg, 1908), 2:135; and in *Russkii biograficheskii slovar'* (St. Petersburg, 1914), 10:1–2.

18. This fragment is contained in an anonymous essay entitled "Vzgliad na Sibir'" that appeared in an 1817 issue of *Sionskii vestnik*.

19. Questions of authenticity have surrounded Dashkova's memoir ever since its first appearance, primarily because there are no surviving copies in Dashkova's own hand. Scholars have long been aware of Dashkova's selective memory and her inaccurate recounting of certain events in her life. Most, though, have either passed over this issue or have concluded that the memoir is genuine. Recently, however, M. M. Safonov revived the question

handful of other women's autobiographical texts from the period, Labzina's writings seem grounded in the events of her life as we know them.

Labzina also wrote a diary over several months in 1818 and 1819, discussing her life with her second husband, Aleksandr Fedorovich Labzin, to whom she had been married since 1794. As early as the 1770s Labzina was living amid the elite of society—with her patron, Mikhail Matveevich Kherskov, her husband's patron, G. I. Potemkin, and even with the empress in Tsarskoe selo. But the association with Labzin gave her a much fuller entrée into Russian intellectual circles, journals, and literary discussions, primarily by way of Freemasonry and lay spirituality. Equally important, Freemasonry provided her with an eschatological vocabulary that framed her subsequent writings even more than sentimentalism. Both the memoir (1810) and the diary were penned during the many years with Labzin, and their tone resonates with the religiosity of Labzin's milieu, especially the Dying Sphinx Lodge, of which he served as Grand Master for many years until Masonry was banned altogether in 1822.

Douglas Smith's work, *Working the Rough Stone: Freemasonry and Society in Eighteenth Century Russia*, emphasizes the remarkable uniformity of language and ritual that seemingly spanned the range of Masonic lodges, both within Russia and without.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Masonic discourse was so homogenized that it is difficult to distinguish anything particularly Russian about their ceremonies, oaths, and spoken creeds. As Smith shows, however, Masonry was also intensely hierarchical (the system of degrees and orders), based upon presumably shared values of virtue and, ultimately, spirituality. At the pinnacle of the Masonic pyramid, or the inner circle in which presided those who had proven their greatest selflessness, charity, and devotion to service to man and God, were the Rosicrucians, known in Russia as the Moscow "Martinists." Embedded in their complex mix of ideals for human improvement was a deep, if somewhat eclectic, Christian religiosity, which, for a few took a decidedly spiritualist and even mystical direction.

Since about 1780 the Martinists had been linked above all with the name of Nikolai Novikov, Moscow's most prominent intellectual, editor, and publisher and its leading Freemason until his arrest in 1792. This was the realm in which Aleksandr Labzin's outlook was forged.<sup>21</sup> Dubbed Russia's "premier mystic" in a recent study of conservatism during the reign of Alexander I, Labzin had been a disciple and then the personal confidant of Novikov for many years, dating back to the late 1770s, and his par-

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of provenance and concluded that the text we recognize as the memoir was not, strictly speaking, composed by Dashkova. M. M. Safonov, "Ekaterina Malaia i ee 'Zapiski,'" in I. P. Palkina and D. M. Bulanin, eds., *Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova: Issledovaniia i materialy* (St. Petersburg, 1996), 13–22. Samples of the manuscript, showing Dashkova's lack of formal handwriting, were reproduced in the 1974 reprint edition.

20. Douglas Smith, *Working the Rough Stone: Freemasonry and Society in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (DeKalb, 1999).

21. Aleksandr Labzin had been a close associate of Novikov and a Martinist as early as 1780 when, as a student at Moscow University, he became a member of Novikov's Society of University Students and his Friendly Learning Society. The two of them maintained an active correspondence for many years, right up to Novikov's death in 1818. During his latter years, while confined to his estate in Avdotino, Novikov relied upon Labzin to act as his primary conduit to both officialdom and Freemasonry.

icipation in the Friendly Learning Society and the Society of University Students that Novikov and his fraternal comrade Johann Schwartz had organized in 1781. Even after Novikov's banishment and disgrace, Labzin, much like Nikolai Karamzin, refused to abandon him, even acting as his primary contact in the capital during Novikov's long semi-exile on his estate in Tikhvinskoe after his release from prison. Their lengthy correspondence, stretching over three decades, touched on matters personal and mundane, but at their heart was a shared concern for the fate of the lodges and the spiritual sustenance of the membership.<sup>22</sup>

During much of Alexander I's reign, Labzin served as the reputedly tyrannical head of Dying Sphinx, the capital's most prominent and most faith-centered lodge during the Masonic revival of the early nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Within Dying Sphinx the enduring principle of service was constructed so as to put service to God and the pursuit of grace at its center. The participants in this milieu intertwined the pursuit of good works with fidelity to the Commandments, subordinating—but not dismissing—reason to the mysteries of faith. For Labzin and his closest associates, this outlook reached its apotheosis with the establishment of the Russian Bible Society (1814–1822), the vaunted effort joined by Alexander I, the Russian Orthodox Church, and leading Masons to translate the Bible into vernacular Russian and to disseminate it widely throughout the empire.<sup>24</sup>

This blending of religiosity and public service framed the mental world within which Labzina flourished in the years of her writings. She was an instrumental and acclaimed member of the group that oversaw the religious—if un-Orthodox—journal, *Sionskii vestnik* (The messenger of Zion) in 1806, a publication whose stress on inner faith and spiritual rebirth angered the ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>25</sup> We shall never know whether she drew these values from the Alexandrian milieu of her mature years or whether they were instilled from childhood. Labzina, though, had no doubt that the source was parental. At the very outset of the memoir, she informs us that her father died when she was five years old, and in the years thereafter her upbringing fell to her passionately religious and occasionally delusional mother and to an equally pious and devoted nanny. In 1772, during her mother's last months, Labzina was married off at the

22. Much of the correspondence between Labzin and Novikov has been published in a variety of venues. See, for example, A. I. Serkov, et al., *Pis'ma Novikova* (St. Petersburg, 1994), nos. 39–42, 49–58, and 61; B. L. Modzalevskii, "K biografii N. I. Novikova: Pis'ma ego k Labzinu, Chebotarevu i dr., 1797–1815," *Russkii bibliofil*, 1913, no. 3:5–39 and no. 4: 14–52.

23. Alexander M. Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries: Russian Conservative Thought and Politics in the Reign of Alexander I* (DeKalb, 1997), 160.

24. On the Bible Society, see Judith C. Zacek, "The Russian Bible Society and the Russian Orthodox Church," *Church History* 35, no. 4 (December 1966): 411–37; I. A. Chistovich, "Ocherk iz istorii religioznogo mistitsizma v tsarstvovanie Aleksandra I," *Russkaia starina*, 1894, no. 2: 120–34; and Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, 159–67.

25. For a brief discussion of this encounter, see Judith C. Zacek, "Introduction," to A. E. Labzina, *Vospominaniia Anny Evdokimovny Labzinoi, 1758–1828* (St. Petersburg, 1914; reprint, Newtonville, Mass., 1974), iii–iv.

age of 13 to Karamyshev, a promising and outwardly impressive 28-year-old member of the so-called Siberian nobility; they remained married until his death in 1791.

Educated at the Ekaterinburg Mining School and Moscow University, Karamyshev was in many ways an example of the best that the Russian Enlightenment had to offer. Successful in his studies, he went off to Uppsala University in Sweden to study natural sciences and chemistry under Linnaeus, for whom he wrote a learned dissertation (in Latin) explaining the necessity of producing a natural history of Russia. Upon returning to Russia he pursued a distinguished career, serving in the Mining College in Irkutsk, Nerchinsk, and St. Petersburg. He was a corresponding member of both the Swedish and the Russian Academy of Sciences and the author of several serious works on mining and economics, as well as a certain amount of rather poorly regarded poetry. At one point he was a member of Potemkin's inner circle at Tsarskoe selo and in that milieu he came into contact with the empress.<sup>26</sup>

As a professional and public figure, therefore, Karamyshev embodied the most sublime qualities of Enlightened absolutism, proof positive of the virtue of teaching the provincial nobility, for whom education offered a sure path to improvement. In Marc Raeff's words, "Schooling turned out to be an essential element in [the] project of 'transfiguring' Russian man—members of the noble service class first in line. . . . Internalization was rightly deemed crucial for the new norms of productivity, polite conduct, and civilized interpersonal relations to be operative and the political and social order maintained."<sup>27</sup> Labzina's account, however, replaces the positive and civilized image of the *public* man with a far darker private one, in which Karamyshev emerged as something else: an inveterate card player, carouser, philanderer, and drunk who carried on a long term and fairly open incestuous relationship with his niece and who relished molesting young servant girls.<sup>28</sup>

About these matters, Labzina did not mince words. On incest: "We arrived in town . . . and, when everyone went away to sleep, his niece appeared and came to bed with us. Whether he seemed close to her, or whether for some other reason that I did not then understand, they sent me away to sleep under the canopy."<sup>29</sup> On philandering: "At night . . . I lay there silently, afraid to disturb my husband, when I saw him get up very quietly, come over to me, and ask whether I was sleeping. I did not answer, and, believing that I was asleep, he went into another room where a young woman lay in bed. And I saw all the abominations which he did with her!"<sup>30</sup> On

26. In addition to the sources cited elsewhere in this paper, Karamyshev's career can be followed in his entry in *Russkii biograficheskii slovar'* (St. Petersburg, 1897), 8:514–15.

27. Marc Raeff, "Transfiguration and Modernization: The Paradoxes of Social Disciplining, Pedagogical Leadership, and the Enlightenment in 18th Century Russia," *Political Ideas and Institutions in Imperial Russia*, 341.

28. The molestation of a 10-year-old girl is recounted on page 83 of the 1914 edition of Labzina, *Vospominaniia*.

29. *Ibid.*, 36.

30. *Ibid.*, 82.



child molestation: "There was a 10-year-old girl living with us who was mama's servant. . . . I was not home at the time. He lured her into the bedroom, locked the door, but he was afraid a shout might bring someone. The girl herself told her aunt everything."

Page after page recounts scenes of abuse and humiliation—indeed these scenes constitute the majority of the memoir, all of which, Labzina assures us, she bore as a this-worldly Christian martyr, with prayer, loving patience, and dogged obedience, ready to express joy at the merest sign of affection. This type of revelatory prose undermines completely the moral superiority of the public and secular and exposes their painful interventions into her own private life as little more than depraved tyranny. But she never challenges patriarchy's morality as such. The lengthy digressions about Kheraskov, for example, her longtime benefactor who stood at the intellectual center of Moscow in the 1770s, convey the multiple ways in which he carried out his fatherly oversight of her *vosпитание* (moral upbringing). Her narrative paints Kheraskov as a nurturing but complicated figure, consistent with Schönle's definition, whose overweening paternalism alternately supported and repressed Labzina as she struggled to define an identity for herself in the highly sociable household of one of the most prominent figures in Russian letters.

All of this is very interesting, not to mention eye-popping. As documents, moreover, these constitute the *only* recorded example of a Russian from this era, male or female, penning both a memoir and a diary, thus adding yet another level of uniqueness. Nevertheless, Labzina rarely figures prominently in the pantheon of literary notables of the Catherinian and Alexandrian age. Most of what has been written ties her almost entirely to Labzin, an understandable but regrettable oversight, since most of what Labzina did write deals with the time before she met Labzin.<sup>31</sup> Neither the memoir nor the diary had much of a publishing history until recently, and, in spite of their highly sentimental and stylized prose, it is not at all clear that she intended them to be published. The narrative ends literally in midsentence ("I have often envied . . .") at a particularly critical juncture in the midst of what appears to be a decisive confrontation with her husband, and, although she lived another eighteen years after first penning it, she never revised or completed the text. Unlike almost every other memoir writer of the period, she proffered no introductory dedication of any kind (typically they are dedicated to one's children or to posterity), and the text gives few hints about the implied reader.<sup>32</sup>

31. To give one example, when Modzalevskii's 1914 edition of Labzina's memoirs were republished in a reprint edition in 1974, the new introduction devoted precisely one paragraph to Labzina herself and accorded the remaining space to Labzin and Russian mysticism, in spite of the fact that the memoir ends long before Labzina meets her second husband! See Zacek, "Introduction," to Labzina, *Vospominaniia*, i–v.

32. Mary Mason has suggested that women's autobiographical writings in general were less egocentric and less programmatic than male autobiographies, and that women typically defined themselves by pairing their own identities with others. Both Barbara Heldt and Beth Holmgren have made similar observations for Russian women writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Labzina employs this strategy of pairing herself

Although married twice, Labzina had no children of her own. She and Labzin did raise her sister's two children, one of whom wrote an appreciative memoir of her upbringing.<sup>33</sup> Left in the care of her niece, and later her grand niece, Labzina's memoir was not published until 1903, when B. L. Modzalevskii brought out a definitive edition, first in *Russkaia starina* and later that same year as a book. Republished in 1914, the memoir remained infrequently discussed until very recently. The few works to treat Labzina in her own right, most importantly Modzalevskii's introduction, have tended to reduce her to a variant of the female martyr familiar in both saints' lives and secular literature, the patient sufferer and almsgiver, who in saintly fashion foregrounds her own virtue by dramatizing the abominations she endures at the hands of the impious people who surround her. A stark alternative to this view, first proposed by P. Bicilli in 1934 and then elaborated in more detail by Iurii Lotman in his posthumously published essay "Dve zhenshchiny," focuses on the memoir as a literary text and deems it a dramatic and nonnaturalist tragedy, a *zhitie* along the model of Avvakum and Ol'ga Morozova.<sup>34</sup> Lotman insists that Labzina's memoir (he makes no mention of the diary) must be seen as a "psychological" text, one that could not possibly constitute an accurate account of life with Karamyshev. He complains that the absence of other eyewitness accounts permitted her an open field on which to convey whatever she chose. Left free to imagine, Labzina wrote about depravities, card playing, and carousing to fill the void when, Lotman assures us, Karamyshev was probably just working late at the lab.

Karamyshev was a chemist and teacher. During the time in question he had set up a laboratory in which he conducted both instructional and scientific experiments. Simultaneously, he had taken on a large administrative responsibility. His time, so it would appear, was scarce. One might suppose that he ran a series of experiments at night, which at the very least would occupy him until late evening. His fatigue and dirty hands and clothes could just as easily have resulted from card games or from scientific experiments. We have before us two alternatives and we cannot truly fathom how Karamyshev was actually spending his time. We can only note that for his wife there were no alternative scenarios: she was sure in advance that he was engaged in depravities, and that cer-

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with another repeatedly in her memoir and diary, although the paired other changes continuously. Thus, the absence of a dedication or an obvious implied reader may have less to do with the decision to publish than with narrative strategies of female writers. Mary G. Mason, "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers," in Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, eds., *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiographies* (Ithaca, 1988), 21–23; Barbara Heldt, *Terrible Perfection: Women and Russian Literature* (Bloomington, 1992), 6–24, 77–79; Beth Holmgren, *Women's Work in Stalin's Time: On Lidiia Chukovskaia and Nadezhda Mandelshtam* (Bloomington, 1993), 2.

33. B. L. Modzalevskii, "Vospominaniia Sof'i Alekseevny Laikevich," *Russkaia starina*, 1905, no. 4: 168–201.

34. P. Bicilli, "Die 'Haus'-Literatur und der Ursprung der klassischen Literatur in Russland," *Jahrbücher für Kultur und Geschichte der Slaven* 10 (1934): 398–99; Iu. M. Lotman, "Dve zhenshchiny," *Besedy o russkoi kul'tury: Byt i traditsii russkogo dvorianstva (XVIII–nachalo XIX veka)* (St. Petersburg, 1994), 301.

tainty predetermined her observations, and *inevitably distorted* what she actually saw.<sup>35</sup>

Far from being the monster that Labzina described, Karamyshev was a true *lumière*, nurturing and cultivating his young wife, so unschooled in Enlightenment that her fanciful mental world transformed his attentiveness into its very opposite, a diabolical lovelessness.

If we recall that Karamyshev was educated *in a European manner*, that he was a great scholar, and that even Labzina never denied the goodness of his character, then one can suggest that in all probability he was consciously educating [*vospytival*] his own wife in the spirit of his own conception of “philosophical ideas.” Consistent with the naturalism of the eighteenth century, Karamyshev made a distinction between love as a *moral* feeling and the natural sex drive.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, for Lotman, a Russian nobleman educated “in a European manner” simply could not have behaved as Labzina described, as if Enlightenment and science were so ennobling as to preclude spousal abuse, an odd view coming from the hindsight of the twentieth century. Karamyshev offered the gifts of knowledge and philosophy, while Anna Evdokimovna wanted his affection. Denied the love she craved, she concocted this evil persona to explain that loss. We shall have occasion to revisit some of these interpretive issues a bit later, but Lotman’s determination to debunk the memoir, to insist on seeing Karamyshev as a Chernyshevskian-type mix of Aleksandr Kirsanov and Rakhmetov, while consigning Labzina to the status of a hopelessly preconscious Vera Pavlovna, is, to put it mildly, curious.<sup>37</sup> Fanciful or not, Labzina’s actual text belies much of Lotman’s brief in that it recounts in lurid detail activities that she witnessed with her own eyes—or so she says—and many that took place right in her own house. Moreover, Labzina wrote these memoirs not as an inexperienced and unlettered adolescent but when she was in her early fifties, long after she had become a society woman and had participated for many years in cosmopolitan sociability and assimilated a great deal of Enlightenment reasoning. Using Lotman’s logic, by then she surely would have known better.

The past few years have witnessed a very different sketch of Labzina, inspired almost entirely by the attempt to recover Russian women’s literature. A new edition of her memoir, edited by V. M. Bokova, appeared in Moscow in 1996 and another one is currently being prepared by Iuliia Zhukova, also in Moscow.<sup>38</sup> The brief entry on Labzina written by Mary Zirin in the 1994 *Dictionary of Russian Women Writers* uses the memoir to focus on Labzina’s own life.<sup>39</sup> Still, Labzina is far from canonized even within Rus-

35. Lotman, “Dve zhenshchiny,” 310. Emphasis added.

36. *Ibid.*, 310. Emphasis added.

37. The reference, of course, is to Nikolai Chernyshevskii’s *What Is to Be Done?* The most recent translation of this work is by Michael R. Katz (Ithaca, 1989).

38. V. M. Bokova, ed., *Rossiiia v memuarakh: Istoriia zhizni blagorodnoi zhenshchiny* (Moscow, 1996), 13–88. Bokova, while emphasizing Labzina’s womanhood, accepts the affinity between her memoir and the genre of—men’s—*zhitiia* and makes specific reference to Avvakum (quite a stretch in my view) and the “Zhitie Moiseiia Ugrina.”

39. Zirin, “Labzina, Anna Evdokimovna,” 355–56.

sian women's literature. Neither Catriona Kelly's recent *A History of Russian Women's Writing* nor M. Sh. Fainshtein's *Pisatel' nitsy pushkinskoi pory*, for example, mentions her at all.<sup>40</sup> Recent studies of eighteenth-century memoir writing, by A. G. Tartakovskii and M. A. Kriuchkova, also ignore Labzina, and the works on mothers and daughters by Barbara Engel, Joe Andrew, and Jessica Tovrov note her only in passing.<sup>41</sup>

As a consequence, Modzalevskii's 1903 introduction remains the single substantive account of Labzina's life. Deeply sympathetic to his subject, Modzalevskii maintained an admirable fidelity to Labzina's text—especially in comparison to Lotman's dismissiveness. He too imposed his own morality tale, however, in which Labzina's unhappy life took a decisive turn for the better when she came under Kheraskov's protection. "[Kheraskov], who was distinguished by his kindness and his warm heart, accepted Anna Evdokimovna as his natural daughter and soon came to love her dearly for her obedient manner. He took upon himself responsibility for her education and secular upbringing . . . which, of course, she could not have received in childhood while living in a backwoods village of a distant borderland."<sup>42</sup> So even for her greatest admirer, Labzina's life was essentially a story of two men, the talented but fallen Karamyshev and the virtuous and ultimately decisive "Russian Homer," Kheraskov. Armed with the uplifting power of Enlightenment, the city, and secular virtue, Kheraskov vanquished the dark side of noble sociability and raised Labzina to consciousness and a better life.

My own reading of the memoir and diary is largely devoid of angels, more complicated, and less amenable to a happy or teleological understanding. Labzina surely revered Kheraskov as a beneficent patriarch, but her life as she depicted it remained quite miserable long after Mikhail Matveevich became a part of it. In the end she (or at least the textual Labzina) did indeed find her bearings, a way of distinguishing between a demeaning formal responsibility to marriage vows and patriarchy and her own personal will. Although never afforded a formal education or private tutoring, she read voraciously, shared the company of men and women alike, and embraced the didacticism of moral improvement that motivated so many of the public men of her age. Moreover, during the last three decades of her life she defined an identity for herself that was highly visible and extradomestic.

40. Catriona Kelly, *A History of Russian Women's Writing, 1820–1992* (Oxford, 1994); M. Sh. Fainshtein, *Pisatel' nitsy pushkinskoi pory: Istoriko-literaturnye ocherki* (Leningrad, 1989).

41. M. A. Kriuchkova, "Russkaia memuaristika vtoroi poloviny XVIII v. kak sotsiokul'turnoe iavlenie," *Vestnik Moskovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, series 8, *Istoriia*, 1994, no. 1: 17–28; A. G. Tartakovskii, *Russkaia memuaristika XVIII–pervoi poloviny XIX v.* (Moscow, 1991); Joe Andrew, "Mothers and Daughters in Russian Literature of the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Slavonic and East European Review* 73, no. 1 (January, 1995): 37–60; Jessica Tovrov, "Mother-Child Relationships among the Russian Nobility," in Ransel, ed., *Family in Imperial Russia*, 31; Barbara Alpern Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge, Eng., 1983), 14–16.

42. Modzalevskii, "Predislovie," in Labzina, *Vospominaniia*, xiv.

But within the memoir the path to life and contentment outside the household did not lie with *prosveshchenie* (Enlightenment), still less with the secular vospitanie that Modzalevskii and Lotman so valorized. Quite the contrary. For Labzina, country life was pure, open, free, and uplifting, a sentiment she shared with several eighteenth-century writers, male and female.<sup>43</sup> Hers was not the desperate nostalgia for the imagined paradise of a childhood on the country estate, both so typical of noble family albums and memoirs from this period. Nor does her description of nature suggest the subtle dark undertones of, for example, Andrei Bolotov's country idyll, the "serpent in the garden," as Thomas Newlin has so aptly put it.<sup>44</sup> Rather, the rural outdoors was godly, bracing, and unbounded, much like it was for Durova, starkly juxtaposed to the suffocation of being forced to remain hidden away in a man's world, whether it be in Kheraskov's house in the city or her husband's.<sup>45</sup>

Enlightenment, in turn, was signified by her husband, for whom reason and the laws of nature were mere rationalizations for an intrepid pursuit of pleasure. As Labzina's aunt explained early on "this is the first time that you shall not have the excellent life in our quiet little refuge. But you shall enjoy the city. . . . Your own husband loves society more, as a kind of amusement, and you too must love it and live in a way that is useful for him."<sup>46</sup> Karamyshev ridiculed this idyll of pastoral innocence and freedom, and he is tied in the text to soliloquies that equate rationalism with the depraved pursuit of carnality. "Throw off your stupid prejudices, my dear friend, which are rooted in your stupid instructions from childhood! There is no sin or shame in making your life merry. . . . How sweet you are when you begin to philosophize! I believe that what you call a sin is merely a natural pleasure, and in this I am not accountable to anyone."<sup>47</sup> This line of naturalist reasoning, of course, lay at the heart of Lotman's defense of Karamyshev's "healthy sex drive," but we must keep in mind that it was Labzina herself who composed these passages, proof positive that she was familiar with the Enlightenment's state of nature. In Labzina's world, though, abstract rationalism and natural law—secularism—denoted hedonism and the abuse of virtuous women by evil men—her husband—to whom women were constrained to submit by civil law and custom, but in whom she saw

43. The theme of noble pastoralism is beautifully presented in Priscilla Roosevelt, *Life on the Russian Country Estate: A Social and Cultural History* (New Haven, 1995), esp. chap. 6: "Nests of Gentefolk: Patriarchy in the Provinces," and chap. 11: "Ideal Worlds: The Idyll of the Russian Intelligentsia."

44. Thomas Newlin, "Rural Ruses: Illusion and Anxiety on the Russian Estate, 1775–1815," *Slavic Review* 57, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 295–319.

45. Compare Durova's description of a girlhood frolic in the fields: "This was the very first time in my life that I had been taken out into the open where I could see dense forest and vast fields and the wide river! I could barely catch my breath for joy . . . I ran, frisked, picked flowers, and climbed to the tips of tall trees to see farther. . . . Two hours flew like two minutes! . . . how could I part with such captivating freedom?" Nadezhda Durova, *The Cavalry Maiden: Journals of a Russian Officer in the Napoleonic Wars*, trans. Mary Fleming Zirin (Bloomington, 1989), 6–7.

46. Labzina, *Vospominaniia*, 34.

47. *Ibid.*, 68, 78.

only wantonness. For her, the locus of this depravity was unmistakably the civil, both spatially, as the city (*civitas*), and culturally, as civil society. As Labzina told her mother-in-law: "This love is difficult for me! Does everybody love in this way at the place where he wants to bring me, and is this the kind of moral upbringing that is called the best and enlightened?"<sup>48</sup>

Formal or customary law, the vaunted building blocks of both liberal civil society and the *Rechtsstaat* of Enlightened absolutism, fared little better. From her aunt: "It is apparent that [your husband] wants to take you away from everything that can remind you of your mother. I see that this makes you bitter, and I share in your grief, but, my friend, you should already be living under his laws. . . . You already know how great and sacred is your obligation to your husband, so when you carry it out you shall also be carrying out God's law."<sup>49</sup> Her response: "What kind of *law* deprives a person of everything she holds dear once she is married?"<sup>50</sup>

What about the well-ordered patriarchal family, embodied by her benefactor, Kheraskov? Labzina mostly showered him with praise, but rather than secularity, sociability, and individuality, Labzina described a tutelage constructed upon a rigidly controlled regimen that—much to her relief—brought her back to the scriptural and prayer-centered life that she had been forced to abandon after marriage. She was kept apart from polite society, even within the Kheraskov household. "When they were entertaining a large number of guests I was to sit with my benefactor and father, even though this initially saddened me. . . . Finally I began to say that I would like to be out among the guests. He said to me gently, 'Why do you want to do that, my friend? If it were useful for you I would have suggested it myself. . . . Don't create impediments that would get in the way of my doing what I know to be best, and I shall see you progress further!'"<sup>51</sup> She tells us that she did not know what a novel was and assumed initially that *roman* referred to a specific person. ("I asked Elizaveta Vasil'evna who this 'Roman' was that they kept talking about and why had I never seen him."<sup>52</sup>) Somewhat later Kheraskov advised her, "Beware of reading novels. They will not do you any good and they can bring you harm."<sup>53</sup> Cloistered, controlled, kept indoors and away from people, forbidden from speaking her mind, Labzina observed, "This sort of upbringing was altogether new to me."<sup>54</sup>

In fact, Kheraskov's ministrations were directed not at all at bringing Labzina into the open air, but rather at advising her on how to deal privately and inwardly with her wayward spouse.

My daughter . . . Be calm and listen to me. Only now are you beginning your life with your husband, and I see that his habits and inclinations are unknown to you. But I shall tell you. He likes large and boisterous gath-

48. *Ibid.*, 37.

49. *Ibid.*, 34.

50. *Ibid.*, 35. Emphasis added.

51. *Ibid.*, 48, 50.

52. *Ibid.*, 48.

53. *Ibid.*, 58.

54. *Ibid.*, 48.

erings. Cards are his passion and he has another vice [here referring to adultery], no better than cards, and without us there may be no one to restrain him. He will at once find companions who suit his inclination, and you will be unable to take him away from them. But try to cope as best you can! There will also be frequent gatherings at your home, I foresee this, but you should go off into your own corner and occupy yourself with your own work [usually a reference to sewing] or with reading. But if you notice that this displeases him, stop and beseech God to save him.<sup>55</sup>

Once again, cosmopolitan sociability is linked didactically to vice—at least for vulnerable young women—and seclusion with virtue. Labzina took this dichotomy even further in an ensuing passage, in which she quoted Kheraskov as exhorting her to keep up appearances at all costs. “Let him continue to believe that you do not suspect him. . . . As soon as you give him cause to feel that you know and that *you will help him remove his mask* then he will be unbound and will no longer be ashamed of the unpleasantness that he causes you.”<sup>56</sup> For Labzina, then, civility and politesse were reduced to mere masks, surface affectations that hid the truer abominations behind them. Good advice, perhaps, but hardly an invitation to public action.

This antinomy of public falsity versus private or hidden truth has strong affinities to the Masonic cult of secrecy, in which the life of the lodge was understood to exist as a common pact or confidence behind closed doors. Members were often constrained to maintain public silence about this inner life at all costs, the only guarantee against the onslaught of society’s carnality and spiritual weakness. Labzina clearly understood this line of reasoning, a commonplace of her milieu during her second marriage,<sup>57</sup> and she appears to have accepted Kheraskov’s contention that giving public expression to her private suffering would uncage the beast of carnal passion (Karamyshev’s depravity), thereby defeating Labzina, who is thus obliged to act as society’s spiritual gatekeeper.

This interchange with Kheraskov, then, shows with particular clarity Labzina’s adeptness at absorbing the ideas that swirled around her and then reformulating them. Fears of passion unleashed and concomitant exhortations to forbearance and self-control were mainstays of Masonic discourse, extending from Kheraskov in the 1770s to Labzin forty years later. But where Masons saw women as carnal and Masonic *brothers* as spiritual and disciplined, Labzina subtly reversed the order by endowing herself (and, by extension, all women) with the understanding and fortitude to protect civilization from the animal excesses of free men, who were the true carnal forces and from whom the formal strictures of law, organized religion, and custom offer no protection, without the tacit—but essential—complicity of women.

So, if Kheraskov was Labzina’s voice of reason, reason was prescribing

55. *Ibid.*, 58.

56. *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

57. Sergei Timofeevich Aksakov’s *Family Chronicle* offers a well-known example of a family striving to comfort female victims of male misbehavior, while deeming this misbehavior private. S. T. Aksakov, *The Family Chronicle*, trans. M. C. Beverley (New York, 1961) is a highly abridged translation of the original.

a highly disciplinary guardianship over women rather than individuality and curiosity, private safety over public expression. For Foucauldians or feminist critics of Habermas this gender-specific and repressive deployment of reason sounds depressingly familiar, constituting the putative Achilles' heel of the entire Enlightenment project.<sup>58</sup> And yet, for Labzina matters were not so simple, since she was not proposing to challenge the legitimacy of patriarchy per se, or the moral authority of her elders. Rather she was trying to define for herself the proper exercise of that authority and to articulate her own basis on which to assess whether that exercise was desirable or not vis-à-vis its bearing on her life as a young woman. She luxuriated in her extradomestic life, whether with her mother, Karamyshev, or Labzin, and whether it involved charity, literary evenings, journalism, or intercession with public authorities. Moreover, she took pride in her ability to think things through, to reflect, and to *reason*, powers that she put vividly on display in all her writings. What, then, provided the inspiration, if not *The Enlightenment*? A complete answer, at least one provided by her own writings, remains elusive, but at the level of cosmology, or her personal explanation for the order of things, she turns repeatedly to God, and her belief in a godly authority that superseded, but did not overturn, the laws of man and nature. A "rebel in the name of the Lord" as it were.

Divinely inspired action often involved individual deeds of charity, going with her mother, her nanny, or alone to give alms and feed or clothe the poor, and to pray over them. Labzina's exemplar was her mother, and the intercession spiritual: "I was seven years old and had already studied literacy, but it was my mother who taught me how to write, and it was she who began to educate my heart, greatly with her words, and doubly so by example. . . . If a dying man was losing consciousness, she reassured and comforted him with the hope of our Savior. . . . Often in such circumstances she prevailed upon me to read aloud about the sufferings of Christ the Savior, which gave extraordinary comfort to the ill."<sup>59</sup> From her mother: "Visit the sick, my friend, and console the suffering and troubled. And always remember that they are as close to you as brothers, and on their behalf you shall be rewarded by the heavenly King."<sup>60</sup>

Sentiments such as these turn out to be fairly commonplace in women's autobiographical writings. Elizabeth Evasdaughter's study of the memoirs of American Catholic women makes the point that "Autobiographical works . . . prove that for centuries we have had a tradition that . . . asserts a woman's duty to participate in society in a spiritually independent and responsible manner."<sup>61</sup> Autobiographical works, she argues, constituted

58. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, 204–7; Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 113–21; and the essays by Nancy Fraser, Jean L. Cohen, Joan B. Landes, and Marie Fleming in Johanna Meehan, ed., *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse* (New York, 1995), 21–138.

59. Labzina, *Vospominaniia*, 5.

60. *Ibid.*, 8.

61. Elizabeth N. Evasdaughter, *Catholic Girlhood Narratives: The Church and Self-Denial* (Boston, 1996), 25.



an expression of spiritual self-defense for Catholic women against a brutal outside world, one that offers up the author's own life as a model useful to others, in particular as an example of forbearance, subordination, and selflessness in both private and public life.<sup>62</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks's analysis of the autobiographies of women of great public accomplishment—Golda Meir, Hannah Arendt, among others—makes a similar point: “Goodness is selflessness . . . and vice versa.”<sup>63</sup>

All these observations offer valuable insight into Labzina's works, in which the self-referential display of subordination to authority and Christian selflessness are paramount. But only to a point. Labzina tells us that she was taught that good works and obedience to faith paid off. “Never forget, my friend, that good deeds are rewarded not only in the next life but even here.”<sup>64</sup> On the eve of her marriage to Karamyshev, her mother advised, “If you end up living in the wider world, in all of your pleasures do not forget to provide help for the poor and unfortunate. Do not become idle, for idleness is the mother of vice.”<sup>65</sup> It is this very sense of a higher calling to action, a spiritual obligation through prayer and ministrations to the wider world that transcends the otherwise unchallengeable, but manifestly unfair, manmade laws without undermining them, which offered Labzina a path to individual choice and resistance to authority. To her husband: “You have the authority to deprive me of my property and peace of mind, but you cannot take away my conscience and good name. God protects me, and he has guarded over me *from my mother's womb up until this very day*. You find it worthwhile to think the way you do, but *leave me be with my own rules*. I assure you, so long as the hand of God protects me I shall not stray from the path of virtue, and I shall not accept your advice. It would bring harm to my body and soul!”<sup>66</sup>

For Labzina, however, selflessness required much more than forbearance. It demanded action, specifically social action outside the household. Unmoved by the Enlightenment's call to improvement through institutional reform (to which she, as a woman, had no recourse anyway), Labzina nevertheless demanded more of herself than the many individual acts of charity (the ‘good’ or ‘blessed’ work of *blagotvoritel'nost'*) that she performed. She saw herself as an intercessor (*zastupnitsa*), that is, one who used her standing to champion the needs of the powerless and downtrodden by intervening on their behalf with constituted authority.<sup>67</sup> As Lotman

62. *Ibid.*, 26–27 and 85.

63. Patricia Meyer Spacks, “Selves in Hiding,” in Estelle C. Jelinek, ed., *Women's Autobiographies: Essays in Criticism* (Bloomington, 1980), 114.

64. Labzina, *Vospominaniia*, 15.

65. *Ibid.*, 22.

66. *Ibid.*, 78. Emphasis added.

67. Eighteenth-century terms and spellings were typically unsystematic, and as a rule assigning a single fixed meaning or expression to fluid constructions is ill advised. *Zastupa* or *zastuplenie* are prime examples in that they have no specific legal standing. Thus, depending on context, it could imply protection, formal guardianship, or personal intercession by a powerful person with access on behalf of a client, one who, by using this language, formally acknowledges subordination. V. Dal', *Tolkovi slovar' zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka* (Moscow, 1989), 1:643; *Slovar' russkogo iazyka XVIII veka* (St. Petersburg, 1995), 8:104–5.

observed, this was a common theme in saints' lives and in the whole kenotic tradition of Russian spirituality, sacred and secular. The role of intercessor could also define a specifically female activity, at least in the eighteenth century, wherein a wife was empowered to intercede with her husband, who held formal authority, on behalf of kin, servants, or humble petitioners who feared to approach the pater familias directly. M. I. Semevskii long ago described in some detail how the intercession on behalf of supplicants was a common expectation for wives of the politically powerful, including the wives of tsars, an essential if little explored link in the murky continuum of Russia's politics from public to private, law-based to familial.<sup>68</sup> "In addition to the lowly, a large number of poor women turned to the tsaritsa with supplications regarding their own needs, presenting them on holidays or name days of a member of the tsar's family."<sup>69</sup> Similarly, Catherine I, as both tsaritsa and as empress, received literally hundreds of requests (over 120 in 1724 alone!) for assistance and intercession on behalf of those who felt that they could not petition Peter directly.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, intercession demanded an engagement with relations of authority in a way that charity did not. And in Labzina's experiences (and perhaps Russia's more generally) it implied a specifically feminine intervention in those relations, a hitherto little explored engendering of empowerment. Indeed, her decision to link spiritual inheritance with her mother ("from her very womb") was unquestionably deliberate, and apparently not easily reached. In an early footnote, Modzalevskii reproduces an alternative introduction to the memoir that she had initially written and then discarded. This variant highlights her father much more, both by pairing him repeatedly with her mother ("my parents"), and—more significantly—by associating the primary attribution of almsgiver and benefactor with her father rather than her mother.

I was born of honest and generous parents. My birth brought my parents great joy, for, although they had had children prior to me, none had lived. I was the first whose life had brought them pleasure. . . . My parents celebrated my birthday not with balls and fancy dinners, but by assisting the downtrodden and offering aid to all the poor, feeding them for three days. And my father himself served them, he went to the prisons and distributed what they required . . .

I did not enjoy the happiness and love of my progenitor [*roditel'*] for very long. . . . I had just turned five when death took this beneficent father and friend of the poor."<sup>71</sup>

68. M. Semevskii, *Tsaritsa Praskov'ia, 1664–1723: Ocherk iz russkoi istorii XVIII veka* (Moscow, 1989), 17–39; Hughes, "Peter the Great's Two Weddings," 38–41. More recently, Isolde Thyret has expanded on their work by suggesting that, while in the *terem*, tsaritsy had the ability to act as arbiters in a variety of legal disputes. Isolde Thyret, "Life in the Kremlin under the Tsars Mikhail Fedorovich and Aleksei Mikhailovich: New Perspectives on the Institution of the *Tërem*" (paper presented at the conference "Private Life in Russian History," Ann Arbor, May 1995).

69. Semevskii, *Tsaritsa Praskov'ia*, 12–13.

70. M. I. Semevskii, *Tsaritsa Katerina Alekseevna: Anna I Villim Mons, 1692–1724* (1884; reprint, Moscow, 1994), 356–67.

71. Labzina, *Vospominaniia*, 1–2.

For whatever reason, Labzina set aside this parents-and-father-centered beginning (which in the first draft went on for several pages) in favor of one that transferred all of the valorization, virtually verbatim, to her mother. On the day after her mother's death, when the courtyard was filled with beggars and the sick expressing public grief, Labzina, now anointed by the unfortunate to be her mother's spiritual successor, received a note from the prison warden requesting that the prisoners be allowed to visit and pay their respects to her biological and their spiritual mother. In this one small gesture her nascent worldly authority is acknowledged by the warden who symbolically passes the torch from mother to daughter. In the process she brings another dimension to intercession, one that momentarily subordinates male temporal authority to a female spiritual one. Here we see the suggestion of a third social realm—faith—outside both the civil and the household, in which social patriarchy is finally supine before the fatherhood of God and in which the feminine becomes truly powerful.

This act of moral inheritance legitimated Labzina's own sense of public spirituality, utterly unconnected to material inheritance.<sup>72</sup> Thus, during her eighteen-month stay in Nerchinsk she established her public persona by exercising this spiritual inheritance of public charity, taking care of the exiles and comforting the sick.<sup>73</sup> "Every day God presented me with an opportunity to do good. . . . I fulfilled my mother's instructions here: I visited the suffering and ill every day and tended to them. I even had the opportunity to do good in distant places. . . . Oh, how contented my heart was then! I did not have any bad thoughts, and my husband's shameful deeds affected me less."<sup>74</sup>

The circle of feminine heritage—faith-centered intercession—thus, is completed at the moment when she is obliged to leave Nerchinsk and return to Irkutsk with her husband. Those who had received Labzina's tender mercies gathered at their house, and again in defiance of civil and pa-

72. In writing about holy men and women, both Peter Brown and Brenda Meehan have observed, in Meehan's words, that "the authority of the holy man derives in part from his [or her] ascetic discipline, which both gives him a reputation for spiritual prowess and renders him capable of spiritual judgment." But unlike Brown's holy men and Meehan's holy women, Labzina never proclaimed herself holy or uniquely spiritual. Neither she nor her mother aspired to asceticism—even though both exercised a kind of religious discipline over their bodies and behavior—and neither is depicted as having a charismatic or unworldly relationship with God. On the contrary, their identities and strivings toward service were entirely social and familial: Labzina was a daughter, ward, and wife throughout her life, and it was as a spiritual, but thoroughly lay, mother that she carried out her public activities. Far from separation from society, she embraced it in her day-to-day existence, albeit on her own terms. Indeed, it was the sense that her chosen path was open to anyone from any walk of life that made her faith so this worldly and publicly relevant. In this context it may be useful to distinguish between holy lives, endowed with a supernatural aura, and pious ones, devoted to doing God's work in the world as one finds it. Brenda Meehan-Waters, "The Authority of Holiness: Women Ascetics and Spiritual Elders in Nineteenth-Century Russia," in Geoffrey A. Hosking, ed., *Church, Nation, and State in Russia and Ukraine* (New York, 1991), 41; Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 61 (1971): 80–101.

73. Labzina, *Vospominaniia*, 84.

74. *Ibid.*, 88.

triarchal power, proclaimed her their mother and protector to the police chief, “‘This time you may beat us but we will not heed you! Do you know of what we are being deprived?’ . . . [to Labzina] ‘Before you arrived we were hungry, naked, and barefoot, and many died of frost. You clothed us, and lightened our loads, you tended the sick, gathered provisions for us from the surrounding area . . . so that we were well fed.’”<sup>75</sup>

The point here is not one of facticity. Whether this particular scene happened, or whether Labzina was the devoted and patient presence in real life that she invariably displayed in the text, is less important than the fact that she constructed this pattern of female inheritance, female lineage, by linking God the father to public activity and even to resistance—but not refusal—to this-worldly patriarchal authority. Labzina could not have been more explicit about her engendering of spiritual inheritance and its liberating role in this worldly affairs. “At these moments, all of my mother’s lessons and words were vividly reborn in my memory, and I often spoke as if she could hear me: ‘My honorable progenitress [*roditel'nitsia*], here is your daughter carrying out your testament! . . . I am here with no guide at all, but may your spirit be my protector!’”<sup>76</sup>

It should be reiterated that all of these retrospections relate to her life with Karamyshev. During her marriage to Labzin and her subsequent involvement with Freemasonry, Labzina participated actively in *obshchestvo*, by participating in Freemasonry, journalism, philosophical circles, and soirées, and whether deemed sociability or public sphere, she was a part of it. It was this milieu that occupied her diary of 1818, and while she makes few direct references to her mother in it, she continues to express her sense of spiritual mission and female guardianship in the name of God the father.

Dying Sphinx lay mired in a major crisis at this time, one that divided the membership into factions and that distressed both Labzin and Labzina greatly and that eventually contributed to the renewed ban on lodges in 1822: “here is something that disturbs [my heart] . . . this divine and holy union has split into two factions and . . . it is killing my spirit. . . . They [i.e., the lodge’s membership] themselves clearly demonstrate who is in which faction . . . I do not know what will come of all this, or whether God will accept it. He Himself said, ‘Love one another, and you shall be acknowledged as my disciples.’ Where is that brotherly love? There is none.”<sup>77</sup>

Polite society, in which she now spent most of her time, drew an equal measure of scorn. “Thus they use my husband’s good heart to evil purpose; he joyously shares with them all that the Lord sends him in His bounty, but it seems they are already sated and stuffed full, and they go to dainty worldly feasts where the flesh is satisfied but not the soul, which sits there dozing, and the conscience begins to nod off too. All the inner world is lulled by the siren’s song.”<sup>78</sup> As with Karamyshev decades earlier, the fatal flaw lay in the flesh, the temptation of weak-minded manhood, to which even the brethren of Dying Sphinx were susceptible.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid., 89.

77. “Dnevnik A. E. Labzinoi,” in Labzina, *Vospominaniia*, 116.

78. Ibid., 119.

Labzina took this rhetoric still further by giving politesse a decidedly eschatological reading.

I went into the study, but somehow none of the conversation was calming. It was all about injustices, civil and religious alike, but we can talk all we want. We will not be any help. It is apparent that everything is headed for destruction though everyone seems to be trying to create and build. . . . The external is given preference over the internal, and that is why there is such disorganization. . . . It seems that hard and painful times are on their way, and the coming of our Shepherd and Teacher is near. You can feel in your heart the joyful echo of bliss in preparation, and the corporeal will shudder from great sorrows and persecutions.<sup>79</sup>

The earthly struggle thus pits the spiritual against the corporeal, and while the Masonic brothers may not recognize it, Labzina does. She, and by extension all women, becomes Eve's daughter, capable of knowing more, but equally prone to using their superiority to seduce helpless men into carnal sin. The diary, in fact, reserves its most savage commentary for womankind.

I have long known that we women were able to make the best and kindest man waver and turn him from his purpose for our own ends, and moreover to make him see it all in the best light and even as Christian virtue: if the idol of my heart needs this, then I will stoop to it. Never will man come to understand woman, with all the cunning and slyness of our sex even if he knows her for 20 years. It takes only six months to figure out a man, but us—never. Forgive me, merciful God, for these thoughts, but I have the misfortune to know this from much experience. I have never been led into trouble by a man, whereas women have tried to cast me down into the abyss, and men have saved me.<sup>80</sup>

This passage, let us recall, was penned a mere eight years after she wrote her scathing memoir of her low-life first husband! And yet the basis of her resistance to the turmoil among her brothers and sisters (her terms) and her alternative construction of a life in society retained her acute sense of divine justice, a legacy that ran from God the father through her mother and down to herself.

How in the end are we to make sense of the paradoxes that Labzina sketched in her writings? Lotman argues that "the tragedy reflected in Labzina's memoir is not just a conflict of incompatible characters, temperaments, and ages, it is also a dramatic collision of two cultures that lacked a common language or even the most elementary basis for translation from one [language] to the other."<sup>81</sup> This hypothesis ignores the fundamentally *retrospective* quality of the memoir, written many years after Labzina had become well acquainted with the language, writings, and manners of educated society. The text provides many examples in which Labzina offered her own recapitulation and simultaneous translation of Kheraskov's and Karamyshev's words of wisdom. The issue, then, was not one of the absence of a common language, but rather Labzina's interpretation and abject rejection of the ideals presented to her by polite society.

79. *Ibid.*, 123.

80. *Ibid.*, 119.

81. Lotman, "Dve zhenshchiny," 304.

What about the conflict of two cultures? This antinomy presumably comes down to the familiar binarisms of sacred versus secular, Enlightenment versus tradition. Here too the iron law of dualism obscures as much as it illuminates. Granted, Labzina's cosmology expressed a conservative faith-centeredness and a piousness that fell well outside the rationalism and naturalism that defined Karamyshev's modernity (rather less true of Kheraskov's). In every other sense, however, the memoir and diary are unimaginable prior to or outside the Enlightenment. All aspects of the life she described—the social discourse, the public visibility, attending the theater, reading (including novels and lay pietistic books) as both spoken and silent practices—were part and parcel of a sociability that is unimaginable in Russia before the eighteenth century, particularly for noblewomen. Her arguments resonate with an Enlightenment-like individualism in which she uses her own experience as a backdrop against which to assess the justice and reasonability of man-made laws. Add to that the fact that these were penned by a *lay woman* describing a highly visible and public life, one in which she willfully and openly subjects many of the men in her life to the risk of public ridicule. Indeed, the very writing of the memoir and diary can be understood as an individualistic rejection of the instructions she received (“leave me be with my own rules. . . . I will not follow your advice”) to bear her burden *silently* so as to preserve the reputation of her lord and master husband. Who, then, was the traditionalist, Labzina or Kheraskov/Karamyshev, and who the embodiment of individualism, unextinguished by authority and convention?

The point here is not to abandon binary oppositions altogether but rather to insist that they do not correspond very closely to individual outlooks, a point that Lotman himself made in a number of other works. Labzina, the complex thinker and rhetorician, was as much a product of the Russian Enlightenment as her husband. Conversely, the patriarchal cloistering and domination of women that the thoroughly modern men in her life expostulated was every bit as “traditional” as Labzina's religious convictions.

One final document relevant to the gendering of civic virtue was written not by Labzina, but by the brothers of Dying Sphinx, who in August 1819 wanted to honor her and her husband for their twenty-five years of marriage and many years of service to the lodge.<sup>82</sup> In a ceremony that the membership apparently made up, they formally recognized that Labzina's service was equivalent to their own, that she was indeed their sister, and they made her an honorary Masonic sister and presented her with a blue pillow bearing a pair of women's gloves which were deemed “Masonic gloves.” “In truth, . . . she is our sister, for in her exercise of all our obligations to the letter, only her sex prevents her from being our brother.”<sup>83</sup> Her service, according to this testimony, consisted in her service to God, her charity, her humility, and her patience in the face of the evils of the world.

Lodges elsewhere had been enrolling women since the 1750s, and by the 1780s these feminized “lodges of adoption” had become widespread

82. Tira Sokolovskaia, “Podnesenie massonskikh perchatok A. E. Labzinoi: Epizod iz istorii Russkogo masonstva (1819),” *Russkii arkhiv*, 1905, no. 12:532–35.

83. *Ibid.*, 533.

in France.<sup>84</sup> Such was rarely the case in Russia, however. Much like the Freemasons in North America, Russian lodges had largely ignored the question of female membership, and although their rituals and celebrations evinced a deeply gendered quality (in that they celebrated maleness and the virtues of men quite explicitly), they devoted almost no attention to this matter in doctrine.<sup>85</sup> The ceremony of the blue gloves invented for Labzina constitutes a rare and possibly singular episode from this era of a woman being in essence inscribed into a Masonic brotherhood in which she had played an integral role for several years.<sup>86</sup> As such, it is noteworthy that the brothers, Russia's self-appointed public men, recognized her as a kindred spirit and chose to honor her for that very spiritual inheritance that she identified throughout her life, not with the Age of Reason or politesse, but with a sociability founded upon piety and matrilinearity.

The extreme paucity of women's autobiographical writings from this era precludes our going too far toward claiming a definitively feminine or spiritual path to individualism, social action, and public-ness in the eighteenth century.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, the returns from other women's memoirs, few as they may be, are mixed. Some passages from Natalia Dolgorukaia's 1767 memoir do resemble Labzina's voice ("Lord Jesus Christ, my Savior, forgive my boldness for what I say to Paul the Apostle: misfortunes in the hills, misfortunes in the den of thieves, misfortunes from intimates, misfortunes from bandits, misfortunes even at home. I give thanks to my God for everything in that he did not instill in me a taste for the sweet things of this world . . ." <sup>88</sup>). But Dashkova's and Durova's memoirs do not. Still, for at least one woman in Catherine's Russia, a faith-centered worldview was most assuredly the moral basis for constructing a life in public.

84. Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York, 1991), 135, 139–42; Janet M. Burke and Margaret C. Jacob, "French Freemasonry, Women, and Feminist Scholarship," *Journal of Modern History* 68 (September 1996): 513–49.

85. On North American Masonic practice, see Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730–1840* (Chapel Hill, 1996), 180.

86. Smith cites a reference to an earlier work by Andrei Serkov claiming that at least three female lodges operated in the Russian empire in the 1780s, in Mitau, Zhitomir, and Vil'no respectively. But there seems to be no documentary trace of these lodges, and it is not known whether they included Russians among their members. In Labzina's case we have the actual protocols from Dying Sphinx, which detail rather precisely her relationship to the lodge. Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, 43–44. The role of women in Freemasonry has received a fair amount of recent attention, but very little of that has focused on Russia. A recent article by Maria Carlson comments that "Unlike the earlier lodges, which were exclusively male, many post-1911 [Russian] lodges accepted women as members." Maria Carlson, "Fashionable Occultism: Spiritualism, Theosophy, Freemasonry, and Hermeticism in Fin-de-Siècle Russia," in Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca, 1997), 147.

87. Kelly Herrold's recent dissertation, "Russian Autobiographical Material in French: Recovering a Memoiristic Tradition (1770–1830)" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1998) contains some additional observations on memoirs and the public sphere. See, in particular, chapter 4: "Memoir Literature and the Public Sphere in Russia," 177–207.

88. *Svoeruchnye zapiski kniagini Natal'i Borisovny Dolgorukoi docheri g. fel'dmarshala grafa Borisa Petrovicha Sheremeteva* (St. Petersburg, 1992), 92.