

The Great (2020) is a satirical and explosive TV Show created by Tony McNamara. This TV show is one of the reasons I began enjoying writing TV shows. In my third year as a Screenwriting student, one of the assignments was to write a Spec Script for an existing series. I chose *The Great* (2020) for its unique style and just batshit crazy humour. It was a difficult task to try and get all of the nuances and the rapid-fire jokes into a script as a fledgeling screenwriter, but doing this assignment has made me appreciate the show for what it is.

With Elle Fanning as the determined Catherine and Nicholas Hoult as her erratic husband, Peter III of Russia, it's a wildly fictionalised version of her life, all about her plan to overthrow him and take the throne. In the beginning, we follow Catherine as she moves to Russia and marries the boisterous and insane king. His sociopathic inclinations and his general carelessness for people just make him awful. I mean truly terrible. He regularly beats his Army's General, his uneducated "strategies" cost Russia the war and then he blames it on others. Not to mention his lack of care for his new bride and even threatens and beats Catherine when they argue.

Catherine's naivety about becoming empress of Russia is shattered as soon as she meets Peter. Her cheery and childlike mindset bothered me in the show. In the beginning, it seemed like watching a baby bird having stones thrown at it as it fell to the ground, crushed. But soon, Catherine pulls herself out of her damsel mentality and she plans to overthrow Peter. The main conflict centres on Catherine's fight to gain power in a man's world, while also challenging the very systems that hold her back. The show's tagline, "An occasionally true story," makes it clear that entertainment and satire come first, not historical accuracy. With its over-the-top characters and events, *The Great* (2020) gives us a wild, darkly funny, and sometimes surprisingly emotional look at 18th-century Russian royalty.

Often the show shows the viewer just how backwards the Patriarchy is, using the men in control like Peter the III and Archie, the Orthodox Priest as the butt of this societal joke. In no way can the theme be misconstrued; misogyny is bad and stems from useless and stupid people. Catherine's journey represents an effort to dismantle those structures, but she does so from within, using both traditionally masculine and feminine tactics.

One of the best things about *The Great* (2020) is how smartly it uses satire. The show does a great job of mocking the ridiculousness of autocracy, especially through Peter III's over-the-top behaviour. His reign is a total joke—cruel, incompetent, and all about his obsession with his legacy. Meanwhile, he's off indulging in pointless debauchery while the country falls apart around him. His court is filled with sycophants, and his whims often lead to senseless violence and bizarre decrees.

Catherine, on the other hand, is all about Enlightenment ideals—she's big on education, science, and reform, and her vision for a more progressive Russia couldn't be more different from Peter's outdated views. But as the show goes on, *The Great* (2020) digs into the messy side of power and the compromises needed to get it. Catherine's idealism gets put to the test, and she has to learn to manipulate, lie, and even use

violence to secure her place. The show shows how chasing power can corrupt even the most well-intentioned people.

Catherine's character reflects liberal feminism, which pushes for women's rights and equality within the current political and social system. Catherine enters Russia as a naïve young woman, but she quickly learns that her marriage and position are less about partnership and more about being a political pawn and a breeding cow, her only use in this palace is to have Peter's babies and be quiet. Early on, she speaks of her dreams of bringing enlightenment and education to Russia, believing in rationality, progress, and equality.

Her desire to rule Russia as an enlightened leader, rather than merely as a figurehead beside her husband, is also a challenge to patriarchal norms, showing a woman asserting her right to political authority.

Yet, Catherine's rise to power also reveals complexities in the feminist struggle. As Catherine becomes more ruthless, the show highlights how hard it is to tear down power structures without getting caught up in them. She has to start using tactics usually linked to male rulers—like lying, manipulation, and even violence—to take control. This tension mirrors radical feminist critiques of how patriarchy dehumanises both men and women, forcing individuals into rigid roles.

Catherine is, after all, a woman of great privilege, both by her royal status and her education. Catherine's push to reform Russia often comes off as pretty condescending toward the lower classes, who she sees as uneducated and rough. Her goals aren't really about helping Russia's poor or oppressed—they're more about her fancy Enlightenment ideals, shaped by her privileged background. While she's all for women's education and empowerment, it's from an upper-class perspective, and she overlooks how peasant women deal with both sexism and class struggles.

Marial, Catherine's maid, serves as a foil to her mistress. Once a noblewoman, Marial's fall from grace reveals how class and gender intersect to disadvantage women differently. While Catherine fights for her place in the royal hierarchy, Marial's struggle is one of basic survival. The power dynamics between these two women offer a critique of the limitations of Catherine's feminist vision, which fails to fully account for the complexity of class oppression. The show's treatment of gender dynamics is both humorous and biting.

Elle Fanning's portrayal of Catherine blends the serious and the absurd. She is at once a fierce revolutionary and a woman dealing with mundane, sometimes ridiculous concerns—such as how to consummate her marriage with a husband who is utterly uninterested in her as a person. The show's irreverence and Catherine's complex portrayal defy simple categorizations of feminist heroism. Instead, it embraces the messiness of real-life power struggles, acknowledging the contradictions women face in their pursuit of empowerment.

I should mention Peter more. He is honestly one of the most redeemed characters in this show, after falling in love with Catherine, he's still uncouth, ignorant and just

generally strange but he finds himself empathetic, which is such an important emotion for a man like him to learn. He went from being crazed, uncontrollable and annoying to being a literal ride-or-die for Catherine. His selfish behaviour is still seen later in the series but he has learnt to control his impulsive nature and he genuinely tries to follow his Wife's rules. Catherine and Peter have one of the strangest and sweetest love stories I have ever seen, Peter would kill to protect her reputation and her rule and he even finds himself more at peace not being the Emperor of Russia, instead devoting himself as his son's father and caregiver.

This man would rather have Catherine be the ruling Monarch of Russia if he could just sit in his room with Paul, his baby boy, and come up with wild recipes for Catherine to try when she is done for the day.

They're love story is tragic, unique, and frustrating at times but in the end, they have a serious and deep love for each other. It breaks my heart every time I watch this show.

Conclusion

The Great (2020) is a sharp, funny look at gender, power, and feminist ideas, mixing historical drama with dark comedy. As we follow Catherine's rise to power, the show touches on different types of feminism—from liberal feminism's push for equality to radical feminism's critique of patriarchy. But it also dives into the messy contradictions that come with feminist struggles, especially when class and privilege are involved. By blending humour with deeper feminist themes, *The Great* gives us a fresh and thought-provoking take on the intersection of gender and power, both in history and today.