

To the Editor:

In his review of William Fierman, ed., *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation* in the summer 1992 *Slavic Review*, Michael Rywkin has given a misleading view of my chapter on Uzbek politics. Those who wish a fuller picture are invited to read the chapter, whose main message is suggested by its title: "Prelude to 'Independence': How the Uzbek Party Apparatus Broke Moscow's Grip on Elite Recruitment."

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Professor Rywkin has decided to let the matter rest there.

To the Editor:

There is a suspicious odor of censorship which emanates from James Cracraft's review essay of John Alexander's *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* ("Great Catherine," *Slavic Review*, Spring 1993). I find it objectionable. No claim to extirpate alleged sexism from our midst can justify such a distorted evaluation of the book. Its selection of tendentious citations, plus the preemptory judgments in the form of lengthy quotes from essays by three of Cracraft's women graduate students, are a parody of a scholarly review. There are indeed times when fresh insight comes from the younger generation, but I recall that the Salem witch trials relied heavily on juvenile testimony.

It is unfortunate that references to Catherine's sexuality, and the explicitly sexual language that appears on several pages of Alexander's book, are offensive to them and to Cracraft. But any historian of the eighteenth century knows that European political commentary (and especially political satire) of the period contained heavy doses of salacious gossip. To purge quotes about Catherine's person and personal behavior of all such language and to delete references to her intimate relations with her lovers would satisfy prudish minds, but it would do an injustice to the tumultuous life (and reign) of Catherine.

Queen Victoria she was not, though Cracraft clearly prefers the biographies of "Great Catherine" that minimize the differences in their private lives. Alexander follows her emotional roller coaster and evaluates in their own terms the vicious rumors concerning her love life that circulated in her time. He has done us a service by placing her within the historical context where she belongs. Cracraft judges her sexuality an inappropriate topic and tries to capitalize on our concern to avoid sexist criteria of historical interpretation to condemn Alexander. Moliere's Tartuffe would have enjoyed his performance.

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To the Editor:

It was with the greatest astonishment that I read Mr. James Cracraft's review essay on John T. Alexander's book in the *Slavic Review* vol. 52, no. 1.

If the scholarly community will begin to evaluate books according to their "political correctness," be it racial, sexual or other, the end of this road is not hard to see.

I live in a country where students once wanted to ban Freud's book from the requirements—the reason, this time, was Freud's attitude to communism, not to sex.

The goal of academic studies, as I see it, is that the students will be taught to think for themselves—not that impeccable wisdom will be poured to their heads. Let it never happen that students' (or teachers') councils vote which books will be politically correct enough to be fit to be studied.

Vestigia terrent.

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Professor Cracraft chooses not to reply.

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