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# Family correspondence in the Russian nobility: letters from Georges and Alexandre Meyendorff to their mother (1815-18)

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*Introduction*

## The Meyendorff family

The two brothers who wrote the letters published in this sub-section of our corpus, Georges and Alexandre Meyendorff, came from a non-Russian family which originated in Saxony. (The Russian forms of their names are Егор Мейендорф and Александр Мейендорф respectively; we shall use the French forms of their forenames here.) In the late Middle Ages the Meyendorff family had settled in Livonia, which encompassed parts of present-day Latvia and Estonia, and in the seventeenth century they became Swedish barons. The family entered Russian service in the eighteenth century, following the annexation of Livonia to Russia by the Treaty of Nystadt (1721) at the end of the Great Northern War (1700-21) waged against Sweden by Peter I (the Great). Thereafter its members loyally served the tsarist regime over several generations. Many Meyendorffs occupied high positions in the Russian imperial forces, civil administration or diplomatic service or made significant contributions to the intellectual life of the nation.<sup>1</sup> One of the scions of the family, known in English as Alexander Felixovich Meyendorf (1869-1964), lived in emigration in England for most of his life after the October Revolution and from 1922 to 1934 held the post of Reader in Russian Institutions and Economics at the London School of Economics, specialising in land law, organisation of peasant communities and diplomatic history.<sup>2</sup>

Georges and Alexandre were the sons of Baron Casimir Ivanovich Meyendorff (1749-1813; according to other sources he died in 1823) and Anna-Katharina, *née* von Vegesack (in Russian Березак; 1771-1840), to whom the letters published here were addressed. Casimir served with distinction in the Russian army from 1765, rising to the rank of Lieutenant-General. He also occupied the post of military governor, first of Livonia (1794-97) and later of Vyborg (1805-07). Casimir and Anna-Katharina had five children: Casimir (1794-1854),

Georges (1795-1863), the twins Alexandre (1796-1865) and Pierre (1796-1863), and a daughter who died in childhood.

Georges and Alexandre were educated by a French émigré, Maréchaux des Entelles, who had been a high-ranking administrator in the French theatrical world under the *ancien régime* and who had corresponded with prominent French writers, including the playwright Pierre Beaumarchais (1732-99). The Meyendorff family archives contain a plan for an educational trip that Maréchaux des Entelles devised for his pupils.<sup>3</sup> Indeed it is quite possible that the tutor accompanied his pupils on a Grand Tour of European countries. At any rate, we know that in May 1812 two of the brothers, Casimir and Georges, were in Paris.<sup>4</sup> As Maréchaux des Entelles himself stressed, acquisition of a perfect knowledge of the French language, no less than the Grand Tour, was an essential part of the education of a European aristocrat. By employing this educated and experienced man and by sending their children on the Grand Tour, Casimir and Anna-Katharina Meyendorff were providing their sons with the best possible noble education in order to prepare them for successful careers in Russian state service and high society. The letters written later by Alexandre and Georges to their mother bear witness to the effectiveness of that education, at least in so far as linguistic accomplishment is concerned.<sup>5</sup>

Georges Meyendorff was to reach the rank of Privy Councillor (Тайный советник, the third highest rank in the civilian section of the Table of Ranks introduced by Peter in 1722). He also travelled widely and was a member of the Russian Geographical Society. Alexandre, who also became a Privy Councillor and member of the Geographical Society, would serve in the Ministry of Finance and as President of the Moscow Chamber of Commerce and wrote about economic matters. In 1840 he accompanied a scientific expedition led by the eminent geologists Roderick Murchison (1792-1871) and Edouard de Verneuil (1805-73) to north-western Russia.<sup>6</sup> Another member of this generation of the family, Pierre (Russian Петр; 1796-1863), pursued a diplomatic career, eventually serving as Russian ambassador in Vienna from 1850 to 1854.<sup>7</sup>

### Russia after the Napoleonic Wars and Alexandre Meyendorff's view of it

The historical moment at which we look into the life of the Meyendorff family through the documents in this sub-section of our corpus is the second half of the reign of Alexander I, in the years immediately after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. This is a period when the reactionary political and obscurantist cultural atmosphere with which Alexander's reign unhappily closed was already setting in. Enlightened members of the social elite had hoped that Alexander would introduce into Russia institutions, laws and practices with which they had become familiar as a result of the experience of life in the more advanced western European countries that some of them had gained while serving in the campaigns against Napoleon. However, these hopes were soon dashed. Alexander retreated after the wars into a political alliance bolstered by religious mysticism (the so-called 'Holy Alliance') with the conservative powers Austria-Hungary and Prussia.<sup>8</sup> Men of reactionary views gained political influence. The martinet Count Aleksei Arakcheev (1769-1834) supplanted the

reforming bureaucrat Mikhail Speransky (1772-1839), who had been prominent in the first half of Alexander's reign, as one of Alexander's closest confidants. Arakcheev is notorious for his introduction of military colonies, in which peasants underwent army drill when not attending to their agricultural tasks.<sup>9</sup> Prince Aleksandr Nikolaevich Golitsyn (1773-1844), a convert to religious 'awakening', served as Minister of Education from 1816. Mikhail Magnitsky (1778-1855) and Dmitrii Runich (1778 or according to some sources 1780-1860) imposed moral and political correctness on the universities of Kazan (in 1819) and St Petersburg (in 1821) respectively.

In this atmosphere, the comments on political and cultural matters which Alexandre Meyendorff makes in one of his three letters to his mother that we publish here (Letter 3 in our selection) seem bold. He remarks on the danger of writing candidly in letters sent through the official post (he has sent his own letter through a private carrier): « il est dangereux d'écrire par la poste tout ce que l'on voit et ce que l'on pense ». (He is referring to the possibility that letters will be opened and read by the authorities, in other words to the practice known in Russian as перлюстрация.) He deplores the crude measures being taken by the government (« toutes les inepties que l'on fait ici » (i.e. in St Petersburg)). He is particularly critical of the authorities' obsession with military exercises, which had been a feature of Russian life since the Emperor Paul and had again become frequent after 1815, under the influence of Arakcheev. (This militarisation of life was particularly striking in St Petersburg, where many troops were stationed; Pushkin, in the introduction to his narrative poem 'The Bronze Horseman' («Медный всадник»), called the city the 'military capital' («военная столица») of the Russian Empire.) Alexandre also protests at the abuse of religion, as exemplified by ostentatious displays of piety which earn royal favour. This pietism represented a response to Enlightenment rationalism, free-thinking and agnosticism. It was partly inspired by German mystical literature, such as the work of Karl von Eckartshausen (1752-1803), who was translated into Russian by Aleksandr Labzin (1766-1825), the editor of *The Herald of Zion* (*Сионский Вестник*), a popular mystical periodical to which Alexander I himself was well disposed until its closure in 1818.

Even the previously judicious poet Vasilii Zhukovsky (1783-1852) has been affected by the prevailing mood, Alexandre observes: he had written a sycophantic poem in which he had characterised the throne of the autocrat as an altar at which Russians worshipped.<sup>10</sup> Someone else, Alexandre reports to his mother, has compared the Emperor to the biblical David. Nor is Meyendorff impressed by Alexander's younger brother the Grand Duke Nicholas, who would succeed Alexander in 1825 and who has visited the headquarters of Alexandre's unit: 'He said nothing of note' (« Il n'a rien dit de remarquable »), he observes. Alexandre is repelled by what he has heard of the conduct of Ivan Pestel (1765-1843), who had been Governor-General of Siberia since 1806 (and who happened to be the father of Pavel, one of the men who would lead the Decembrist Revolt, a military insurrection against autocracy that took place on the accession of Nicholas in 1825). Alexandre also loathes the influential Arakcheev, who he believes has interceded with the Emperor on behalf of Ivan Pestel: Arakcheev is the 'worthy friend of so worthy a man' (« digne ami d'un si digne home

»), he remarks facetiously. Alexandre's alienation from the regime leads him to worry – how seriously we cannot know from this letter – that he will incur disfavour and punishment: he had feared, he tells his mother, that a travel order he had received in the post would signal his dispatch to Siberia.

### Alexandre Meyendorff's translation of a poem by Schiller

Reading the earlier letter that Alexandre Meyendorff had sent to his mother in September 1815 (Letter 1 in our selection in this sub-section), one is indeed inclined to think of Alexandre as an idealistic young man who might have developed into an opponent of the autocratic regime when there was eventually a parting of ways, to use Nicholas Riasanovsky's phrase, between the state and public opinion.<sup>11</sup> This letter consists largely of Alexandre's translation into French of a poem, 'The Words of Faith', written in 1797 by the German poet, dramatist and historian Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805).<sup>12</sup> In this poem of five stanzas, Schiller contends that there are three concepts – liberty, virtue and God – that are essential to humans' sense of self-worth.

Alexandre's translation of Schiller's poem is the private exercise of a teenager and naturally has many flaws. After all, it is his first translation, Alexandre tells his mother, and it is for her eyes only. Alexandre has reduced Schiller's poem from thirty lines to twenty and in so doing has changed Schiller's rhyme scheme from a consistent pattern of *ababcc* to a mixture of *aabb* (in stanzas 1 and 5) and *abab* (in stanzas 2, 3 and 4). It goes without saying that he cannot preserve the poetic force of the German original. Nor is his translation entirely faithful to Schiller's poem. Whereas Schiller states that the words 'free', 'virtue' and 'God' spring from within us, in Meyendorff's version it is said that these words seldom come from the heart. Meyendorff confuses value or worth ('Wert') – of which mankind, according to Schiller, is bereft if faith in these three words is lost – with happiness ('bonheur'). Again, whereas Schiller reassures readers that the slave, once freed from his chains, should not be feared, Meyendorff seems to draw a distinction between the man who is free and the slave who has broken his chains. Schiller's God is a divine will ('ein heiliger Wille') rather than the 'adorable being' of Meyendorff's fourth stanza. The 'highest living thought' that in Schiller's fourth stanza spins beyond space and time is not the human thought (« notre plus haute pensée ») which is loosely connected syntactically to the end of the first sentence of Meyendorff's fourth stanza. Schiller's closing statement (that humans never lose their sense of worth so long as they retain their faith in the three words the poet has identified) seems to have been quite misunderstood by Meyendorff, who concludes with the assurance that a man who keeps faith in these words is always « intime » (Meyendorff's meaning here is obscure), irrespective of his fate.

Whatever the shortcomings of Alexandre's translation, the young man's choice of such a poem to translate (assuming that it was Alexandre who made the choice) invites reflection on the cultural mood among the early-nineteenth-century Russian elite. Schiller's poem is full of the heady passion and optimism that still coloured much European literature and thought in the years after the French Revolution. Human beings, Schiller contends, are free

even where they are born in chains ('Der Mensch ist frei geschaffen, ist frei, / Und würd er in Ketten geboren'). They have a sacred inner world, which may not always find expression in their utterances but which is the source of the ideals that make their lives worth living. Virtue is no empty sound ('die Tugend, sie ist kein leerer Schall'), but an ideal which people may put into practice if they are so inclined. The fact that the young Meyendorff occupied himself with the translation of this poem suggests that he associated himself, however vaguely, with the freedom-loving Romantic revolt of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century European literature and thought, that is to say with that idealism that even the Russian Emperor had seemed to share in the early part of his reign ('the fine beginning of Alexander's days', in Pushkin's memorable phrase<sup>13</sup>). It is hard to imagine that the political implications of Schiller's celebration of liberty or of his imagery of slaves breaking their chains could have been altogether lost on the young man.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Meyendorff includes in the second stanza of his translation a reference to tyrants (« la voix des tyrans ne doit point vous troubler ») that may have more blatantly political overtones than Schiller's reference to 'raging fools' ('rasender Toren').

In short, it is not impossible to imagine this juvenile translator of Schiller's rousing poem, perturbed as he soon would be by the reactionary political climate in Russia in the immediate post-war years, following the republican path taken by a substantial number of his contemporaries. After all, there were men in his own social circle who would later become Decembrists. The most notable of these was Pavel Pestel, who would be hanged in 1826 for his part in the Decembrist Revolt. It may also be that the Gagarin to whom Alexandre refers in a further letter to his mother, to which we shall now turn, is the Decembrist Aleksandr Ivanovich (1801-57).<sup>15</sup>

### Francophonie as a key to success in career and society

And yet, there is no sign of disloyalty or political disaffection in the last of Alexandre's letters of 1817 to his mother that we publish here (i.e. Letter 5 in our selection). Rather this letter, dated 1 December 1817, gives a vivid insight into the occupational and social ambitions of a young francophone aristocrat of the Alexandrine epoch. (Advancement in his career and social success, it should be noted, are inextricably linked in Meyendorff's mind, and in this respect he is no doubt typical of his age and milieu.) Alexandre wishes to be noticed. 'I very much want Sipiagin to employ me', he writes, for he's a man who can do me a lot of good later on' (« Je desire bien que Sipägin m'employe, car c'est un homme qui par la suite peut me faire beaucoup de bien »).<sup>16</sup> He reports to his mother that he has been invited to take part in a society that has been created, following Sipiagin's establishment of a library of some 6,000 volumes, with the aim of educating army officers and enabling them to learn of new publications as they appear. The founders of this society propose to produce a journal for this purpose and Alexandre and his brother Georges have been asked to provide material for it.<sup>17</sup> While this bibliographical endeavour is clearly to Alexandre's liking for its own sake, it appeals to him most of all because it may help him, and his brother, to progress in service. The Emperor and the Grand Dukes, after all, are honorary members of the

society. If the society shapes well, then much good might come of it for the two brothers (« Si cette société prend / bonne tournure comme je l'espère elle nous fera à tous grand bien »). A further possible means of advancement that occurs to him, and which he mentions at the end of his letter, is to seek entry to the court by becoming a chamberlain. Alexandre also provides his mother with a detailed report on his progress in the glittering social world of St Petersburg, as does his brother Georges in his letter of 1816 (Letter 2 in our selection). Alexandre has been a guest at balls or *soirées* in the houses of numerous luminaries of this *beau monde*, including the British ambassador Lord Cathcart,<sup>18</sup> Countess Anna Bobrinskaia,<sup>19</sup> Countess Varvara Golovina (1766-1819), Aleksandra Zherebtsova (1788-1852),<sup>20</sup> and a princess from the Dolgorukii clan.

Linguistic knowledge and prowess are for various reasons beneficial in the interlocking worlds of the army and the salon which Georges and Alexandre Meyendorff frequent. The two brothers, as members of a francophone Germanic family serving the Russian state, are well equipped to succeed in those milieux. Alexandre's third letter (Letter 5) furnishes an example of the career opportunities that knowledge of languages could provide. General Sipiagin has promised him, he reports, that he would give him something to translate 'for the famous Jomini' (« pour le fameux Jomini »), a celebrated Swiss writer on the art of war who served in both the French and the Russian armies in the Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic periods.<sup>21</sup> It is not clear from which language into which other language Alexandre is likely to be asked by Sipiagin to translate, but knowing that the work had been commissioned by Jomini we may suppose that French is either the source language or the target language. Again, bilingualism or multilingualism, and especially francophonie, will hold Alexandre in good stead in a society that is frequented by Frenchmen – a Bordeaux and a Laval<sup>22</sup> are mentioned in this letter – and by foreign envoys, who are regular guests at households such as that of Countess Golovina and for whom French will undoubtedly have been the *lingua franca* at this period.

Most importantly, for Russian subjects of non-Russian origin for whom Russian was not the domestic language and whose command of Russian may have been poor, French was the most prestigious means of communication with other Russian subjects within their social stratum. Command of French was therefore crucial to their preferment within the elite. It should be noted in this connection that the high society of Alexandrine St Petersburg included not only many foreigners but also many Russian subjects of Germanic origin, like the Meyendorffs, whose ancestors had found themselves in the territory of the Russian Empire as a result of the expansion initiated by Peter the Great and continued by Catherine II (the Great). Countess Bobrinskaia (*née* Ungern-Sternberg), for instance, was by origin a Baltic German from Reval (Russian Ревель, now Tallinn, capital of Estonia). The Dellingshausens, one of whom is among Alexandre's social peers (see Letter 5), are also a baronial family from the pre-revolutionary Russian province of Eistland (Russian Эстляндия, i.e. the northern part of modern Estonia).<sup>23</sup> The Pestel family, who seem to have settled in Russia in the reign of Peter, are of German origin too (although their roots may lie elsewhere).

Notwithstanding the strong Germanic element in the early-nineteenth-century Russian nobility, it was still to France that members of this cosmopolitan high social world looked for their models, as readers of Tolstoy's account of St Petersburg in the Napoleonic age in *War and Peace* might expect. Of those *salonnières* whom Alexandre Meyendorff mentions, it is the Francophile Varvara Golovina who hosts the salon to which he is most strongly attracted. A member of the Golitsyn family whose mother was the sister of Empress Elizabeth's francophone favourite, Ivan Shuvalov (1727-98), Golovina had converted to Catholicism under the influence of a Jesuit émigré and had lived in France under the *ancien régime*. The conversation in her salon is not vulgar, as Alexandre thinks it is everywhere else, for 'this, in a word, is a French house with a Russian fortune of 500,000 roubles a year' (« La conversation n'y est pas terre à terre comme partout, en un mot c'est une maison française avec une fortune russe de 500,000 Rl. par an »).

It is clear from Alexandre's letter, finally, that St Petersburg society is much concerned with the French concept of 'comme il faut' as a criterion of social success. The concept seems at this stage in its history in Russia to be associated with conformity to standards of taste and fashion prized by the elite and with enjoyment of the *douceur de vivre* associated with France, rather than with that crabbed observance of propriety which Russian writers came to expect of French bourgeois society in the ages of the July Monarchy (1830-48) and the Second Empire (1852-70). (It is « comme il faut » of the former sort that Tolstoy recalls when in his trilogy *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth* he describes his youthful enthusiasm for the French language in the 1840s.<sup>24</sup> It is « comme il faut » of the latter sort, on the other hand, that Dostoevsky mocks in his venomous critique of Paris in his *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, published in 1863.<sup>25</sup>) The father in the Golovin house that Alexandre Meyendorff visits – Nikolai Nikolaevich (1759-1821), who is a Grand Cup-Bearer at the imperial court – is « très comme il faut », doubtless because he has a grand manner and puts all his guests at their ease. The ball which was 'the most comme il faut' (« le plus comme il faut ») out of all those that Alexandre had attended was the one at the house of the ravishing Princess Dolgorukaia, who has 'an inconceivable grace and abandon' (« une grace et un abandon inconcevables, elle est à ravir »). In general, Alexandre already finds himself 'at the level of everything there is that is most comme il faut' (« au niveau de tout ce qu'il y a de plus comme il faut »), since he enjoys pleasures and benefits of all kinds to which so many people aspire but which so few are able to obtain. The letter written by Georges Meyendorff to his mother in September 1817 (Letter 4 in our selection) attests to a similar preoccupation with « comme il faut », although in this case the concept is applied to a different social class. All the suitable peasants (« Tout ce qu'il y avoit de comme il faut parmi les paysans et paysannes ») have been invited to some festivity that Georges and fellow officers have clubbed together to organise in the village where they are presumably stationed.<sup>26</sup>

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The letters of the Meyendorff brothers to their mother, then, give us an insight into the social life and linguistic habits of a Baltic family of Russian subjects of non-Russian origin. Although the family were loyal servants of the imperial state, it briefly seemed possible that the generation represented by Georges and Alexandre, brought up in the Alexandrine age, could be receptive to the subversive current within the idealism of the times and that they could be alienated from the state by the brutishness, corruption and obscurantism of Russian officialdom after the Napoleonic Wars. However, their overriding imperative, it turns out, remained attainment of high rank and the social status that accompanied it. To this end, command of French was a useful tool, indeed an essential tool, if a speaker had a relatively poor command of Russian. That is not to say that the Meyendorff brothers had no Russian. Alexandre seems well informed about developments in contemporary Russian literary culture, since he refers to Zhukovsky, and he quotes Ivan Krylov (1769-1844), the author of fables written in racy Russian. Nor could French have been the only language used in the family circle, since the brothers wrote to their father in German and Alexandre is able to translate Schiller from the original. However, in order to negotiate the cosmopolitan society of the capital, to mix easily with other members of the Russian elite, whatever their ethnic origin, and to flourish in the higher ranks of the Russian imperial army or administration, command of French was indispensable at this time.

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., S. V. Volkov, *Генералитет Российской империи. Энциклопедический словарь генералов и адмиралов от Петра I до Николая II* [*The Generals of the Russian Empire. An Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Generals and Admirals from Peter I to Nicholas II*], 2 vols (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2009), vol. II, pp. 127-28.

<sup>2</sup> See 'A. F. Meyendorff (1869-1964)', in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 42, no. 99 (1964), pp. 440-42.

<sup>3</sup> GARF, f. 573, op. 1, d. 420. The plan was probably written in 1805, judging by a handwritten note on the document.

<sup>4</sup> GARF, f. 573, op. 1, d. 437, fols 3-5.

<sup>5</sup> The brothers' written French, as exemplified in their letters to their mother, does contain minor spelling errors, e.g. (in Alexandre's letters) « arangé [arrangé] », « jornal [journal] » « tien [tient] », « greque [grecque] », « nous [nos] », « aportera [apportera] » and (in Georges's second letter) « Vous pouvez faire allez [aller] vos bagages en poste », « il vaut mieu [mieux] prendre », « le thé servoit de rafraichissement et de souppé [souper] ». Georges also uses the apparent Germanism 'gastes' for 'guests'. Some of these deviations from modern standard usage, of course, may have been careless slips. After all, we are reading informal and relatively spontaneous private correspondence. In any case, spelling practices and use of accents, at least in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Russia, were less consistent than in modern French standard usage. What can be said with confidence is that the brothers do not have such difficulty with French homophones as eighteenth-century noblemen such as Mikhail Shcherbatov for whom French was not a primary domestic language and who were perhaps less thoroughly tutored in it.

<sup>6</sup> 'Proceedings of Learned Societies. Geological Society.' *Philosophical Magazine Series 3*, vol. 19, no. 126 (1841), pp. 489-500. p. 490. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14786444108650472> (accessed on 26.10.2012).

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.rusdiplomats.narod.ru/ambassadors/meyendorf-pk.html> (accessed on 26.10.2012).

<sup>8</sup> On the latter part of Alexander's reign see especially the last part of Marie-Pierre Rey's recent biography, *Alexandre I<sup>er</sup>* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), pp. 381 ff.



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<sup>9</sup> On Arakcheev, see Michael Jenkins, *Arakcheev: Grand Vizier of the Russian Empire* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969). On Speransky, see Marc Raeff, *Michael Speransky: Statesman of Imperial Russia, 1772-1839* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1957).

<sup>10</sup> Meyendorff presumably has in mind Zhukovsky's «Певец во стане русских воинов» ['A minstrel in the camp of the Russian warriors'], in which we find the quatrain «Тебе сей кубок, русский царь! / Цвети твоя держава; / Священный трон твой нам алтарь; / Пред ним обет наш: слава.» ['[We raise] this cup to you, oh Russian tsar! / May your kingdom flourish; / Your sacred throne is [like] an altar to us; / We vow before it to bring you glory']: see V. A. Zhukovskii, *Собрание сочинений в четырех томах [Collected Works in Four Volumes]*, ed. V. P. Petushkov with an introductory article by I. M. Semenko (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1959-60), vol. I, pp. 149-67; quotation from p. 152. This poem had in fact been written in 1812.

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A Parting of Ways: Government and the Educated Public in Russia, 1801-1855* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> The text of Schiller's poem, 'Die Worte des Glaubens', is as follows:

Drei Worte nenn ich euch, inhaltsschwer,  
Sie gehen von Munde zu Munde,  
Doch stammen sie nicht von außen her,  
Das Herz nur gibt davon Kunde,  
Dem Menschen ist aller Wert geraubt,  
Wenn er nicht mehr an die drei Worte glaubt.

Der Mensch ist frei geschaffen, ist frei,  
Und würd er in Ketten geboren,  
Lasst euch nicht irren des Pöbels Geschrei,  
Nicht den Missbrauch rasender Toren,  
Vor dem Sklaven, wenn er die Kette bricht,  
Vor dem freien Menschen erzittert nicht.

Und die Tugend, sie ist kein leerer Schall,  
Der Mensch kann sie üben im Leben,  
Und sollt er auch straucheln überall,  
Er kann nach der göttlichen streben,  
Und was kein Verstand der Verständigen sieht,  
Das übet in Einfalt ein kindlich Gemüt.

Und ein Gott ist, ein heiliger Wille lebt,  
Wie auch der menschliche wanke,  
Hoch über der Zeit und dem Raume webt  
Lebendig der höchste Gedanke,  
Und ob alles in ewigem Wechsel kreist,  
Es beharret im Wechsel ein ruhiger Geist.

Die drei Worte bewahret euch, inhaltsschwer,  
Sie pflanzet von Munde zu Munde,  
Und stammen sie gleich nicht von außen her,  
Euer Innres gibt davon Kunde,  
Dem Menschen ist nimmer sein Wert geraubt,  
So lang er noch an die drei Worte glaubt.

<sup>13</sup> «Дней alexандровых прекрасное начало»: see Pushkin's «Послание цензору» ['Epistle to the Censor'] of 1822.

<sup>14</sup> It is easy to see how Schiller – especially through his embodiments of 'the beautiful Soul' (*die schöne Seele*) in such characters as the Marquis of Posa in his historical drama *Don Carlos* – would become an inspirational figure for a wide range of Russian writers and thinkers, from Herzen to Dostoevsky, in the oppressive age of Nicholas I.

<sup>15</sup> See [http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio\\_d/dekabristyg.php](http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio_d/dekabristyg.php) (accessed on 26.10.2012).

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<sup>16</sup> Alexandre is referring to General Nikolai Sipiagin (1785-1828).

<sup>17</sup> This initiative of Sipiagin's did not please Arakcheev, however.

<sup>18</sup> i.e. William Cathcart, 1st Earl Cathcart (1755-1843), British ambassador in St Petersburg from 1814 to 1820.

<sup>19</sup> Bobrinskaia (1769-1846) was the widow of the illegitimate son of Catherine II and Grigorii Orlov (1734-83).

<sup>20</sup> It seems clear from Georges Meyendorff's letter of 27 November 1816 (Letter 2 in this selection) that it is Aleksandra, a daughter of Prince Lopukhin, to whom Alexandre Meyendorff is referring here. Aleksandra was the daughter-in-law of Olga Zherebtsova (*née* Zubova, 1766-1849), the sister of one of the favourites of Catherine II and an international adventuress whose lovers were said to have included the future George IV of England.

<sup>21</sup> i.e. Antoine-Henri, baron Jomini (1779-1869), author of *Traité de grande tactique* [*Treatise on Grand Tactics*], subsequently entitled *Traité des grandes opérations militaires* [*Treatise on Grand Military Operations*], which came out in five volumes in 1805.

<sup>22</sup> This is Jean-François-Charles comte de Laval de La Loubrerie or Laval de Loubrerie (1761-1846), known in Russia as Ivan de Laval. He married Aleksandra Kozitskaia (1772-1850), daughter of Grigorii Kozitsky (1724-75), the secretary of Catherine II. One of the couple's daughters married Prince Sergei Trubetskoy (1790-1860), who would take part in the Decembrist Revolt and would be exiled to Siberia as a result. Laval was director of the educational district of Vilna [modern Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania], which was the largest educational district in the Russian Empire. Later he was employed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and finally he directed the *Journal de Saint-Petersbourg* (*The St Petersburg Journal*) the official francophone journal of the Empire.

<sup>23</sup> It is probably Ivan Fedorovich Dellingshausen (1795-1845), who had fought in the Russian campaign against Napoleon and would later take part in the suppression of the Polish revolt in 1831, with whom Alexandre Meyendorff socialises.

<sup>24</sup> 'The human race', Tolstoy wrote here, 'may be divided into innumerable categories – into rich and poor, good and bad, soldiers and civilians, wise men and fools, and so forth [...]. At the time of which I am writing my own favourite and principal system of division in this respect was into people *comme il faut* and *comme il ne faut pas*. The latter I subdivided into those inherently not *comme il faut* and the lower orders. The *comme il faut* people I respected and looked upon as worthy to consort with me as my equals; the *comme il ne faut pas* I pretended to despise but in reality detested, nourishing a sort of injured personal feeling where they were concerned; the lower classes did not exist for me – I despised them utterly. *My* [Tolstoy's italics] *comme il faut* consisted first and foremost in having an excellent knowledge of the French tongue, especially pronunciation. Anyone who spoke French with a bad accent at once aroused my dislike. "Why do you try to talk like us when you don't know how?" I mentally inquired with biting irony.' (*Детство. Отрочество. Юность*, in L. N. Tolstoi, *Полное собрание сочинений* [*Complete Works*], 90 vols (Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo: Moscow and Leningrad, 1928-58), vol. II, pp. 172-73. We have used the translation by Rosemary Edmonds, *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 268.

<sup>25</sup> *Зимние заметки о летних впечатлениях*, in F. M. Dostoevskii, *Полное собрание сочинений в тридцати томах* [*Complete Works in Thirty Volumes*] (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-90), vol. V, pp. 46-98 (see the last chapter, where Dostoevsky dwells on the concept of 'comme il faut').

<sup>26</sup> There is no doubt that the lower orders are a source of amusement for Georges as a member of the aristocratic social stratum: 'I'd never finish', he tells his mother, 'if I were to describe to you all the ridiculous scenes that happened there' (« Je n'en finirois pas si je vous depeignois toutes les scènes ridicules qui s'y passèrent »).