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Chapter 6

From Russia with Love: Souvenirs and Political Alliance in Martha Wilmot's *The Russian Journals*

Pamela Buck

During the Napoleonic Wars, Britain became increasingly aware of its global neighbors in its search for allies. Martha Wilmot's *The Russian Journals*, which describes her stay in Russia from 1803 to 1808 with family friend and powerful political figure Princess Dashkova, exemplifies this desire for international connections. Wilmot, an Anglo-Irish Protestant woman from a well-connected, wealthy family of landed gentry in County Cork, kept this collection of letters and journal entries to be read by family and friends at home. She had received the invitation to visit Russia from the princess, who had traveled through Britain from 1777 to 1778 and had been introduced to the Wilmots by her friend Catherine Hamilton, a cousin of Martha's father. One of the most important women of her time, Princess Dashkova was instrumental in the coup that had brought Catherine the Great to power and was also familiar with Britain politically through her brother, Count Voronzov, who was the Russian ambassador stationed in London. Once in Russia, Martha was joined temporarily by her sister Catherine, who contributed a number of letters to the journal. Critically, the journal has been noted for its record of Russian political life, its observations of the royal courts at St. Petersburg and Moscow, and its description of the country's peasant system. Upon her return to Ireland, Martha Wilmot brought back numerous souvenirs, including the princess's memoirs,¹ a fan that had belonged to Catherine the Great, diamonds, clothing, portraits, and other valuable gifts from the height of Russia's imperial age.

In this essay, I will argue that Wilmot exchanges souvenirs with Princess Dashkova to help strengthen Britain's understanding of the distant Russian Empire and encourage a possible alliance against Napoleon. Collecting souvenirs, or portable, national memorials that sustained memories of the journey abroad, was a common practice of travelers at the time.² The souvenirs would allow Wilmot to memorialize her friendship with the princess while bringing Britain and Russia

¹ Wilmot published the princess's memoirs in 1840: Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova, *Memoirs of the Princess Daschkaw: Lady of Honour to Catherine II, Empress of all the Russias*, ed. Martha Wilmot Bradford (London: H. Colburn, 1840).

² See Danielle M. LaSusa, "Eiffel Tower Key Chains and Other Pieces of Reality: The Philosophy of Souvenirs," *Philosophical Forum* 38:3 (2007): 271–87.

together culturally. For Wilmot, the souvenirs further serve a political function. The French attempted to invade Ireland in 1796 and planned another invasion of Britain that stretched from 1803 to 1805. Although discontent with their lack of political representation after the Acts of Union in 1800, many moderates in the Irish gentry, such as Wilmot, felt that a revolution headed by Napoleon posed a greater risk to their nation's stability than their lower status within Britain's empire. Wilmot thus collects Russian souvenirs to facilitate a greater connection between Britain and Russia as well as between Ireland and England. Moreover, as Napoleon's growing empire began to threaten Russia, the princess and other Russian leaders began advocating for a union with Britain rather than France. The act of giving these imperial objects to Wilmot indicates that the princess shared her friend's desire to forge an alliance.

To show how Wilmot uses souvenirs in *The Russian Journals*, I will focus on two objects: the miniature portrait, which she exchanges with Princess Dashkova to establish a political alliance with Russia through personal friendship, and the masquerade costume, which she uses to make Russia—exotic, eastern, and different—fashionable at home. Wilmot's exchange of souvenirs shows her engaging in the larger global trends of the time. In *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Maxine Berg argues that Britain's political and national identity was fashioned through the worldwide circulation of goods. This was especially true during the Napoleonic wars. As she states, “[o]pposition to the French and Catholicism provided one way of making connections among peoples of the British Isles. But identities were also made in trade and empire, in facing the ‘otherness’ of different civilizations and cultures.”³ By exchanging souvenirs with Russia, Wilmot likewise aims to create a connection between two very different but powerful empires as a way to oppose France and strengthen Britain. She also suggests that England face the otherness of its Irish colony as part of this national growth. The circulation of material goods that she traces in her journal provides an essential view of how Britain had begun to develop international alliances and redefine itself as a more global nation.

The Miniature Portrait: Picturing an Alliance

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Britain witnessed a surge of interest in the miniature portrait and its sentimental meanings.⁴ As shown in *The Russian Journals*, Wilmot collects the miniature portrait in part to memorialize her friendship with Princess Dashkova. According to Edith Londonderry, the unlikely but intense friendship formed because the princess, ill and aging, found Wilmot

³ Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8.

⁴ Julie Aronson and Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Perfect Likeness: European and American Portrait Miniatures from the Cincinnati Art Museum* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 20.

to be an intelligent and sympathetic companion; in turn, Wilmot appreciated the princess's kindness and protection during her stay in a foreign land.⁵ In a journal entry of December 20, 1803, several months after her arrival in Russia, she recounts how the princess is about to give her a visual token of their friendship:

The Princess is preparing a Bracelet for me, her own picture; it is to be worn on the left arm, and is literally call'd a Sentiment. (Do not suppose I have lost my senses because I continue my plan of writing all sorts of little nothings as they occur; by the by I think such trifles often let one into the manners of a place more than graver subjects, and I shall be so delighted if I can make you sensible of the manners and customs here.) You may be sure this same Bracelet is a more agreeable testimony of Princess Daschkaw's affection than anything else cou'd be.⁶

Circular or oval in shape, the miniature portrait was often worn as jewelry or ornament.⁷ As the princess's "own" image, the miniature is closely connected to its painted subject, and Wilmot believes it represents her friend's "affection" for her. Being "literally call'd a Sentiment," the bracelet is the embodiment of emotion; assigned a proper name, it is specifically intended to evoke love for and remembrance of the person pictured. The instructive phrase "it is to be worn" suggests that its correct display helps the viewer to recognize its particular function as a sentimental memorial;⁸ worn on the left arm as a bracelet, it enables Wilmot to intimately attach her friend to her body. Its placement on the left side of the body, close to the heart, heightens the portrait's sentimental value. As Robin Jaffe Frank points out, the miniature portrait is a memorial object used to commemorate highly personal associations between the sitter and the beholder.⁹ The portrait bracelet that Wilmot wears allows her to show in a lasting material way her connection with the princess.

Beyond personal remembrance, the miniature portrait on the bracelet signifies political affiliation. Featuring the image of the princess, a prominent Russian leader, the bracelet is a revealing testimony of Wilmot's feelings for her benefactress as well as her political sympathy. Wilmot observes a similar practice with Count Alexis Orlov, another leading figure under Catherine the Great's reign, who "wears the Empress's picture set in diamonds of enormous size."¹⁰ The valuable diamonds

⁵ Martha Wilmot, *The Russian Journals of Martha and Catherine Wilmot*, ed. Edith Londonderry and Harford Montgomery Hyde (London: Macmillan, 1934), xx. This edition will be quoted without changes in punctuation or grammar to reflect current usage.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 126.

⁸ Wilmot, *The Russian Journals*, 67.

⁹ Robin Jaffe Frank, *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), vii.

¹⁰ Wilmot, *The Russian Journals*, 68.

reveal the degree to which the count values his connection to the former empress. As Catherine's signature stone, the diamonds help establish her identity, while their size reflects her momentous political importance. Like Wilmot's bracelet, the count's miniature proclaims his association with and support of Russia's imperial leaders. As Frank explains, the miniature portrait can function as a symbol of political connection when featuring a person of public standing; furthermore, it can act as a tool of propaganda, helping to create an image of the wearer in relation to the subject.¹¹ Wilmot may wear the bracelet to acknowledge what Londonderry interprets as her gratitude to the princess, but with its image of a famous political figure, the bracelet also acts as a declaration of her support for the Russian Empire and fashions her as its loyal subject.

In writing about the miniature portrait, Wilmot wants to generate sympathy for Russia at home. Recording "all sorts of little nothings" in her journal, she presents her readers with the insignificant incidents of her everyday life abroad but also discusses the "nothings," or small objects, that the princess gives her. Though seemingly worthless as "trifles," these everyday objects carry importance because they enable her readers to better understand Russian culture and politics. She commands her readers to "not suppose I have lost my senses" for writing on souvenirs; far from irrational, she uses her senses to perceive the information afforded to her by such objects. In turn, Wilmot believes that the "Bracelet is a more agreeable testimony of ... affection than anything else cou'd be" because readers can envision the princess's love through this object. Reaching out to her audience through the souvenir, she desires to "make you sensible" and render her audience as receptive as she is to Russia. When she says "I continue my plan of writing" she means that she not only perseveres in her project of discussing miniatures but also uses them as part of her plan to establish national feelings for Russia in her home country.¹² Rather than indicating a side issue, her digressive comment interrupting the discussion of the bracelet is a way to instruct her viewers on how to regard this seemingly foreign country.

Moreover, Wilmot hopes that the miniature portrait will solidify Ireland's political relationship with Russia through personal friendship. In a journal entry of October 29, 1805, she writes of the princess: "She has given me this *Eveg* a *gage d'amitié* of high value indeed, her own Picture."¹³ While the portrait acts as, literally translated from French, a pledge or guarantee of friendship between Wilmot and the princess, it is also a gift from a high-ranking official that shows Russia's desire to ally with Britain. Despite the declared intent of feeling, Wilmot is aware that these gifts are employed for political ends. As she states, "I was often offer'd bribes ... in the guise of proferr'd friendship."¹⁴ The *gage d'amitié* is thereby a means by which the princess can convince her and the British to take

¹¹ Frank, *Love and Loss*, 10, 16.

¹² Wilmot, *The Russian Journals*, 67.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 154. Wilmot uses the abbreviation "Eveg" in her letters to signify evening.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 298.

Russia's side. However, it is a bribe that Wilmot willingly accepts in the interests of her country. After expressing concern over the news of "the dreadful convulsed state of Ireland & the threats of ... *french Invasion*" in a September 17, 1803, entry, she writes to her mother to say: "You hope Russia will be our friend. How ardently do I hope it too."¹⁵ Calling Russia by this intimate term, she shows that the desired connection is national as well as personal. Her journal entry of September 16, 1804 eventually brings "blessed intelligence respecting the Russians having avow'd their intentions of befriending England against the french."¹⁶ In describing the alliance as "befriending," Wilmot not only suggests that it functions like a friendship, but also that friendship has helped foster an alliance. Intimate objects like the miniature portrait, she implies, play a key role in establishing national connections.

The miniature portrait box additionally indicates how Britain would benefit from this alliance. Wilmot records in her journal on April 4, 1805: "The Princess rummaged her treasures today & gave me a magnificent snuff box of gold. The Empress Katherine's likeness is most perfectly represented in profil at one side & at the other the Coronation or rather the famous 28th of June when she was chosen."¹⁷ A popular sentimental object, the snuffbox shows the exchange of deep feeling between Wilmot and the princess. The status of the box as a luxury good heightens its sentimental appeal. As Berg explains, luxury goods, defined as elite in their association with rank and hierarchy, their link to the person, and their fine material, helped those who owned them rise in esteem.¹⁸ The box given to Wilmot is similarly associated with a "famous" empress and clearly connected to her through the "perfectly represented [likeness]."¹⁹ The wealth of the box, one of the princess's "treasures," enhances its function as a precious memento. Like the diamonds on Count Orlov's miniature, the "magnificent" gold material of the box signifies Catherine's importance as a ruler. By sharing with Wilmot an object of such luxury, the princess indicates the wealth and power of the Russian Empire; in turn, the political alliance would appear to be equally worthy. As Russia's ally, the gift implies, Britain would rise in the world's esteem as a more global empire.

To further show her bond with Russia, Wilmot plans to exhibit the princess's miniature portraits at home. She relates how the princess gives her yet another gift in a December 1, 1805, journal entry:

But a few days ago she gave me a *gage d'amitié* which she priz'd to such a degree that she told me she had intended to have it buried with her, and that in changing that intention in order to give it to me I might judge of her tenderness & affection. It was the first present She ever receiv'd from Katherine the Second, & certainly serv'd to recall the most interesting period of a friendship which *then*

¹⁵ Ibid., 50, 60.

¹⁶ Ibid., 128.

¹⁷ Ibid., 140.

¹⁸ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 28, 6.

¹⁹ Wilmot, *The Russian Journals*, 140.

existed assuredly.... It is a beautiful fan which the Princess happening to admire in Katherine's hand was requested by the Empress to accept as a memorandum of her affection.... I think I shall get it elegantly framed, and consider it as one of the most valuable memorandums of friendship which I possess.²⁰

The portrait fan, another sentimental object, signifies the empress's select "request" of the princess as a friend and "serv'd to recal" this friendship in her memory. Just as the princess once accepted the fan from Catherine "as a memorandum of her affection," Wilmot now can "judge of her tenderness & affection" in receiving the fan from the princess. While the princess had intended to have the fan buried with her remains, Wilmot decides to turn it into a souvenir by framing it. Susan Stewart contends that objects "placed under glass ... eternalize an environment by closing it off from the possibility of living experience" or change; framing an object thus turns "history into still life."²¹ Far from moldering in the grave, the princess's fan will live on when preserved behind glass. By planning to frame it, Wilmot suggests that the affection between her and the princess will be just as lasting and remain unaltered by time.

Wilmot's display of the fan further indicates the merit of an alliance with Russia. By intending to have it "elegantly framed," Wilmot indicates the importance of the fan to her, much as the diamonds framing Count Orlov's miniature of Catherine the Great reflect the value of that connection to him. However, the frame also reflects the worth of the object itself. As Marcia Pointon explains, "visibility is a prime factor in the scale of values attached to ownership," while "the framing of particular portraits in elaborate and individually designed frames calls attention to their pre-eminence."²² Wilmot would have wanted those at home to recognize the status such an object provided. The personal gift of the fan would further assume political significance for Britain when framed. Berg notes that luxury goods serve as "cultural displays of power" for their collectors, and that countries often imported them to bolster national identity.²³ By exhibiting the fan, Wilmot would provide a constant material reminder of the strength Britain could gain through an alliance with Russia. Because the fan carries such importance both personally and politically, it is no surprise that she deems it one of her most valuable souvenirs.

While Wilmot collects miniatures to forge an alliance with Russia, the princess gives her the objects as a means of guaranteeing both her own and imperial Russia's remembrance. At the time of Wilmot's visit to Russia, the princess was close to death and had no legal heirs; Londonderry argues that this is probably why she loaded Wilmot with so many gifts.²⁴ Marcel Mauss points out that in some societies

²⁰ Ibid, 159.

²¹ Stewart, *On Longing*, 144.

²² Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 13, 34.

²³ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 38, 19.

²⁴ Wilmot, *The Russian Journals*, xxi.

“exchanges and contracts take place in the form of presents; in theory these are voluntary, in reality they are given and reciprocated obligatorily.”²⁵ In passing on her goods to Wilmot, the princess no doubt expects her friend to remember her in turn. During her visit to her sister, Catherine Wilmot notes in a letter of May 15, 1807, that “the Princess has been acting of late precisely as if she was already Dead. Her Legacies to her friends She has already given in advance of those sort of memorandums which are to exist as monuments of her esteem.”²⁶ As gifts by will, the princess’s goods are distributed in preparation for her death. Because they are “given in advance,” the gifts make her seem deceased already. However, the princess uses her premature gifts to project her memory into the future. Though the objects are small, they function, just like much larger “monuments,” as lasting evidence of her notable person, memorializing her and enabling her continued existence. As Mauss explains, because a gift “still possesses something of [the giver],” it solidifies the connection between giver and receiver.²⁷ By giving her souvenirs to Martha Wilmot, the princess ensures that she, and by extension her empire, will be remembered after her death.

The miniature portrait not only allows the princess to be remembered but also paradoxically keeps her alive. As Wilmot notes in her journal on June 7, 1808, giving the miniature “awaken’d in Princess D’s mind a hundred recollections of former times, but I think she is more animated *in it* than in any other.”²⁸ For the princess, the miniature conjures up remembrances, so that previous events seem to continue in the present. As a result, she is more enlivened when thinking about the past than the present. While Wilmot’s pronoun “it” could refer to “former times,” it may also suggest that the princess is more alive in the miniature. According to Stewart, “the miniature projects an eternalized future-past upon the subject; the miniature image consoles in its status as an ‘always there.’” Represented in the portrait, the subject is rendered immortal. Because the miniature is continually present, it guarantees the subject’s continued existence. Souvenirs like the miniature thus “deny the moment of death” with their static nature.²⁹ Wilmot recognizes that, even if the princess dies, she will still be “animated” and seemingly alive in her portrait. The miniature, which captures her presence “more ... than any other” state does, is the best way to retain her presence.³⁰

In turn, Wilmot gives her own miniature portrait to the princess to solidify the alliance between their countries. In a January 24, 1804, letter to her sister-in-law, she writes of her plans to “sit for *four* Pictures. Only think, the Princess will have a

²⁵ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (New York: Routledge, 2002), 3.

²⁶ Wilmot, *The Russian Journals*, 246.

²⁷ Mauss, *The Gift*, 15.

²⁸ Wilmot, *The Russian Journals*, 347.

²⁹ Stewart, *On Longing*, 126, 144.

³⁰ Wilmot, *The Russian Journals*, 347.

Miniature of this ridiculous face of mine in a snuff Box."³¹ While Wilmot herself is not a political figure, her portrait, featured on a box like that of Catherine the Great, plays a political as well as a sentimental role by visually linking her country with Russia. Her emphasis on the number of portraits indicates not only the princess's love for her but also her desire to make the alliance. In addition to the portraits the princess wants for herself, Wilmot notes "[a] second Miniature she intends to send to my Mother."³² By sending one to Wilmot's family and mother country, the princess encourages Ireland to remember Wilmot's connection to Russia. The purpose of the miniature to establish a political alliance is further evinced by its appearance. According to Pointon, political art plays a more symbolic than representative role, so that the identity of the subject portrayed is less important than the material claims made upon the subject.³³ Following the progress of the portrait in a letter sent to her mother the next month, Wilmot asserts: "as to likeness I fear that will be left out of the question," yet "your miniature shall be just like it."³⁴ Just as the pictures of Wilmot must match, so Britain and Russia should comply in their political views.

The exchange of miniature portraits further enables Wilmot to assume a political role in facilitating international relations. In her July 18, 1807, journal entry, she recounts: "Every description of Society that I have ever seen here has been the faithful Miniature of a Court. I am myself *Prime Minister* of one of the greatest in Moscow."³⁵ When she calls Russian society a miniature court, she means that each aristocratic group to which the princess introduced her acts like a small-scale replica of the ruling class. By deeming herself its prime minister, Wilmot suggests that she plays the equivalent of this political position in Russian society as the princess's friend. She also uses the term to designate herself the diplomatic representative of Britain in Russia. While her position may not appear politically serious, the Russians hold her accountable for Britain's political moves. As she notes in her entry of July 21, 1807, "King George & his two parliaments are sometimes brought to me to *answer* for their proceedings (for which I am made responsible) with as much gravity as if the thing was not absurd."³⁶ Though the Russians' behavior may seem overly serious to Wilmot, who has no direct influence on the British monarch, it shows that they view her as politically important partially because of her national affiliation. The role she plays in Russia's miniature social court thus carries great symbolic significance.

Wilmot not only writes about miniature portraits, but also turns Russia itself into a miniature for her British readers. Her "description of Society" in the journal

³¹ Ibid., 79.

³² Ibid.

³³ Marcia Pointon, *Strategies for Showing: Women, Possession, and Representation in English Visual Culture 1665–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 176.

³⁴ Wilmot, *The Russian Journals*, 83–4.

³⁵ Ibid., 298.

³⁶ Ibid., 301.

provides her readers with written miniature pictures of the Russian court.³⁷ She even turns the princess, her superior in political and social rank, into a miniature through her writing. At the princess's estate, she describes her favorite room as containing "a most elegant Bureau where all my writing impliments are arranged in the compleatest order. Over the Bureau hangs the Princess's picture."³⁸ Placed above the writing desk, the princess's portrait is situated so that Wilmot cannot help but see her friend before her as she writes. Having all her writing tools perfectly arranged at her desk, she is prepared to carry out her memorial task. By creating a miniature portrait of the princess and her society in her journal, she turns Russia into a souvenir to be contemplated and interpreted by her readers. Although her miniature literary portrait renders Russia small, Wilmot hopes that it will convey to her Irish audience the national benefits of establishing an alliance with an empire as large and powerful as that of Russia.

The Masquerade Costume: Union in Disguise

According to Terry Castle, attending masquerades was as much of an eighteenth-century tourist phenomenon as visiting Italian museums on the Grand Tour, and costumes often became souvenirs of travels; at the end of the century, their popularity also coincided with the expansion of imperialism.³⁹ Wilmot engages in the imperial collecting of Russian costumes to introduce this powerful but little-known empire to those at home. In a letter written to her mother on April 28, 1804, from the princess's rural estate in Troitskoe, she recounts how her servant makes her a peasant costume:

My little Sophia is at present hard at work, and guess the employment. She is making me a dress, according to the costume of the Peasants of this part of the country, of glowing red nankeen. If an opportunity offers I intend sending it home. It wou'd be a fine dress in case of a Masquerade frolick. The singularity of the fashion wou'd be a delightful puzzle.⁴⁰

Fashioned according to traditional Russian clothing, the peasant dress is an authentic souvenir of its place of origin. However, as a costume, Wilmot also intends to wear it as a clever disguise for a masquerade party. By promising to send a Russian peasant costume to Ireland, she engages Britain's oriental fascination to heighten her readers' interest in Russia. Under the reign of Catherine the Great, notes Londonderry, Russia had started to Westernize but was still seen

³⁷ Ibid., 298.

³⁸ Ibid., 64.

³⁹ Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1986), 12, 61.

⁴⁰ Wilmot, *The Russian Journals*, 96.

by the West as “essentially barbarian and Asiatic.”⁴¹ In addition, groups of people such as peasants, who were socially foreign to the middle and upper classes, were often seen as exotic. The peasant dress, which Sophia crafts from the Chinese fabric nankeen, connects Wilmot’s readers to Russia’s oriental past rather than its more Westernized present. In fact, by dressing Russia up in this Eastern costume, she purposely emphasizes the country’s exoticism to increase its appeal in Britain. As Castle states, the most unusual costumes were also the most popular at masquerades.⁴² Indeed, Wilmot understands that the Russian dress would be valued for its “singularity” in a Western context.⁴³ By bringing a Russian costume that her viewers will surely like, she hopes to convince them to share her feelings about Russia as well.

While Wilmot builds on the exotic appeal of the Russian dress, she also renders it safe through the mediating presence of the masquerade. Worn as a fun costume for a “frolick,” the dress would be less likely to intimidate a British audience. Presenting viewers with a “delightful puzzle,” it entices them into a game that simultaneously entertains and tests their knowledge of this unfamiliar national identity. Taking the dress out of its native setting and “sending it home” would further enhance its effect.⁴⁴ As Stewart observes, “the exotic object represents distance appropriated; ... on the one hand, the object must be marked as exterior and foreign, on the other it must be marked as arising directly out of an immediate experience of its possessor.”⁴⁵ By donning the costume, Wilmot becomes the intermediary with the “immediate experience” through which Russia can be understood. With her assistance, the costume would create, to use Stewart’s terms, an “intimate distance” between Russia and Britain. Although the purpose of the masquerade is to render the familiar strange, the unfamiliar dress would also be more approachable when exhibited “within the context of the familiar, the home.”⁴⁶ Wilmot’s strategy of presenting an unknown souvenir that inhabits a known space would help Britain to imagine forming an alliance with an empire so different than its own.

The masquerade costume also functions as a disguise for Wilmot’s political intentions. As Castle notes, masquerades were frequently aligned with politics, since information about them was placed alongside reports of wars and government sessions in newspapers; hence “the masquerade was news” because, like politics, it “absorb[ed] similar kinds of public attention.”⁴⁷ Wearing the peasant dress to a masquerade in Britain would transform it into a statement about Wilmot’s support of Russia during a time of political debate over the alliance. Furthermore, the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁴² Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, 60.

⁴³ Wilmot, *The Russian Journals*, 96.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Stewart, *On Longing*, 147.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, ix.

costume would enable her to gauge the possibility of this connection. In a July 5, 1804, letter to her mother, she emphasizes her desire for the costume's safe arrival by writing: "I am going to ask you whether you have had any tydings of the Russ Peasant's dress which I sent to Moscow to be forwarded to St Petersburg the day before we quitted Troitska."⁴⁸ By inquiring whether her mother has "tydings" of the dress, Wilmot is asking whether the dress has arrived at the same time that she inquires about news on the political status between the two countries. If the costume has been sent through the major cities in Russia and onto Ireland, this means that the routes of trade are open between them and that the relations between Britain and Russia are assumedly friendly.

At the same time that Wilmot presents Russia as Eastern, she employs the costume to break the stereotype of it as a less modern nation and to reveal its imperial power. In a December 13, 1806, letter, she notes that the princess gave her a number of costume books, which she describes as "three most interesting Volumes of 'a Description of all the Nations submitted to Russia' full of colour'd Prints of the Costumes of Each."⁴⁹ By documenting all the countries conquered by Russia, the costume books act as evidence of the Russian Empire's strength and glory. The prints of each colonized country allow the reader to see over whom Russia exerts power, while the books collect the dresses of different nations and turn them into souvenirs of the Russian Empire. In giving the books to Wilmot, the princess hopes to prove the Russians' power to Britain through the documentation of dress. As Douglas Fordham observes, visual representations of exotic costume were used to show a country's imperial power, and exhibiting them "became a matter of national pride and significance." Fordham further points out that costume had the ability to affect political decisions.⁵⁰ Indeed, Wilmot hopes that the book will convince her readers that Russia could be a valuable ally. Although she initially presents Russia to Britain in peasant dress, she removes the disguise to show that the former is not a lowly, backward country in terms of its imperial status; rather, the costume books show evidence of Russian power over those nations that have been incorporated into its empire.

Costume enables Wilmot not only to cultivate a partnership between Britain and Russia, but also to warn the former that it could lose the alliance to France. According to Russian historian Marc Raeff, Russia embraced Western cultural ways, such as fashions in clothes, in its attempts to modernize.⁵¹ In her December 13, 1806, letter, Wilmot notes this cultural emulation of the French by the Russians when she states: "Profession & trade of the domestic kind (I mean taylors,

⁴⁸ Wilmot, *The Russian Journals*, 112. "Russ" is Wilmot's abbreviation for Russian.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁵⁰ Douglas Fordham, "Costume Dramas: British Art at the Court of the Marathas," *Representations* 101:1 (2008): 59 and following.

⁵¹ Marc Raeff, "The Emergence of the Russian European: Russia as a Full Partner of Europe," in *Russia Engages the World, 1453-1825*, ed. Cynthia Hyla Whittaker (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 124.

Mantuamakers, Miliners ...) swarm with french."⁵² Through her parenthetical list of clothiers, she emphasizes that those who make clothes in Russia are French, and that French fashions are popular in the country. Her use of the verb "swarm" suggests that the French occupy jobs in Russia in large numbers and conveys to Britain how widespread French influence is in the empire. The term further evokes the state of being surrounded, reflecting the encroaching invasion of Russia that Napoleon was planning. Wilmot reveals the extent to which French dress has overtaken the country when she tries unsuccessfully to obtain Russian clothing at a store before leaving for Ireland. As she recounts in her journal on September 28, 1808, "I went this Eveg to the Russ shop to buy a russ manufacture gown, but found nothing."⁵³ Russian clothes, replaced by French ones, have become impossible to find. Using clothing to show national sympathy, Wilmot reflects that, if Russia were to adopt French dress and other customs, it might ally with France politically as well.

By sending traditional peasant clothing to Britain, Wilmot symbolically shows Russia's growing political servility to the French Empire. In her December 13, 1806, letter, she calls Napoleon's France "the Silken Yoke of the World's Tyrant."⁵⁴ As French goods enter Russia, they unite the two countries in a commercial alliance; according to Wilmot, however, France's yoke is also an oppressive agency that renders Russia subservient. Napoleon not only uses actual luxury textiles like silk, which suggest wealth and status, to compete with Russia's nobility, but his rule is also silken in its suave and ingratiating means of establishing power through fashion. Wilmot consequently views Napoleon as a tyrant who employs dress to exercise complete power over Russia. In turn, she sees the Russians who submit to French fashion as no more than potential subjects. Through costume, she shows *that Russia could become, like the "Nations submitted" in the costume books, a souvenir of Napoleon's empire.*⁵⁵ The peasant dress thus sends an allegorical message to Britain regarding Russia's growing subservience to Napoleon's regime.

To counteract French influence, Wilmot not only introduces Russian dress to Britain but also circulates English clothing in Russia. She writes in an August 1, 1803, letter to her mother: "The examination of my Wardrobe wou'd have made you laugh, and the admiration for everything English. I mention these trifles because I think they are very characteristic."⁵⁶ The Russian women who are fascinated with Wilmot's clothes imbibe through them an understanding of English culture; the clothes, then, are a way for Wilmot to spread ideas about the British Empire in Russia. While it may seem humorous to her mother that fashions so commonplace at home are unfamiliar in Russia, Wilmot suggests that this very exoticism in dress makes the British popular there. Employing the same

⁵² Wilmot, *The Russian Journals*, 275.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 382.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

term she uses to describe the miniature portraits, Wilmot observes that clothes are “trifles” whose fashionable status belies their political impact. By describing this “characteristic” Russian quality, she gives her mother an impression of the country while asserting just how much dress defines national character. Eventually, in a letter of July 9, 1804, Wilmot informs her mother that the princess requests that she stop sending her daughter clothes of “English Museline” from home, because “when she gets them she gives the half away.”⁵⁷ Just as Wilmot takes nankeen to Ireland, she brings muslin to Russia in order to generate interest in Britain. The practice that seems unnecessary to the princess constitutes, for Wilmot, an attempt to make national connections through dress.

Wilmot additionally encourages an alliance between Britain and Russia by dressing up as a peasant for the princess. In an August 23, 1808, journal entry, she recounts: “Yesterday I receiv’d a present ... which delighted me, a Peasant’s dress in the true fashion of the Married Women. I put it on immediately & went with bread & salt to shew myself to the Princess.”⁵⁸ By donning the costume to exhibit herself before the princess, she engages in a form of masquerade. Just as the Russian peasant costume will be “delightful” to those in Ireland, she is “delighted” to dress up as a figure that is the opposite of who she really is in order to entertain her friend.⁵⁹ Although she wears an authentic peasant dress, Wilmot is not a Russian, a peasant, or a married woman. However, this “true fashion” reveals the truth about her class status. With her humble props of bread and salt, she suggests that she is the princess’s servant. Despite her relatively high rank as a member of the Irish gentry at home, in Russia she stands in relation to the princess, an aristocratic figure heading a great empire, just as a Russian peasant does. While making social calls in Russia, she is also in a position of servitude as the princess’s companion. Far from denigrating her, however, the costume allows Wilmot to suggest the union she desires between Britain and Russia. As the dress of married women, it implies that she is both wedded and servile to the princess; it thus becomes a means by which she can appease her friend and win Russia’s favor.

Through these peasant costumes, Wilmot expresses her desire to unite not only the Russian and British Empires but also Ireland and England. Elizabeth Bohls points to the phenomenon of middle-class women tourists who identified with the lower classes as a means of commenting upon their own situations. “British women carried with them into unfamiliar terrain their subordinate position in their own society,” she explains. Consequently, “women travelers recognized analogies between their own position and that of women in Middle-Eastern cultures” or, more generally, cultures foreign to their own, which “sometimes resulted in an identification with the Other that cut across the barriers of religion, culture and ethnicity” as well as class. Bohls calls this practice “projection or displacement,” in which women write “their own cultural exclusion through that of these other

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 96, 369.

Others.”⁶⁰ The acts of sending, wearing, and invoking Russian peasant costumes allow Wilmot to displace and thereby address her own country’s lack of political representation within Britain. In receiving a peasant dress from her servant, Wilmot shows that she identifies with Sophia as a subject under empire. The costume suggests that, to England, the Irish are the equivalent of peasants and just as foreign as Russians. By dressing as a peasant, Wilmot comments upon her low status as a member of the British Empire and signals her desire to be as unified with England as she has become with Russia and the princess.

Costume allows Wilmot to further encourage unity by challenging hierarchies of class and nation. In a letter of February 18, 1804, she describes a masquerade held by the princess: “The best thing I saw there was my own little pretty *femme de Chambre* Sophia. I dress’d her out in every finery I could collect and she look’d uncommonly pretty.”⁶¹ By putting Sophia in luxurious clothing, Wilmot symbolically moves her out of the peasant class and into the privileged nobility. According to Castle, this reversal of roles through costume collapses the boundaries between self and other. More than just the disguise of the body, the critic argues, “the festive fusions of the masquerade suggested the breakdown of larger conceptual oppositions.” In particular, costumes of “[o]ccupational dress overthrew the hierarchy of rank and class.” As a result, Castle further explains, the distinctions of nobility and servantry, or domination and powerlessness, disappear in the chaos created by the masquerade.⁶² In dressing Sophia as a lady and herself as a peasant, Wilmot questions such categories of self and other by showing that the roles are reversible. The clothes that render Sophia “uncommonly pretty” imply that the dress worn by those in subject positions are far from common.⁶³ For Wilmot, this message is resonant on a national level as well. Identifying closely with her own servant, she dresses up Sophia in order to imply that Ireland, seen as lower in rank under Britain’s empire, is as good as England. By crossing class boundaries with costume, she suggests that the divisions between nations can indeed be breached.

Wilmot hopes that the exchange of dress with the princess will also increase Ireland’s national status at home. In a letter of September 24, 1805, Catherine Wilmot lists the numerous gifts that her sister receives, which include “a full suit of Russian Costume worn at Court by Princess Daschkaw.”⁶⁴ The princess’s royal clothing is a souvenir of her life at court and of the Russian Empire’s power; like masquerade dress, it too functions as a costume that would render its wearer an imperial figure. By giving it to Martha, the princess implies that she considers her as good as the nobility in Russia. In turn, the princess dresses down as an

⁶⁰ Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics 1716–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 202–203.

⁶¹ Wilmot, *The Russian Journals*, 83.

⁶² Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, 76–8.

⁶³ Wilmot, *The Russian Journals*, 83.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 198.

Irishwoman. As Catherine states in an October 1, 1805, letter, “in the center of riches and honours I wish you were to see the Princess An old brown great coat and a silk handkerchief about her neck worn to rags is her dress, & well may it be worn to rags for she has worn it 18 years and will continue to do so as long as she lives because it belong’d to Mrs Hamilton.”⁶⁵ By masquerading in her Irish friend’s clothes, which function as symbols of their attachment, the princess displays her sentimental bond with Catherine Hamilton. Dressing in “rags” in the midst of her “riches” further suggests her sympathy with Ireland as a subject nation. As Catherine Wilmot’s letters show, the princess’s actions place Ireland on an equal level with Russia, thereby raising the country’s importance.

The masquerade costume’s subversion of boundaries enables Martha Wilmot to express her desire for political union between Ireland and England. She writes of her conversation with the princess in a September 9, 1803, letter:

This Evening she suggested an idea which I really think excellent, that the most perfect union wou’d be establish’d between England and Ireland were the King to reside and even call his Parliament in the latter Kingdom at Stated periods—thus becoming acquainted with Ireland and blending the interests of both Countrys by raising the consequence of the *little Green Island* and exciting the affections of his Irish subjects.⁶⁶

As the princess’s suggestion shows, the way to establish union would be for England to do a little masquerading of its own, in which Britain’s king would live and set political meetings in Ireland part of the time. By getting to know Wilmot’s country, he would no longer see the colony as foreign. Like the princess’s gift of royal costume and her dressing in Irish clothes, the king’s political actions, Wilmot believes, would “rais[e] the consequence” of her country in England’s eyes. While the Irish would remain subjects, like the peasants that she represents in masquerade costume, Wilmot imagines a union in which Ireland would be as important as England and enjoy more complete political representation within the empire. Just as costume helps to erase boundaries, so Wilmot hopes the two countries could share similar interests that would break down the divide between them. With Napoleon threatening invasion of Britain and radical groups attempting to stage rebellions in Ireland, she suggests that it is in both nations’ best interest to facilitate strong relations.

Although virtually unknown in literary studies today, Martha Wilmot’s *The Russian Journals* remains an important text on the material circulation of *things* in an increasingly global eighteenth-century world. In particular, the souvenirs that she exchanges with Princess Dashkova shed light on how cultural and political connections were formed between Russia and Britain as well as how national identity was redefined on a more global scale. Interestingly, Wilmot’s journal remained unpublished during her lifetime; though it is unclear why, one

⁶⁵ Ibid., 200–201.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 50.

may assume that she feared a negative reception in Ireland due to her gender and political views. As she claims upon her arrival in England on December 26, 1808, "I was on a sort of theatre; a great public witnessed my acts; they judg'd them too."⁶⁷ Despite her reticence to share her Russian experience with a larger public, writing the journal enabled her to partake in the major political debates of the time and assume a role of public consequence. Even though she was forced to flee Russia after its declaration of peace with France in 1807, the alliance with Britain was resumed in 1812 and remained strong after Napoleon's defeat into the nineteenth century. The journal thus stands as a souvenir in its own right, reminding us to align Wilmot with other global writers of her time.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 414.