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# French in the nineteenth-century Russian salon: Fiodor Rostopchin's 'memoirs'

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*Introduction*

## Fiodor Rostopchin's life and career

Fiodor Rostopchin (1763-1826), whose laconic 'memoirs' we include in our corpus of documents, was the son of a retired major who owned land in the Province of Oriol, in the fertile black-earth region of Russia some two hundred miles south of Moscow. The family was thought to be of Mongol descent through a sixteenth-century ancestor who had come over to Russia from the Crimean Tatar horde. (It was even claimed that they traced their ancestry back to Genghis Khan (1162?-1227); it is doubtful, though, whether the family took the claim seriously, as Fiodor, in a letter to one of his daughters seems to treat it as a joke.<sup>1</sup>) From his tenth year until he reached the age of sixteen, Fiodor was educated at home by a Frenchman (a Monsieur Lacour), who was given permission to live with his pupils in a separate house on the family estate. According to an account written much later (in French) by one of his daughters, the young Rostopchin took much pleasure in reading the books that his tutor acquired for his charges, such as French works on ancient history by Jean-Baptiste-Louis Crevier (1693-1765), Charles Rollin (1661-1741) and René Aubert de Vertot (1655-1735) and the tragedies and moral essays of the great writers of the age of Louis XIV.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, as a young man, Fiodor served in the imperial army, seeing action in the Russo-Turkish War of 1787-92. He became a favourite of Paul, who would reign briefly from 1796 until he was killed in a palace coup in 1801, as a result of which his son Alexander was installed on the throne as Alexander I. Under Paul, Rostopchin rose to the rank of Lieutenant-General and *de facto* Minister of Foreign Affairs, in which role he encouraged a diplomatic rapprochement with France and a cooling of relations with Great Britain.

In 1801, shortly before the murder of Paul, Rostopchin fell out of favour and there began a long period during which he disappeared from public life, lived mainly on his estate at Voronovo to the south of Moscow and devoted himself to agricultural pursuits, horse-breeding and literary activity, for which he had some talent.<sup>3</sup> Apprehensive about the possibility that the revolutionary turmoil that had begun in France would affect Russia, Rostopchin tried to stir up animosity towards Freemasons and 'Martinists' (i.e. supporters of a mystical tradition of Masonry) and fanned the suspicion that Napoleon's ubiquitous agents were hard at work subverting Russians. From 1809, aided by Princess Ekaterina Dashkova

(1743-1810) and by the Emperor's sister, the Grand Duchess Catherine (Ekaterina Pavlovna; 1788-1818), Rostopchin began to try to regain favour at court. However, it was not until May 1812, when he was appointed military governor of Moscow, that his efforts were altogether successful. As Napoleon's invading army approached Moscow, he was also appointed commander in-chief of forces in the city. He took to writing leaflets in racy Russian, in which he gave Muscovites news of the conflict and incited hostility towards foreigners.<sup>4</sup> (Rostopchin was a rabble-rouser who readily resorted to unscrupulous means to achieve his political ends, which were rabidly conservative as well as patriotic.) He also energetically supervised the formation of a militia and the removal from Moscow of a large amount of state property, including official documents, religious relics and canons.

To Rostopchin's dismay, the Russian commander-in-chief, Mikhail Kutuzov (1745-1813), decided after the Battle of Borodino on 26 August 1812, at which both the Russian army and Napoleon's *Grande Armée* had suffered heavy losses, to preserve his forces by retreating through Moscow to the south-east, thus abandoning the city to the invaders. The day after the *Grande Armée* entered Moscow, fires broke out which within a few days destroyed a large part of the city. The charge that Napoleon himself started the fires seems implausible, because his army badly needed the provisions that the fires consumed. Since Rostopchin had previously broached the subject of setting fire to Moscow with Kutuzov and others, and in particular since he had had fire-fighting equipment removed from the city during the evacuation which had preceded Napoleon's arrival, it was widely assumed that it was he who was the instigator of the arson. Rostopchin himself did little to dispel this suspicion so long as it was possible that the arson could be construed as a heroic act.<sup>5</sup> Nor was the suspicion that clung to Rostopchin about his role in the outbreak of the great fire the only stain on his reputation as a result of the events of 1812. He was also said to have stirred up a mob and to have left them to beat to death a Russian prisoner, Mikhail Vereshchagin, a merchant's son who had come into possession of and translated a speech and a letter written by Napoleon and who had brought these documents to the attention of others. Lev Tolstoy (1828-1910) relates the episode, in a manner that is extremely unfavourable to Rostopchin, in *War and Peace*.<sup>6</sup>

Rostopchin's stock remained high enough for a while after 1812 for him to accompany Alexander to the Congress of Vienna, but as hostility towards him as the suspected arsonist mounted he found it politic to leave Russia. In 1814 he began to travel to various spa towns in Austria and Germany in the hope of alleviating the ill health that dogged him from 1812 onwards. Ironic as it may seem in view of Rostopchin's apparent Gallophobia, in 1816 he settled in Paris, where his family joined him the following year. (The family by now consisted of Rostopchin's wife Ekaterina, *née* Protasova (1776-1859), and their five children (two sons and three daughters) who had survived beyond infancy.<sup>7</sup> Ironic as it may also seem, given the Gallophobia for which Rostopchin was noted and to which we shall turn in the following section of this essay, Ekaterina converted to Catholicism, either in 1806 or in 1810, and brought up her daughters in that religion.<sup>8</sup>) In Parisian society Rostopchin was welcomed as a notable actor in the war that had been waged against Napoleon and he enjoyed much

success in the salons there during this early part of the Bourbon Restoration.<sup>9</sup> The Rostopchins remained in Paris until the autumn of 1823, when Fiodor and Ekaterina set off with their two youngest children to return to Russia. (Rostopchin had first taken the precaution of writing a pamphlet, entitled *The Truth about the Fire of Moscow*, in which he categorically denied that he had started the conflagration in 1812.<sup>10</sup>) However, Rostopchin's health soon failed and he died in January 1826, shortly after the Decembrist Revolt which, as a staunch supporter of autocratic government, he deplored.<sup>11</sup>

### Rostopchin's disapproval of Russian Francophiles and francophonie

Rostopchin is of considerable interest to intellectual historians, for he was one of the leading representatives – along with Nikolai Karamzin (1766-1826), Sergei Glinka (1776-1847) and Aleksandr Shishkov (1754-1841) – of Russian conservatism in the age of Alexander I.<sup>12</sup> He was the author of quite a substantial corpus of writings, most of which, however, was not published in his lifetime and much of which, it should also be stressed, was of a populist nature.<sup>13</sup> In his youth he wrote *A Journey to Prussia*, an example of the *récit de voyage*, a genre that was in vogue at that time.<sup>14</sup> Most importantly, from the point of view of the social, cultural and political history of language, Rostopchin continued the vigorous tradition of censure of *francophonie* and Gallomania that had been established in Russia in the mid-eighteenth century, chiefly by comic dramatists. We shall briefly examine Rostopchin's contribution to this tradition before considering writings in which his use of French seems to undermine his Gallophobia.

Rostopchin challenged the alleged obsession of some of his compatriots with all that was French and their habit of using only French language, practices, servants and governors in a novella *Oh, the French!*, which was written in 1806 or 1807 but not published at that time. The folly of those who are prone to Gallomania is pointed up in the novella by Rostopchin's portrayal of an idealised Russian family with traditional native values.<sup>15</sup> However, the most successful example of his virulent Gallophobia was a pamphlet of 1807 entitled *The Russian Nobleman Sila Andreevich Bogatyriov thinks out loud on the Staircase of Honour*.<sup>16</sup> (Rostopchin, it is worth noting, has appropriated for his anti-French purpose a literary form, the political pamphlet, that was much used in France during his lifetime.) Seven thousand copies of *The Russian Nobleman* were sold – a very large number for a printed publication at that time – and the pamphlet reached a relatively broad social audience.<sup>17</sup> Rostopchin's eponymous hero is a provincial nobleman who comes to Moscow after the Battle of Eylau, which took place in East Prussia in February 1807, in order to seek news of members of his family who had been fighting in the Russian army against Napoleon. Having prayed for his sovereign in the Cathedral of the Assumption in the Kremlin, Bogatyriov falls to musing about Russia's enthrallment by foreigners:

My Lord, will this ever end? How long are we to be apes? Is it not time we woke up and came to our senses, offered a prayer, spat and told the Frenchman: 'Get

lost, you diabolical apparition! Go to hell or back to where you came from, we don't care, as long as you're not in Rus.<sup>18</sup>

Russia has become a place, Bogatyriov thinks, where foreign riff-raff come to enrich themselves and fatten themselves up. French refugees who had been mere shop-keepers, government clerks, lackeys or banned priests had only to call themselves princes or gentlemen to be accepted as arbiters of fashion or tutors to Russian children, although they could barely read. Frenchified Russian nobles, of course, are also to blame for this state of affairs and are castigated for their gullibility. Had they studied history instead of reading worthless French romantic fiction, then they would have known that 'in every French head there is a windmill, a hospital and a madhouse'.<sup>19</sup> As in so much Russian Gallophobic literature, such Russians are taken to task not only for employing the ignorant, lazy or deceitful immigrants as tutors but also for their deluded view of what constitutes a sound education. 'What do we teach our children nowadays?' Sila asks himself.

To pronounce French well, to turn their feet outwards and to tousle their hair. Only those [children] whom a Frenchman would take for his compatriot are [considered] intelligent and good. How can they love their country when they don't even know the Russian language properly?<sup>20</sup>

And again, with particular emphasis on the alleged ascendancy of the French language over Russian:

So who are these people who come to us and who do we entrust our children to! So long as they pronounce French nicely, they can do as they please: it's just a disgrace. People learn French in all countries, but so that they can write, read and speak comprehensibly. Now wouldn't it seem strange to our nobleman if Russian became as fashionable in other countries as French [is with us]; if the kennel-boy Klimka, the cook Abrashka, the lackey Vavilka, the laundress Grushka and the slut Lushka started educating noble children and teaching them what is right? But that's been the custom here over the last thirty years, if you please, and sadly there is no end of it in sight.<sup>21</sup>

The sweeping statement that Rostopchin makes in this passage about the solely utilitarian purpose of teaching French in other European countries and his implicit assumption that Russia is an exceptional case are highly questionable. (We shall examine claims about Russian exceptionalism elsewhere.) What is of interest here is the fact that Rostopchin views Russian *francophonie* not as a means of facilitating the reception of useful concepts from a more advanced civilisation but as demeaning and threatening to his own nation.

As an antidote to Russian Gallomania, which has made Russian youth lose respect for their parents and their elders, Rostopchin has Bogatyriov commend Russia's 'merciful

sovereign, magnanimous nobility, wealthy merchants, industrious people' and her many great soldiers, ecclesiastics, ministers and writers. All the illustrious Russians that Bogatyriov names as examples of native achievement 'knew and know French', Rostopchin claims (this claim cannot be true, as he has named individuals who flourished long before French language or culture impinged on Russian life); 'but none of them', he avers, 'has attempted to know it better than Russian'.<sup>22</sup> Around the time that he produced *The Russian Nobleman* Rostopchin also wrote a comedy, *News, or the Dead Man Lives*, in which the now familiar character of Bogatyriov again berates the feckless nobility for their slavish adherence to French fashion and their lack of patriotism.<sup>23</sup>

It is at first sight surprising that this castigator of Russian Gallophiles who were allegedly corrupting the nation's youth by teaching them to abandon their mother tongue should himself have chosen French as his preferred medium for much of what he wrote, including documents of various sorts in which he expressed his anti-French sentiments. French is the language, for example, of formal, carefully argued documents that Rostopchin intended to be read by his sovereign and in high official and social circles. Among these documents there was a mischievous *Memorandum on the Martinists* (a critical account of Russian freemasonry) and a long letter (in which Rostopchin was highly critical of the French) that he addressed to Alexander in 1823 shortly before he returned to Russia.<sup>24</sup> However, Rostopchin's use of French is not confined to documents written for the public sphere. It is also the language, for instance, that he used in a voluminous correspondence which he conducted over many years with Count Semion Vorontsov, the Russian ambassador in London, whom he had befriended during his long study tour in the West in 1786-88.<sup>25</sup> Nor does he shy away, in this private correspondence, from those same concerns about the supposedly detrimental effects of bilingualism or multilingualism that he had expressed in his popular Gallophobic tracts. He complains for example, that

Our young people are worse than the French youth; they obey and fear nobody. One has to admit that while being dressed in the European manner we are still far from being civilised. The worst thing is that we have ceased to be Russian and that we have bought our knowledge of foreign languages at the expense of the mores of our ancestors.<sup>26</sup>

French is the language, finally, in which Rostopchin wrote what has come to be regarded as his most accomplished literary work, a short and seemingly impromptu autobiography entitled *My Memoirs or Me as I am, written in Ten Minutes*.<sup>27</sup> An examination of this text, to which we now turn, may help us to explain the apparent paradox of the Russian who deplores Gallomania and yet persists in using the French language for many purposes.

### [Rostopchin's 'Memoirs': material for performance in the francophone salon](#)

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Rostopchin's *Memoirs* have been published before. They appeared in print for the first time, in French, in the Parisian daily *Le Temps (The Time)* on 16 April 1839.<sup>28</sup> They were promptly

translated from French into other languages, though often inaccurately. An English version, for example, appeared in *The Athenaeum* on 24 August, preceded by a brief introduction which invited readers to speculate on whether 'the climate of Russia [...] might, could, would, or ought to produce such a compound of Voltaire and Beaumarchais, such a mixture of the Cynic and the Epicurean, as the author of this *bluette* must be'.<sup>29</sup> However, the 'memoirs' have not been discussed, as far as we are aware, from the point of view of their interest as an example of Russian francophone writing.

The memoirs were written late in 1823 or in 1824, after Rostopchin had returned to Russia, in response to a suggestion made by the society hostess Countess Anna Bobrinskaia.<sup>30</sup> As a man who had once played important roles in the Russian administration and a talented writer and raconteur who had been well connected in Russian high society over a long period, Rostopchin might have been expected to produce memoirs of historical and anecdotal interest. The document with which Rostopchin, to the surprise of his hostess, shortly returned to Bobrinskaia's salon may therefore have disappointed in some respects, but as a verbal offering to a salon and later as a minor printed work of art it was highly successful.

The 'memoirs' strikingly exhibit qualities that were prized in the salon society in which Rostopchin himself was an accomplished, if overbearing, participant. For one thing, they are too brief for it to be possible that they will bore listeners who wish not so much to be informed as to be entertained. They consist of fifteen so-called 'chapters', on such subjects as Rostopchin's 'education', 'sufferings', 'privations', 'respectable principles', 'tastes' and 'aversions', but many of these chapters comprise only a single sentence, and none of them contains more than four. Rostopchin writes elegantly, in carefully crafted, well-balanced sentences. He takes pains to demonstrate that he has insight into character: 'I have become a true sage or [an] egoist, which is synonymous' (« je suis devenu un vrai sage ou égoïste, ce qui est synonyme »). As a keen student of the social world, he cannot but make jaundiced remarks on the human condition: 'I have been deprived', he observes, 'of three great enjoyments of the human kind: theft, gluttony and pride' (« J'ai été privé de trois grandes jouissances de l'espèce humaine : du vol, de la gourmandise et de l'orgueil »). And again: 'By dint of being impudent and a charlatan I sometimes passed for a savant' (« A force d'être impudent et charlatan je passai quelquefois pour un savant »). He is capable of self-analysis, although he is self-deprecating only in ways likely to raise his own stock in the *haut monde*, where the criterion for esteem is not virtue but wit: 'I was stubborn as a mule, capricious as a coquette, cheerful as a child, lazy as a sloth [literally a marmot in French] and as active as Bonaparte' (« Je fus entêté comme une mule, capricieux comme une coquette, gai comme un enfant, paresseux comme une marmotte, actif comme Bonaparte »). It is part of Rostopchin's appeal to this readership (or rather, to this audience, for what he writes is intended first and foremost to be read aloud in public) that he courts mild controversy. Thus, writing of his tastes, he declares that '[H]unchbacks of both sexes have a charm for me that I have never been able to define' (« Les bossus des deux sexes avaient pour moi un charme que je n'ai jamais pu définir »). At the same time, he has lightness of touch. When

he confides that his favourite theatrical genres are comedy and farce, his listeners can be confident that he takes nothing so seriously that he will risk social unpleasantness by asserting his point of view insistently and at length. Above all, he displays wit and wishes to amuse: 'I have never been implicated in any marriage or any tittle-tattle', he claims, 'and have never recommended a cook or a doctor so have never made an attempt on anyone's life' (« Je n'ai jamais été impliqué dans aucun mariage ni aucun comméragé. Je n'ai jamais recommandé ni cuisinier, ni médecin, par conséquent je n'ai attenté à la vie de personne »).

In short, Rostopchin's memoirs are a brisk, acute, self-conscious little literary work which borders on cynicism but is rescued from it by their author's light-heartedness. It can be taken for granted that the author of such a work is familiar with the neo-classical literature associated with the seventeenth-century French salon, including, for example, the pithy maxims of the Duc de La Rochefoucauld (1630-80) and the perceptive sketches of character offered by Jean de La Bruyère (1645-96). It is equally obvious that they are the product of, and were written for, the salon society of the 1820s that Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837) wearily observed in the first canto of his novel in verse *Eugene Onegin* (1823-31), whose eponymous hero 'could express himself and write perfectly in French, danced the mazurka with ease and bowed without stiffness'.<sup>31</sup>

Literature designed for consumption in this social domain might best be seen as material for accomplished performance of the sort expected of a nobleman. Indeed, the notion of performance, to which Iurii Lotman drew attention in late Soviet times,<sup>32</sup> seems never to be far from Rostopchin's mind as he succinctly reviews his life. It is clearly central, for example, in his self-valedictory 'analysis'. 'My life', Rostopchin concludes, 'has been a bad melodrama in full public view in which I have played heroes, tyrants, lovers and noble fathers but never servants' (« un mauvais mélodrame à grand spectacle, où j'ai joué les héros, les tyrans, les amoureux, les pères nobles, mais jamais les valets »). Piotr Viazemsky (1792-1878), a poet and man of letters who had been close to Pushkin, tends to confirm this view of Rostopchin as performer when in a thoughtful essay written in his old age he compared him to an actor who needed 'stalls and boxes occupied by select and brilliant spectators'.<sup>33</sup> Rostopchin himself boasted that he was a talented pantomime who in his youth had excelled in the art of acting.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, somewhat like a twenty-first-century celebrity, Rostopchin craved attention. In Alexandrine Russia – or Restoration France, come to that – brilliance in the salon was one means of achieving it. Populist demagoguery of the sort in which Rostopchin had engaged in the early part of Alexander's reign, when he was not frequenting salons, was another means. The two roles in which Rostopchin shone, salon luminary and populist pamphleteer, required the use of different languages, elegant French and racy Russian respectively, and Rostopchin, as Viazemsky reliably tells us, had a wonderful command of both of them.<sup>35</sup>

### [A francophone aristocrat torn between cosmopolitanism and chauvinism](#)

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So closely, then, was the French language associated with the *esprit* of pre-revolutionary French high society which many nobles in Alexandrine Russia wished to emulate that it

seems quite natural that Rostopchin should have used it as the vehicle for 'memoirs' written for circulation in the Russian *beau monde*. French was a medium for Russian noble performance of a western role. This fact goes some way to explaining how Rostopchin's choice of French as a social language can be reconciled with the hostile remarks that he made about the French, about Russians' imitation of French culture, about Russians' use of the French language and about the allegedly corrupting effect of Russian *francophonie*. More generally, it helps us to understand why we repeatedly encounter nationalistic Russian thinkers who, however much they might have protested at the invasiveness of French culture, seem personally to remain attached to that culture, as well as profoundly affected by it. And yet, acknowledgement of the performative significance of the French language will not enable us to explain in a completely satisfactory way the contradiction between advocacy and practice, between protestations of dismay at the use of French and continuing use of French for certain social or cultural purposes.

In Rostopchin's individual case, one is inclined to think that Gallophobia was symptomatic of a desire on the part of a man who was deeply indebted to French culture not to recognise that indebtedness. It was a form of denial of influence that helped him to maintain the value of that which was not French in him. There is, after all, a striking unoriginality about Rostopchin's criticisms of the French and their language and culture. The criticisms he makes had been commonplace for decades before the Alexandrine age. That is not to say that the problems he identified (the poor quality of French teachers in Russia, the tendency of many families to assimilate French culture only in a superficial way and so forth) did not in fact exist, merely that Rostopchin seems to seize on them as a pretext to demonstrate that his own culture, wit and knowledge did not come from foreigners. Expressions of Gallophobia, we therefore suggest, amount to a complex ritual of liberation for Rostopchin. His Gallophobia was a social phenomenon (insofar as it was a public exercise), ideological (inasmuch as it took the form of a set of views with political implications that were shared by a large number of his peers) and psychological (for he returned time and again to his theme, as if to convince himself of its validity).

However, there are three other possibilities or factors which we should take into account, besides Rostopchin's personal attitudes, as we consider the apparent ironies or inconsistencies of linguistic attitudes and usage among bilingual Russians in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. First, for Rostopchin and other Russians of the Alexandrine age, Gallophobia was to some extent a fashionable pose. We should therefore beware of taking all expressions of it at face value. In literary texts, critical reference to Gallomania, together with complaints about the contamination of the Russian language by Gallicisms, may often seem more like an irresistible reiteration of a successful stock theme than an expression of real concern about a contemporary problem. By the same token, critique of the cultural fashion that prevailed in the highly codified world of the salon may have seemed a form of controversialism that was allowed and even admired, provided that it remained within certain clearly understood limits and did not infringe propriety, *le bon ton*. The society assembled in the salon still had sufficient social, political and cultural power



and self-confidence to withstand unpalatable truths about itself, provided that speakers of those truths did not overstep the mark.

Secondly, we may wonder whether what strikes us a troubling paradox – namely, the continuing use of the French language by a man who said he deplored Russian *francophonie* – seemed a paradox at all to educated Russians of Rostopchin's age, or at least whether the paradox actually troubled those Russians. Viazemsky, in the essay on Rostopchin to which we have already referred, contended that contradictions coexisted comfortably in Rostopchin and that Rostopchin was not exceptional at that time in this respect. Russians are by nature eclectics, Viazemsky argued, or at least they were eclectics at that youthful stage of the nation's cultural and intellectual formation:

[...] there were several Rostopchins in Count Rostopchin. This sort of heterogeneity is quite characteristic of the Russian nature. We have few integral personalities; [...] We can be divided into two categories: people fit for anything and people capable of nothing. [...] we are creations, or publications, which are encyclopaedic and eclectic rather than specialist, reference works rather than treatises. [...] This sort of phenomenon is usually a property of civil societies that are young and which have not yet been rigorously divided by upbringing and education into clear-cut distinct domains; the economic rule of *division of labour* is a consequence and a fruit of later experiences and an established order.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, the disparate elements in this heterogeneous personality, the Russian and the French personae, were inextricable from one another in Rostopchin as Viazemsky portrayed him:

Besides this receptivity and pliability which is characteristic of Russians, a peculiar multi-ethnicity [разноплеменность] was strongly in evidence in Rostopchin. He was a native Russian, a true Muscovite, but a thoroughbred Parisian too. In spirit, valour and prejudices he was cast in a mould from which Pozharskys and Minins might emerge at a certain moment; in mentality and wit he was the absolute image of a real Frenchman. He hated the French and abused them in the purest French; he struck them with weapons that he had borrowed from them.<sup>37</sup>

We have here two *topoi* – the *topos* of the receptivity of the Russian people to other cultures, which was common in post-Petrine Russian culture, and the *topos* of 'multi-ethnicity' – which adequately explained apparent contradictions in the behaviour of francophone Russian nobles of the ages of Catherine and Alexander without requiring them to view themselves as dangerously divided beings, as later writers and thinkers often assumed they were.

Thirdly, attitudes towards language use were in any case not the same among Rostopchin's generation of the cosmopolitan cultural elite, in whom the values of the age of the Enlightenment had been inculcated, as they would be among later generations which had absorbed German Romantic ideas. For the former, brought up in the era before the birth of the modern nation state that began to come into being after the Napoleonic Wars, the use of French for social and cultural purposes among themselves did not represent betrayal of one's fatherland (*patrie* or отечество), which was understood as an empire ruled by an autocrat. For the latter, who had been persuaded that language and culture were, or should be, inextricably linked to notions of ethnicity rather than to class, French might be acceptable as a vehicle for the reception of foreign culture and as a *lingua franca* for communication with foreigners but it would become unacceptable – in theory at least – as a means of communication with fellow Russians of any social stratum. The loyalty of this later, post-Napoleonic generation was to a cultural nation whose authentic representatives were the unilingual russophone common people.

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Rostopchin, as Alexander Martin has pointed out, was 'a child of the eighteenth century and the age of "enlightened absolutism"'.<sup>38</sup> His allegiance was to the Russian imperial state and the international, bilingual, noble culture that it had embraced. Consequently the 'cultural content' of Russia's national identity, to quote Martin again, was 'entirely compatible' in his eyes

with a Europeanised way of life so long as one remained loyal to the social order. [...] He had never admired the French [...] Yet he accepted the language and lifestyle of the French aristocracy as a universally relevant model [...] and he saw no contradiction in being a 'real' Russian who nonetheless patterned his life after foreigners.<sup>39</sup>

What stoked Rostopchin's animosity towards France, then, was not antipathy to the French people and their culture in their entirety but his horror at the overthrow of the French *ancien régime* and at the ensuing turmoil. Over two or three decades, Rostopchin's mouthpiece Sila Bogatyriov complained, the French had destroyed their government, desecrated temples, murdered their king, cut off heads like cabbages in the name of equality and liberty and made war on other peoples.<sup>40</sup> However, it was not certain that such anarchy would be confined to France; it might befall Russia too. (The memory of the great peasant revolt that had taken place in 1773-74 under the leadership of the Cossack Emilian Pugachov (1726-75) remained fresh in the consciousness of Russian nobles of Rostopchin's generation.) From the perspective of a man who regarded peasants as an idle, brutish mob and who thought, his grandson observed, that 'there was no middle ground between despotism and anarchy',<sup>41</sup> the Russian lower orders seemed to pose no less of a threat than

Napoleon. They might at any moment turn against the landowners. For this reason Rostopchin refused to open the Moscow arsenal to the populace in 1812 even as the city was falling to the invader.<sup>42</sup> It is within this framework of conceptions of national identity and class allegiance that the apparent tension between Rostopchin's expressions of Gallophobia and his lifelong use of French for many purposes should in the last analysis be understood.

*Derek Offord and Vladislav Rjéoutski*  
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<sup>1</sup> In a letter written in the post-Napoleonic period to his daughter Sophie, Rostopchin reported that an English newspaper had published an article on him in which he was said to be a direct descendant of Genghis Khan, on which news he congratulated Sophie. Extracts from the letter in question are to be found in a eulogistic biography of Rostopchin written by his grandson (the son of Sophie and the French aristocrat she married): see Marquis A. de Ségur, *Vie du comte Rostopchine: gouverneur de Moscou en 1812* (Paris: Bray et Retaux, 1871), p. 311. For more objective biographical information on Rostopchin, see the entry in *Русский биографический словарь* [*Russian Biographical Dictionary*] by a pre-revolutionary scholar A. El'nitskii, which runs to 70 pages with double columns and which is available online via the site of the Russian State Library at <http://dlib.rsl.ru/viewer/01002921717#?page=238> (accessed on 28.11.2012). See also the briefer and more recent material at [http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio\\_r/rostopchin.php](http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio_r/rostopchin.php) (accessed on 26.11.2012).

<sup>2</sup> [Natal'ia Naryshkina], *1812 : le comte Rostopchine et son temps (Par Madame Narichkine née Comtesse Rostopchine)* [*1812: Count Rostopchin and His Time (By Madame Naryshkina, née Countess Rostopchin)*] (St Petersburg: Société R. Golicke et A. Willborg, 1912), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> On Rostopchin's literary output, see the entry on him in *Русские писатели 1800-1917: биографический словарь* [*Russian Writers 1800-1917: A Biographical Dictionary*], 5 vols (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo 'Sovetskaia entsiklopediia', then Nauchnoe izdatel'stvo 'Bol'shaia Rossiiskaia entsiklopediia', then Izdatel'stvo 'Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia, 1989-2007), vol. V, pp. 366-69.

<sup>4</sup> See P. A. Kartavov, ed., *Ростопчинские афиши. Летучие листки 1812 года* [*Rostopchin's Posters. The Leaflets of 1812*] (St Petersburg: publisher not indicated, 1904). Some of these leaflets may be viewed online at <<http://www.museum.ru/museum/1812/library/rostopchin/afishi.txt>> (accessed on 13.11.2012). They are briefly discussed in Alexander M. Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries: Russian Conservative Thought and Politics in the Reign of Alexander I* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997), pp. 126-29. The first leaflet in this collection sets the tone: a fictitious well-oiled town-dweller warns the dwarves and dandies in the French army not to try to take Moscow, which is surrounded by the graves of other peoples – Poles, Swedes, Tatars – who had made the attempt and failed.

<sup>5</sup> This episode would provide rich material for participants in the perennial ethical debate about ends and means. Should Rostopchin, if he did indeed order the arson, be reviled as a villain who was responsible for the death of those who could not escape – the aged, the infirm, the wounded – and for the ruin of those whose property was destroyed? Or should he be lauded as a hero who, by making it impossible for Napoleon to remain in Moscow, shortened the foreign occupation of his country and saved it from greater suffering? For a recent authoritative Russian account of Rostopchin's role during Napoleon's occupation of Moscow, see V. N. Zemtsov, «Граф Ф.В.Ростопчин, уголовники и Московский пожар 1812 года» ['Count F. V. Rostopchin, criminals and the Moscow fire of 1812'], in *Эпоха 1812 года. Исследования. Источники. Историография*. [*The Age of 1812. Research. Sources. Historiography*], no. 7: *Труды ГИМ* [*Transactions of the State Historical Museum*], no. 167 (Moscow: Gos. Ist. Muzei, 2008), pp. 1-16. Russian soldiers, elements in the Moscow police, criminals released from prison, peasants from the surrounding countryside and soldiers of Napoleon's *Grande Armée* were all responsible, according to Zemtsov's account, for pillaging when the French entered the city, and the pillaging may have been accompanied by acts of arson. However, Rostopchin himself also bore a large measure of direct responsibility for the fires by ordering the burning of warehouses containing grain and other key buildings. For a brief English account of Rostopchin's actions in 1812, see Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire 1801-1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 133-35. For a longer account (but not a discussion

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about whether Rostopchin was responsible for the outbreak of the fire), see Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, pp. 123-34.

<sup>6</sup> In vol. III, part 3, chapter 25 of the novel. See *Voina i mir*, in L. N. Tolstoi, *Полное собрание сочинений* [*Complete Works*], 90 vols (Moscow and Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1928-58), vol. XI, pp. 345 ff.

<sup>7</sup> The Rostopchins' daughter Sofia (1799-1874), the third of the five children who survived beyond infancy, married Eugène Henri Raymond, Count of Ségur (1798-1869), in 1819. She became a French prose writer best known for her novel on moral education, *Les Malheurs de Sophie* (1859), which was set in France during the Second Empire (1852-70). Their elder son, Sergei (1796-1836), found himself several times in a Parisian debtors' prison. The youngest of their children, Andrei Rostopchin (1813-92), is the author of texts that appear elsewhere in this corpus.

<sup>8</sup> Later Ekaterina Rostopchina would scorn the Orthodox education that her daughter-in-law gave to the children of her youngest son, Andrei Rostopchin. For an excellent account of the ground gained by Catholicism in the family life of the Russian nobility in the Alexandrine age, especially as a result of the conversion of noblewomen who played the leading role in the household, see Daniel Schlafly, « De Joseph de Maistre à "la Bibliothèque rose": Le catholicisme chez les Rostopčîn », *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* [*Papers on the Russian and Soviet World*], vol. 11, no. 1 (1970), pp. 93-109; see p. 98, n. 3, on the possible dates of Ekaterina's conversion.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., the letter quoted by Ségur, *Vie du comte Rostopchine*, pp. 312-14.

<sup>10</sup> *La vérité sur l'incendie de Moscou* (Paris: Ponthieu, 1823). The pamphlet was written in Paris and dated 5 March 1823. A Russian version, entitled *Правда о Московском пожаре* was published in Moscow (Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1823); this version is available online at [http://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/Правда\\_о\\_пожаре\\_Москвы\\_\(Ростопчин,\\_Волков\\_1823\)](http://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/Правда_о_пожаре_Москвы_(Ростопчин,_Волков_1823)) (accessed on 13.11.2012).

<sup>11</sup> When news of the Decembrist Revolt in St Petersburg reached him in Moscow a few weeks before his death, Rostopchin is said to have remarked, in French and with characteristic wit: 'Usually it is shoemakers who make revolutions so that they can become great lords of the manor; but with us it is the great lords who have wanted to become shoemakers' (« Ordinairement ce sont les cordonniers qui font les révolutions pour devenir grands seigneurs; mais chez nous ce sont les grands seigneurs qui ont voulu devenir cordonniers »). See «Некоторые черты для биографии графа Ф. В. Ростопчина» ['A few details for the biography of Count F. V. Rostopchin'], *Русский архив* [*Russian Archive*], 1868, 2nd edn (Moscow 1869), col. 1675; available online at [http://memoirs.ru/texts/NekCGR\\_RA68.htm](http://memoirs.ru/texts/NekCGR_RA68.htm) (accessed on 13.11.2012). Prince Piotr Viazemsky has a slightly different version of the same witticism: «в эпоху Французской революции сапожники и тряпичники (chiffonniers) хотели сделаться графами и князьями; у нас графы и князья хотели сделаться тряпичниками и сапожниками» ('during the French Revolution shoemakers and rag-pickers wanted to become counts and princes; with us counts and princes wanted to become rag-pickers and shoemakers'). See P. A. Viazemskii, «Характеристические заметки и воспоминания о графе Ростопчине» ['Recollections and notes about the character of Count Rostopchin'], *Русский архив* [*Russian Archive*], 1877, book 2, no. 5, pp. 69-78; also available online at [http://az.lib.ru/w/wjazemskij\\_p\\_a/text\\_0300.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/w/wjazemskij_p_a/text_0300.shtml) (accessed on 14.11.2012).

<sup>12</sup> For discussion of Rostopchin's political, social and cultural views, see especially Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, pp. 59-73, 92-93, 100-07, 125-34. A paper by Gary Hamburg at the conference 'The French Language in Russia', held at the University of Bristol from 12 to 14 September 2012, is also partly devoted to Rostopchin; a recording of this paper can be found on our project website at <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/research/french-in-russia/conference>. There is a doctoral thesis on Rostopchin's socio-political views by Arina Meshcheriakova: «Государственная деятельность и общественно-политические взгляды Ф.В. Ростопчина» ['F. V. Rostopchin's government service and socio-political views'] (Voronezh, 2006); available online at <http://www.dissercat.com/content/gosudarstvennaya-deyatelnost-i-obshchestvenno-politicheskie-vzglyady-fv-rostopchina> (accessed on 09.02.2013).

<sup>13</sup> Given Rostopchin's reputation after the burning of Moscow and in view of Soviet attitudes towards pre-revolutionary conservative writers and thinkers, it is unsurprising that Russian editions of his works should have been scarce and incomplete. A one-volume edition came out in Russia in the mid-nineteenth century, during the repressive period at the end of the reign on Nicholas I: F. V. Rostopchin, *Сочинения Ростопчина (графа Феодора Васильевича)* [*The Works of Rostopchin (Count Fiodor Vasilevich)*] (St Petersburg: Aleksandr Smirdin, 1853). Rostopchin's son Andrei produced a French edition of writings by and about him: A. Rostopchine, *Matériaux, en grande partie inédits, pour la biographie future du c-te Th. Rostopchine*. Only twelve copies of this work, which was published in Brussels in 1864, seem to have been printed. A further French edition came out towards the end of the nineteenth century: Th. Rostopchine, *Oeuvres inédites du comte Rostoptchine : publiées par la comtesse Lydie Rostoptchine* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1894). A new Russian

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edition appeared early in the post-Soviet period: F. V. Rostopchin, *Ох, французы!* [*Oh, the French!*], ed. G. D. Ovchinnikov (Moscow: Russkaia kniga (Sovetskaia Rossiia), 1992).

<sup>14</sup> *Путешествие в Пруссию*, which was first published in *The Muscovite* [*Москвитянин*], 1849, nos 1, 10, 13, 15. The work is available online at [http://az.lib.ru/r/rostopchin\\_f\\_w/text\\_0100.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/r/rostopchin_f_w/text_0100.shtml) (accessed on 13.11.2012); this version is taken from the edition compiled by Ovchinnikov, *Ох, французы!* cited in the preceding note, pp. 17-70. For recent scholarship in English on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Russian travel-writing (but not including Rostopchin's work), see Andreas Schönle, *Authenticity and Fiction in the Russian Literary Journey, 1790-1840* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2000); Derek Offord, *Journeys to a Graveyard: Perceptions of the West in Classical Russian Travel Writing* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005); Sara Dickinson, *Breaking Ground: Travel And National Culture in Russia from Peter I to the Era of Pushkin* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Rostopchin, «Ох, французы!», in *Ох, французы! Наборная повесть из былей, по-русски писанная* [*Oh, the French! A Collection of True Stories written in Russian*], pp. 84-147. The work was first published posthumously, in 1842, in *Notes of the Fatherland* (*Отечественные записки*). On Rostopchin's intention in this work, see Ségur, *Vie du comte Rostopchine*, p. 143.

<sup>16</sup> Rostopchin's title evokes pride in native vitality and tradition. The forename of his nobleman, Sila, literally means 'strength' and his surname, Bogatyriov, brings to mind the *bogatyř* (богатырь), the Herculean hero of Russian folklore. The 'staircase of honour', to use Alexander Martin's translation of this term, is the ceremonial entrance to old Russian buildings, in this case the Cathedral of the Assumption (Успенский Собор), which is of course rich in Russian historical associations.

<sup>17</sup> Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>18</sup> Rostopchin, *Мысли вслух на красном крыльце российского дворянина Силы Андреевича Богатырева*, in *Ох, французы!*, p. 148. Rostopchin's use of the word Rus (Русь or Old Russia) at the end of the passage quoted is an additional means of stirring patriotic fervour. Ségur, in his biography of his grandfather, thought it prudent not to quote this passage in full for his French readership and broke off after 'came to our senses': see Ségur, *Vie du comte Rostopchine*, p. 150.

<sup>19</sup> Rostopchin, *Мысли вслух на красном крыльце*, p. 150.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50. The absurdity of the sort of cultural exchange that Bogatyriov imagines is heightened by Rostopchin's use of diminutive forms of forenames (Klimka and so forth), which noble readers would immediately have associated with their serfs.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150. Untroubled by inconsistency, Rostopchin has Sila also wonder how all his ancestors (so many of whom knew French, he has said) managed to make do without French but nevertheless served their sovereign and country with honour (see p. 149).

<sup>23</sup> *Вести, или Убитый живой*, in Rostopchin, *Ох, французы!*, pp. 157-205. According to Martin (p. 71) this work is a sequel to *The Russian Nobleman Sila Andreevich Bogatyriov*, whereas Ségur (pp. 146-48) is vaguer about the order in which the two works appeared. The play was performed in a Moscow theatre in 1808 but its reception was mixed: not surprisingly, it offended francophone society: see <http://dlib.rsl.ru/viewer/01002921717#?page=262>.

<sup>24</sup> «Записка о мартинистах, представленная в 1811 году графом Ростопчиным великой княгине Екатерине Павловне», *Русский архив*, book 3 (1875), pp. 75-81. On this document, see Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, pp. 100-03. Substantial passages from the letter to Alexander are reproduced by Ségur, *Vie du comte Rostopchine*, pp. 296-306.

<sup>25</sup> These letters are published in the Vorontsov archive: see *Архив князя Воронцова* [*Archive of Prince Vorontsov*]: see vol. VIII. A further letter was published in *Русский архив*, 1878, book 1, no. 3, pp. 292-98; also available online at <http://memoirs.ru/texts/RostPisRA78K1V3.htm> (accessed on 13.11.2012).

<sup>26</sup> Letter of 1803 to Count Semion Vorontsov: *Архив князя Воронцова*, vol. XXIX, pp. 307-08; quoted by Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire 1801-1917*, p. 109.

<sup>27</sup> i.e. *Mes mémoires ou moi au naturel, écrits en dix minutes*.

<sup>28</sup> The memoirs were reprinted in other papers (including papers in Lyon, Orleans, Strasbourg and Brussels) within days of their publication in *Le Temps*. In the same year, 1839, they were also reprinted in French as a separate booklet: *Mémoires du Cte Rostoptchine, écrits en dix minutes. Son mot sur Fouché, Talleyrand et Potier. Anecdote de la pelisse* (Paris: rue du Helder, no. 8, 1839). This latter version was incorporated (pp. 57-65) in a short selection of Rostopchin's work which included the pamphlet (cited in n. 10 above) in which he defended himself against the charges levelled at him in connection with the Moscow fires of 1812: *Cte Feodor Vasilievitch Rostoptchin, La Vérité sur l'incendie de Moscou, par le Cte Rostopchine, suivi de ses Mémoires écrits*

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*en dix minutes ; son mot sur Fouché, Talleyrand et Pothier ; anecdote de la pelisse* (Paris: Ponthieu, 1823). It will be noticed that it appears from the cover and title page of this selection as if the memoirs had been published earlier than 1839, but it becomes clear from a further title page within the selection (at p. 57) that it is the 1839 edition of the memoirs that is being used here (1823 is the date of first publication of the pamphlet about the Moscow fire). The work is reprinted again in Ségur, *Vie du comte Rostopchine*, pp. 342-47. It is also available online at <http://www.miscellanees.com/r/rostop01.htm> (accessed on 14.11.2012) and in *Rostoptchine (le comte Théodore) 1765-1826. Notice littéraire et bibliographique sur ses ouvrages* (1854), pp. 57-62, which is held in Harvard College Library and has been made available as a Google eBook at [http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-IYEAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-IYEAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed on 26.11.2012). On the history of the publication of the memoirs and translations of them, see pp. 46-55 of this *Notice littéraire et bibliographique*.

<sup>29</sup> 'Memoirs of the Count Rostoptchine, written in Ten Minutes', in *The Athenaeum*, no. 617 (1839), p. 630.

<sup>30</sup> Bobrinskaia (1769-1846) was the widow of the illegitimate son of Catherine II (the Great) and Grigorii Orlov (1734-83). Ségur and Viazemsky both tell us that Rostopchin's memoirs originated in this way.

<sup>31</sup> «[...] по-французски совершенно / Мог изъясняться и писал; / Легко мазурку танцевал / И кланялся непринужденно [...]» (A. S. Pushkin, *Евгений Онегин*, canto I, stanza 4).

<sup>32</sup> e.g. 'The Decembrist in everyday life', 'The theatre and theatricality as components of early nineteenth-century culture' and 'The poetics of everyday behavior in Russian eighteenth-century culture', in Ju. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspenskij, *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, ed. Ann Shukman (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavonic Contributions, 1984), pp. 71-123, 141-64 and 231-56 respectively.

<sup>33</sup> Viazemskii, «Характеристические заметки и воспоминания о графе Ростопчине», op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, p. 126.

<sup>35</sup> Viazemskii, «Характеристические заметки и воспоминания о графе Ростопчине», op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.; Viazemsky's italics.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Dmitrii Pozharsky (1577-1642) and Kuzma Minin (?-1616) were Russian national heroes of the so-called Time of Troubles (Смутное время) in the early seventeenth century.

<sup>38</sup> Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, p. 63.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 63-64.

<sup>40</sup> Rostopchin, *Мысли вслух на красном крыльце*, in *Ох, французы!*, p. 151.

<sup>41</sup> Ségur, *Vie du comte Rostopchine*, p. 91.

<sup>42</sup> Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, p. 129.