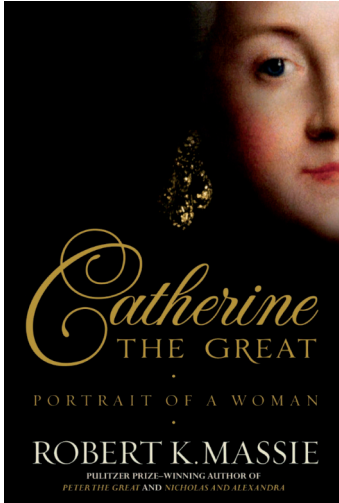


July 2014

**Reading Guide: *Catherine the Great: Portrait of a Woman*
by Robert K. Massie (2011)**

1. Sophia Augusta Fredericka had a very domineering mother, Johanna. How did Johanna influence her daughter in her early years and how did that shape the woman and leader that Sophia would eventually become?
2. What was it about Sophia that made Empress Elizabeth take note? Which of Sophia's characteristics impressed Elizabeth and inspired her to consider Sophia a suitable match for her nephew Peter?
3. When Empress Elizabeth took the infant Paul from his mother immediately after he was born, Catherine suffered a great depression and as a result, "Catherine's feelings for Paul were never normal." Discuss Catherine's relationship with her son Paul and her role as a mother to her other children.
4. How do you view Catherine's coup d'etat and the arrest of her husband? Were her actions justified?
5. Regarding Peter's death, do you think that Catherine is blameless or do you think she intentionally placed her imprisoned husband under the watch of Alex Orlov, knowing that he hated Peter? What do you make of Orlov's frantic letter to Catherine after Peter's death?
6. Men played an important role in Catherine's life both as lovers and advisors, and sometimes both. Which man had the most significant impact on Catherine and why?
7. In choosing her lovers, which was more important: love or power?
8. How did Catherine bring the Age of Enlightenment to Russia? Describe her relationship with Voltaire.
9. As empress of Russia, Catherine amassed a significant collection of art of almost four thousand paintings and became "the greatest collector and patron of the arts in the history of Europe." Explain Catherine's vision in collecting art. Why was it so important to her for Russia to own these masterworks of European art? How do you think Europeans viewed this collection?
10. Consider the Pugachev revolt and its outcome. How did this event change Catherine's idealism and attitude toward serfdom? Are you sympathetic to her cause at all?
11. In the "Acknowledgments" Massie says, "I must acknowledge the extraordinary pleasure I had in the company of the remarkable woman who has been my subject. After eight years of having her a constant presence in my life, I shall miss her." After reading about Catherine, what will you miss? How do you view Catherine now that you have read Massie's version of her life? What was Catherine's greatest disappointment in life? What was her greatest accomplishment?

About Robert K. Massie

Robert K. Massie was born in Lexington, Kentucky, and studied American history at Yale and European history at Oxford, which he attended as a Rhodes Scholar. He was president of the Authors Guild from 1987–1991.

Other Books by Robert K. Massie

- *Nicholas and Alexandra: An Intimate Account of the Last of the Romanovs and the Fall of Imperial Russia*, Robert K. Massie (1967) Massie takes readers to the rise of Nicholas and Alexandra, the last of the Romanovs. This account discusses the politics and passions of the imperial family.
- *Castles of Steel: Britain, Germany and the Winning of the Great War at Sea*, Robert K. Massie (2004) In a work of extraordinary narrative power, filled with brilliant personalities and vivid scenes of dramatic action, Massie elevates to its proper historical importance the role of sea power in the winning of the Great War.
- *Dreadnought*, Robert K. Massie (1992) A chronicle of the twentieth century's great arms race.
- *Peter the Great: His Life and World*, Robert K. Massie (1981) Against the monumental canvas of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe and Russia unfolds the magnificent story of Peter the Great, crowned co-tsar at the age of ten.
- *The Romanovs: The Final Chapter*, Robert K. Massie (1996) In July 1991, nine skeletons were exhumed from a shallow mass grave near Ekaterinburg, Siberia, a few miles from the infamous cellar room where the last tsar and his family had been murdered seventy-three years before. But were these the bones of the Romanovs? And if these were their remains, where were the bones of the two younger Romanovs, who were supposedly murdered with the rest of the family?

Other Related Texts

- *Catherine the Great: Love, Sex and Power*, Virginia Roundling (2008) Dutiful daughter, passionate lover, doting grandmother, tireless legislator, generous patron of artists and philosophers—Empress Catherine II was all these things, and more.
- *The Memoirs of Catherine the Great*, Catherine the Great, translated by Markus Cruse and Hilde Hoogenboom (2006) Famous for her will for power and for her dozen lovers, Catherine was also a prolific and gifted writer.
- *Catherine the Great*, Simon Dixon (2009) When Catherine II died in St. Petersburg in 1796, the world sensed the loss of the most celebrated monarch of Europe—something no one would have predicted at the birth sixty-seven years before of an obscure German princess, Sophie of Anhalt-Zerbst, later married off to the pathetic heir to the Russian throne.
- *Russia Against Napoleon: The True Story of the Campaigns of War and Peace*, Dominic Lieven (2011) Though much has been written about Napoleon's doomed invasion of Russia and the collapse of the French Empire that ensued, virtually all of it has been from the Western perspective. Now, taking advantage of never-before-seen documents from the Russian archives, Lieven upends much of the conventional wisdom about the events that formed the backdrop of Tolstoy's masterpiece, *War and Peace*.
- *Moscow 1812: Napoleon's Fatal March*, Adam Zamoyski (2005) Napoleon dominated nearly all of Europe by 1810, largely succeeding in his aim to reign over the civilized world. But Britain eluded him. To conquer the island nation, he needed the help of Tsar Alexander of Russia. The tsar refused, and Napoleon vowed to teach him a lesson by intimidation and force. The ensuing invasion of Russia, during the frigid winter of 1812, would mark the beginning of the end of Napoleon's empire.