"Maîtres à l'épée, Maîtres à danser, Maîtres à penser": Founding French National Consciousness in Russian Exile
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Maîtres à l’épée, Maîtres à danser, Maîtres à penser: Founding French National Consciousness in Russian Exile

ABSTRACT: Proceeding from Lord Acton’s insight that “exile is the nursery of nationality,” this paper examines a peculiar historical instance of dislocation as a relevant matrix for the articulation of national identity. I inquire into aspects of the elaboration of French national consciousness among French émigrés of the revolutionary period in Russia, approaching the subject at two levels: first, the maîtres à danser, the run-of-the-mill émigrés who abandon cosmopolitan certitudes or pretensions of a “monde français” and abstractions of dynastic loyalty, in favour of nostalgic attachment to a tangible patrie, very much at odds with the Russian otherness into which they have been thrust. Second, the maîtres à penser, those émigré thinkers in whom the Revolution provokes a reconsideration of established universals and who conceptualize Russia in terms of a project to reconcile universal and particular or national values. I examine the dilemmas and ultimate failure of such a projection by focusing on the work of Joseph de Maistre. On both levels, the historical case studied here is an exemplification of the proposition that nationalism is founded on a disenchantment with the world, and that physical estrangement from both the world to which one believes oneself to belong as well as spiritual estrangement from the world in which one treads, may provide a critical context for defining collective identity.

Readers of War and Peace will remember the opening scene in Anna Pavlovna Scherer’s drawing room where French émigrés mingle with the beau monde of Petersburg society sharing gossip and indignation about the “Anti-Christ,” i.e., Napoleon Bonaparte, and his most recent depredations.1

Tolstoy’s perspective on these émigrés is ironic, even contemptuous. It is a cast of mind that he shares with many other writers, some of whom are themselves émigrés, and it is one that extends beyond Annette Scherer’s salon to the political émigré in general.2 “The contempt which a well-ordered bourgeois

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with a checkbook feels in regard to someone who does not have a current bank
account,” is how one Russian émigré puts it.3 And from Dante’s “salty bread” to
Akhatova’s “bitter air” and “poisoned wine” of exile, the pity that the émigré
arouses is mixed with derision.

There are, however, other perspectives on the persona of the émigré.
“Modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees,”
writes Edward Said.4 Others reiterate the point: Leszek Kolakowski dwells on
the “cognitive privilege of the outsider”;5 and Wolf Lepennies declares: “The
culture of exile is globalization in advance of globalization.”6 Exile is invoked
as archetype or paradigm, both constitutive of modernity and undermining it.

The uses of exile are thus acknowledged by at least some literary critics.
Those concerned with the formation of collective identity, particularly
nationalism, have also recognized them. Historians have noted that the term
“nation” in its medieval usage referred to communities of expatriates.7 But the
foundational reference here is Lord Acton’s classic essay on “Nationality”
where he refers to exile as the “nursery of nationality.”8 Acton was thinking, in
his time, of the Poles and of Italians, and perhaps of Greeks and Rumanians as
well. Benedict Anderson and others have transposed his point beyond its
original geographic and chronological parameters.9 Even though much of this
literature is recent, one is nevertheless surprised that, twenty years ago,
Kolakowski could still write: “I am not aware of any study specifically
examining the cultural role of various forms of exile, individual and collective,
in the history of Europe.”10

If one interpretation of Kolakowski’s point then was that we lacked rigorous
analyses of the relation between exile and nationalism or, to put it differently, of

izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1962) 590.
1 R. Abramowitsch to Mehr, 5 October 193[3], cited in André Liebich, From the Other
Shore: Russian Social Democracy After 1921 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University
Press, 1997) 2.
2 Edward Said, Reflections on Exile and Other Essays (Cambridge, MA: Harvard
3 Leszek Kolakowski, “In Praise of Exile,” in Modernity on Endless Trial (Chicago:
6 John Emerich Dalberg-Acton, “Nationality [1862],” Essays on Freedom and
Power, selected and with an introduction by Gertrude Himmelfarb (Boston: Beacon
Press, 1948) 181.
7 Benedict Anderson, “Long Distance Nationalism,” in The Spectre of Comparisons:
8 Kolakowski, p. 58. The sort of study that Kolakowski seems to have in mind would be
exemplified in [Ecole française de Rome] L’Emigration politique en Europe aux XIXe et
the experience of dislocation as a marker of identity, the point may retain some measure of validity. The literature on the identity-forming impact of exile has expanded by leaps and bounds, not least in the area of Russian studies. Kolakowski’s point may well hold true, however, for the period of the French Revolution, the foundational moment of modern nationalism. Historians see the French revolutionaries as the bearers of nationalism at home and abroad, provoking nationalism whether in the form of imitation or of reaction in the countries that bore the French onslaught. Russian nationalism, for example, is seen as having crystallized within Russian society under the pressure of the French invasion. The proposition that French nationalism in the revolutionary period was also already at that time the construction of those who, literally, turned their backs on the Revolution has been more rarely entertained.

The argument of this article is that French nationalism should be considered as a product of exile as well. My paper will thus consider a specific instance of dislocation as a relevant matrix for the articulation of national identity by looking at some French émigrés of the revolutionary period in Russia. I approach the subject at two levels. The first level is that of the run-of-the-mill émigré maîtres à danser and maîtres à l’épée. These exiles abandon the cosmopolitan certitudes or pretensions of a “monde français” and the abstractions of dynastic loyalty, in favour of a nostalgic attachment to a tangible patrie, so very much at odds with the Russian otherness into which they have been thrust. At this level, I shall look at the soldiers of the Armée de Condé stationed in Volhynia under Russian command in 1797–1798 as well as at the figure of the French émigré ouchitel’ or tutor, a literary stereotype but also a real historical phenomenon.

The second level is that of the maîtres à penser, those émigré thinkers in whom the Revolution provokes a reconsideration of established universals and some of whom conceptualize Russia in terms of a project to reconcile universal and particular or national values. The article will examine the dilemmas, and the

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ultimate failure, of such a projection by focusing on the work of the key thinker within this construction, Joseph de Maistre.

**L’EMIGRATION**

“One might emphasize the crucial role played by the Emigration in undermining the universalist pretensions of the late eighteenth-century French culture,” remarks a recent study that stresses the birth of modern nationalism as a movement from the “dative” to the “native.” Indeed, the émigrés who left France in the course of the Revolution confidently believed that they were living in a “monde français.” Inasmuch as the world was becoming ever more French, they had had little interest in reciprocating the outside world’s interest in France. Consequently, few future émigrés had traveled at all before the Revolution. An early historian of the emigration has aptly rendered the prejudices of the times: “Les voyages avaient été jusqu’alors un luxe regardé comme bizarre. La vie au milieu d’amis offrait tant de charmes qu’on ne comprenait point la nécessité de voir les étrangers.” For the French, to be suddenly thrust among foreigners who only recently had been beating a path towards them was a powerful shock. It was such circumstances that led Madame de Staël to write, “voyager est, quoi qu’on en puisse dire, un des plus tristes plaisirs de la vie.”

Yet the émigrés embarked upon their adventure in a spirit of levity and gaiety that aroused the admiration even of reluctant hosts. Of course, like all other emigrations, these French exiles believed their sojourn abroad would be of short duration. Moreover, to emigrate was the only proper thing to do. The “émigration joyeuse” was also the “émigration d’honneur,” a way of demonstrating that one belonged to “la bonne société” and the only way for male émigrés to escape accusations of unmanliness. Early in their peregrinations the émigrés still expressed astonishment that “il existât autre chose au monde qu’eux et leurs manières,” referring to their hosts as “ces gens-là.” With time, however, they experienced what the same author has called the “hard school of relativity.”

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14 Baldensperger vol. 1, 111, citing Antoine de Rivarol in 1770.
18 Forneron vol. 1, 219.
19 Baldensperger vol. 1, 111.
20 Baldensperger vol. 1, 112.
In Russia, the shattering effect of confrontation with foreignness and otherness was even greater than elsewhere. Life in London or in the Kent countryside (where the future Charles X resided) was certainly less strange than that in Moscow or somewhere on the Volga. Some émigrés had read seductive accounts of Russian life and, being French, expected to enjoy particular favour.21 First impressions were pleasant enough: “On aurait pu d’ailleurs se croire à Paris, tant il se trouvait de Français dans les réunions,” wrote one émigrée of Saint Petersburg.22 The Russian capital may have been “la plus belle ville du monde.” Nevertheless, even its splendour inspired anxiety: “Tout est ici sur une échelle colossale. Les rues, les places, les palais ont quelque chose de gigantesque. Les maisons des particuliers seraient partout ailleurs des monuments. Que vais-je trouver sous ce merveilleux décor?”23

What the more fortunate émigrés did find amid the “Asiatic” marvels of Petersburg and Moscow were the promised delights of dancing, music, drinking and the like. They also found an unexpected strangeness, the lack of a “mesure commune.”24 Though Russians went to great pains to prove that they were as well versed as their guests in “l’art de vivre,” the émigrés found the Russians’ francization superficial.25 Madame de Staël, uncritical of Russia in other respects, remarked that Russians had a different conception of sociability than did the French.26 Puzzled and uneasy, the émigrés decided that Russian hospitality reposed upon a “reste de barbarie” rather than a “douceur des moeurs.”27

The émigrés’ bewilderment and anxiety were not groundless. Beneath the perfect courtesy encountered by those admitted to court and higher circles, lurked contempt. “Les émigrés ennuient parce qu’on est faible. On se plaît à leur créer des fautes pour se mettre bien avec soi même,” observed Joseph de Maistre, himself the object of numerous slights.28 Chancellor F.V. Rostopchin, famous as governor of Moscow in 1812, mocked as “ridiculous” those Russian hostesses who tried to recreate “la vieille amabilité française.”29 Among the Russian elite, Rostopchin was particularly hostile towards the “illustres gueux errants” but his
prejudices were shared in even higher places. Both Catherine II and Paul I can be described, charitably, as capricious in their attitude to the émigrés. Catherine initially welcomed them, but then drew back from any help under the pretext that “je n’ai pas le droit d’intervenir dans les affaires de la France.” Paul, mentally unbalanced, bestowed favours and punishments with equal irrationality. After having offered the Bourbon pretender a modest court in the Baltic provinces, Paul withdrew the invitation in a pique. Humiliatingly but persistently, Louis XVIII begged the tsar, in abject terms, to increase his allowance. And, in this respect, the king was not by any means an exception among his countrymen in Russia: “le séjour de Louis XVIII et des émigrés français en Russie, ne fut qu’une longue mendicité.”

MÂITRES À L’ÉPÊE

The Russian chapter in the history of the Armée de Condé, known also as the Armée des Princes, not only casts light on exiles’ experience but also on the transformation of their consciousness. This émigré legion, created in the Rhineland, had exhausted the largesse of its Prussian, Austrian and British sponsors by 1797. Given the choice between serving in the British colonies and going into Russian service, the soldiers found the latter option less offensive. Whatever prestige they might have once claimed had faded, so that as the four thousand or so soldiers undertook their long march to the Russian empire they avoided territories, such as those of the Elector of Cologne, who banned “Jews, outlaws and émigrés.” They knew too already that the German peasant was

31 Ernest Daudet, Les Bourbons et la Russie pendant la Révolution française d’après les documents inédits (Paris: Illustrée, 1886) 31. This declaration from a ruler who had already partitioned Poland twice and was preparing to partition it into disappearance! Catherine had a phobia of assassination by someone from the land of the Jacobins, M. Strange, La Révolution française et la société russe (Moscow: Éditions en langue étrangère, 1960) 126.
33 For instance, Louis XVIII to Paul I, 8 April 1799, letter published by Daudet 353.
34 Daudet 149. With the exception of the figures on the Armée de Condé (see note 58 below) there do not appear to be any reliable figures about the number of French émigrés in Russia.
36 Weiner 40.
more of a threat to them than French republicans. Speaking a mixture of dialects—Norman, Breton, Picard, Auvergnat, Gascon, Provençal, Langue d’Oc—soldiers of this ragtag army had long borne privations in the name of the king: “last night we slept in the open, our stomachs empty. Before wrapping ourselves in our cloaks we cried three times at the top of our voices, Vive le roi!”

The marching order issued to the Armée de Condé, as it set out for Volhynia, assured the soldiers that they were bound for a land “où le climat est doux et le sol fertile.” It promised further that they would not be subjected to any arbitrary punishment under their new suzerain, that officers would keep their ranks, that French nobles would have the same rights as Russian nobles, and that freedom of religious practice would be assured to all. The soldiers responded with their usual levity. They bought Polish and Russian grammars, maps, and hunting rifles (poaching was one of the soldiers’ favourite occupations). They composed humorous songs and made sport of the difficulties en route. Many, however, must have been aware of the incongruity of their situation: in the words of one observer, “pour restaurer la monarchie légitime 4000 royalistes s’acheminèrent vers la Pologne!”

On the Russian-Austrian border, with Russian officers and a Cossack detachment as witnesses, a Russian Orthodox priest administered an oath of loyalty and obedience to the tsar, which the soldiers took orally and the officers in writing. All removed their white cockades and replaced them with Russian emblems. Soon they took on unfamiliar Russian uniforms. By now, the irony of their predicament could not have escaped anyone’s attention: having left their country out of fidelity to their king, these émigrés now vowed loyalty to a foreign monarch in a foreign country. A Condéen soldier sighed, “Qui eût dit, il y a quelques années à toute cette brave noblesse, lorsqu’elle se croyait encore le plus ferme appui d’un trône, qui déjà n’existoit plus … qu’elle s’estimerait un

37 Forneron vol. 2, 17.
40 Bittard 326. An example of émigré “désinvolture”: told by a local prince that he was to leave the prince’s domaines within 24 hours, the émigré replied: “Oh, Monseigneur est trop bon, il ne me faut qu’un quart d’heure,” Alexandre de Puymaigre, Souvenirs sur l’Emigration, l’Empire et la Restauration. Publiés par le fils de l’auteur (Paris: Plon 1884) 47.
41 Bittard 336.
42 Bittard 331, and Puymaigre 45.
jour heureuse d’aller mourir en paix à trois cents lieus de sa patrie, et d’obtenir un asile, ou plutôt un tombeau dans une terre étrangère et sauvage?43

Accounts differ about material conditions around Dubno where the army was stationed.44 Though some soldiers were billeted in huts shared with serfs; conditions were less difficult than in Germany. Siberian and Baltic winds did not detract from the charms of nature described by the Spectateur du Nord’s correspondent.45 True, the human landscape was desolate.46 Relations with local Polish gentry eventually led to disappointment. The Spectateur du Nord called them “ignorant and uncultivated,” though it also speculated that these ancient “Sarmatians” might be the ancestors of French monarchs.47 Some Polish aristocrats had taken refuge in France during the troubled times of the Polish Partitions and they were keen to return the hospitality they had enjoyed in Paris.48 At the same time, the Poles saw in the French natural allies against the Russians, an assumption that offended the sense of honour of the French who had, after all, sworn allegiance to the Russian emperor.49

The French soldiers insisted upon their loyalty to the tsar, but this insistence soon evaporated.50 They never got used to the new flag, where the fleur-de-lys appeared only in the corners around an imperial Russian eagle. They chafed under the emperor’s mania for drills: an hour and a half a day of parading, bareheaded and without coat or cover, even in the bitterest cold. Only once, in the dead of February, did their commander cancel the parade.51 Though they resigned themselves to despotic authority, a fact of nature “like thunder,” they were chilled by Russian arbitrariness. A Condéen officer who got into a brawl was condemned to one hundred lashes of the knout and exiled to Siberia; it was only through intervention at the very highest levels that he succeeded in not having his nose cut off.52 An émigré writes with uneasy awe about how a Russian general chatting at a ball, received a note, changed colour, and immediately disappeared into exile in Siberia. What hurt as much as other

43 “Géographie—Volhinie,” Le Spectateur du Nord (Hamburg), January, February, March 1798, 208. The author is only identified as a “brave et loyal Militaire.”
45 Le Spectateur du Nord 210-212.
46 Bittard 334.
47 Spectateur du Nord 212 and 209.
49 Bittard 336.
50 Le Spectateur du Nord 216.
51 Bittard 334.
tribulations was the imperial *ukaz* forbidding, as the memorialist puts it ironically, “all populations between Germany and the Great Wall of China,” from waltzing, because the empress had suffered a heart murmur while dancing.\(^5^3\)

The Duc d’Enghien, grandson of the eponymous commander of the Armée de Condé, expressed the prevailing feelings: “Dans le fait, tout est ici si différent des usages, des moeurs de notre pays, que même en désirant de plaire au souverain bienfaisant qui nous nourrit, involontairement nous lui déplaisons en mille choses.” He added, “Tout y est absolument opposé à nos idées, à nos principes...”\(^5^4\)

What were these ideas and principles? Enghien does not spell them out but memoirs tell us that never were Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot (all prohibited by imperial *ukaz*) read as much as they were here. In these dreary marches of the Russian empire, anything that recalled France was welcomed, even the writings that inspired the hated revolutionaries.\(^5^5\) Moreover, although the very raison d’être of the emigration was loyalty to the king—“mon âme à Dieu, ma vie au roi, l’honneur à moi”—neither he nor the royal family were held in high personal esteem.\(^5^6\) The process of reconciliation with the homeland, and the elaboration of a new national consciousness, can be measured by the change in attitude towards fighting against other Frenchmen. At the very outset of the emigration, the creator of the Armée de Condé defended killing compatriots in the name of the king.\(^5^7\) Twenty years later, even Louis XVIII adopted the opposite position, refusing to celebrate French defeat at the battle of Leipzig in 1813.\(^5^8\) In the intervening period, the belief came to prevail, “il faut le dire aussi franchement, en plaçant notre drapeau blanc sous l’impulsion de l’étranger, notre cause ne paraissait plus nationale.”\(^5^9\)

What came to bind the émigré soldier and his revolutionary adversary was attachment to a common home and to common souvenirs. This attachment grew proportionately to the émigrés’ disappointment with foreign lands and with their treatment at the hands of foreign sovereigns. Nowhere was this disappointment (reinforced by unfamiliarity, inactivity, and distance) as intense as in the utterly incomprehensible Russia: “une incurable nostalgie engourdissait les Condéens.  

\(^{53}\) Puymaigre 50.  
\(^{54}\) Bittard 336.  
\(^{55}\) Puymaigre 50 and Beauregard 82.  
\(^{56}\) Vidalenc 384–387. Citation from Weiner 28.  
\(^{58}\) Weiner 191. In the intervening period, the 6 000 man strong Armée de Condé had been disbanded (in 1801).  
\(^{59}\) Puymaigre 18.  

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Ils n’avaient plus le stimulant de la guerre, la proximité de la patrie, l’ennui les accablait.”60 The anonymous Condéen soldier’s fear of making his grave “trois cents lieus de sa patrie … dans une terre étrangère et sauvage”61 was captured in literary form by a more famous émigré: “Après avoir erré sur le globe, l’homme, par un instinct touchant, aime à revenir mourir aux lieux qui l’ont vu naître, et à s’asseoir un moment au bord de sa tombe sous les mêmes arbres qui ombragèrent son berceau.”62

In fact, the émigrés not only wanted to die at home but to live at home as well. “Repos,” “stabilité,” “bonheur” gradually became their aspiration.63 Against the revolutionaries’ “rights of man” one of the greatest publicists of the Emigration advised the counter-revolution to raise the “charter of nations.”64 Both sides ultimately adopted such a “charter” but its appeal was ambiguous. Beside the “Grande Nation” stood one’s “petite nation,” what Rousseau and others had referred to as the “petit pays” or the “pays natal.” By coincidence, it was one of the most famous figures of the Emigration, the legendary spy and conspirator, the Comte d’Antraigues, who had given his name to an earlier document articulating the distinction between the (artificial) “amour de la patrie” (i.e., the “Grande Nation”) and the (natural) “amour du pais natal.”65 The latter, founded upon the reminiscences of childhood and related to the “premières affections du coeur,” was morally superior and psychologically stronger.66 Émigrés in Russia pined to repose in their “pays natal.” Ultimately, they exchanged fidelity to their king for loyalty to the “Grande Nation” in order to recover the “pays natal” which, they came to realize, was their true patrie.

MAÎTRES À DANSER
Humiliation at the hands of their Russian hosts and reconciliation with what one had left was also the experience of another, more sizeable part of the French emigration. Although some émigrés succeeded in obtaining prestigious

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60 Bittard 334.
61 Le Spectateur du Nord 208. See note 45 above.
63 [note liminaire] Le Spectateur du Nord, January 1797, 2.
government posts and others made advantageous marriages in Russia, a far greater number had to earn their living through whatever talents they could muster. The only skill they all possessed was that of being French and the most common occupation for an émigré (or émigrée) was that of tutor. A contemporary remarked, “l’émigré qui, en Russie, ne devient pas grand seigneur tombe ouchitel.”67 There were far more émigrés who “fell” than those who “rose.”

The profession of tutor came naturally to either sex—or so it seemed. Though knowledge of the French language was their greatest asset, they could propose other accomplishments: riding, fencing, and drawing were some of the much appreciated talents but so was simply familiarity with “des conditions de la vie mondaine selon les rites de Versailles.”68 Russian families were pleased to have these worldly newcomers in their household—“gai[s], poli[s] même avec les serfs”—seeing in them not only instructors but entertainers. And if the émigré could claim that some cousin or other had been guillotined, his prestige was limitless.69 Even the crusty émigré-hater, F. V. Rostopchin, was proud that the French priest who taught his wife had been a tutor to the Dauphin.70

Such pride did not prevent Rostopchin from expressing his utter scorn for the whole genre of French tutors, a sentiment shared by others and poetically immortalized in Pushkin’s ironic treatment of Eugene Onegin’s tutor and his counterpart in the Captain’s Daughter. It was a scandal they were granted any status at all, Rostopchin huffed. They were the “dregs of French society,” lionized by self-hating Russians.71 They were pretentious, they were ungrateful, and they were frauds. And what did they teach children? “À bien prononcer le français et à friser les cheveux.”72 The French were so light in manner, he opined, that it was a wonder that they remained on the ground.73 Such contempt was not only widespread but also substantiated. As the demand for French tutors in the second half of the eighteenth century had long outstripped the supply, virtually any foreigner could then pass himself or herself off as a French teacher. Domestic servants and hairdressers, such as Monsieur Beaupré in Pushkin’s

67 Haumont 191, citing Vigel, Vospominaniia vol. 1, 121.
68 Vidalenc 288.
69 Haumont 192.
72 Cited in Pingaud, Les Français en Russie 300.
Captain's Daughter, claimed the status of ouchitel', becoming figures of fun for an ever more sophisticated and nationally-conscious Russian public.74

The social status of tutor remained low but competition for a job as a tutor became tough. With the arrival of numerous refugees from the French Revolution the earlier demand-side market tipped in the other direction. Proper schools, some run by secular or religious émigrés, sprang up. Aspiring new tutors had to compete with the great number of émigré priests, favoured by their (presumably) superior qualifications in Latin, as well as with the French-speaking Swiss (such as tsar Alexander's tutor Frédéric César LaHarpe) who had already cornered the upscale market for ouchiteli.75 The hiring process for tutors reflected the harsh market conditions. One could always place an ad in the newspaper, but one had better chances, in Moscow, by hanging about a traktir near the Okhotnyi riad which served as a sort of tutors' labour exchange. Better yet, one might stand outside the Catholic church on Sunday in the hope that a lackey from some great family or other would come up and ask one to follow him.76

The well-anchored disregard for the tutor easily extended to the émigré tutor: "he taught them French and knew spelling well, even though he was an émigré," writes a memorialist.77 And even the émigrés themselves made fun of their own.78 Not only the émigrés' professional incompetence but also their hopeless inability to learn any Russian at all made them figures of fun. In satirizing the Russian emigrant, I. A. Krylov could not identify any examples of a French accent in Russian and therefore gave his French character a German accent.79 To be sure, the French, like all other émigrés, did not seek assimilation or even integration within Russian society. It is all the easier to imagine the alienation they felt in this land where, beneath the thin veneer of the world they knew, stood a world so unfamiliar that they could neither speak to it nor understand it.

One of the supposed advantages of hiring an émigré—rather than, say, a Swiss—as a tutor was the émigré's presumed immunity to the temptations of Jacobinism. In fact, such immunity could not at all be assured. Alexander Herzen (at a slightly later period) and the Decembrist Pavel Pestel both had

75 Vidalenc 289–291.
76 Haumont 191–192.
77 F. F. Vigel, Zapiski vol. 1 (Moscow: Artel' pisatelei, 1928) 80.
78 One poor fellow (admittedly in Hamburg rather than in Russia) taught his pupils particularly bizarre verb forms, such as "se soucisser" (in place of se soucier), provoking hilarious diffusion of this neologism among other émigrés. Vidalenc 289.
79 "karacho [sic], tchisti et 'petèkok,' pour kipiatok," was the limit of their knowledge of the language, writes A. O. Smirnova-Rosset, cited in Haumont 189.
French émigré tutors who, unquestionably, fashioned their revolutionary stance. Such cases were probably not exceptions. Like the soldiers of Condé who returned to reading the Encyclopédistes while in Russian service, émigré tutors too found that they were more deeply steeped in the culture of the Enlightenment than they had themselves believed upon leaving France. The humiliation of déclassement powerfully re-enforced this conviction: "un Montmorency ouchitel, devient forcément démocrate," comments one contemporary.

As in the case of French soldiers in Russia, émigré tutors there experienced the combined effects of humiliation, abasement, nostalgia, and otherness. They too prepared to reconcile themselves with what France, their "grande patrie," had become in order to recapture something of the "pays natal" they remembered. Whatever their lofty thoughts and noble yearnings, soldiers and tutors shared, in one form or another, the humble longing of a "bard of Volhynia" for the "tripes savoureuses et le cidre doré" of his native Caen. Gastronomy as a foundation stone of national consciousness may be particularly French; it is, arguably, as solid a foundation as any.

**MAÎTRES À PENSER**

Among French émigrés in Russia, Joseph de Maistre was the ultimate émigré. As Cioran has remarked, "toutes ses pensées allaient porter la marque de l'exil." In part, this was because de Maistre's intellectual nationality was French but his effective nationality was not. In part, it was because de Maistre spent fourteen years in Russian exile as minister plenipotentiary of a king who was himself an exile.

De Maistre was a Savoyard, subject of the king of Piedmont-Sardinia, though by the quirks of border changes he was not naturalized Sardinian, even when he served as minister of Sardinia, and he did at one time find himself, involuntarily, a French citizen. When he published his first great work, *Considérations sur la France* (1796), at the age of forty-three, de Maistre was already an émigré (in Lausanne) but he had never been in France. He was thus always a stranger to the country with whose culture he identified. "Rien n'est plus français que la famille de Maistre," he insisted to the French theorist Louis de Bonald, acknowledging though that it was not law but "la nature [qui] a

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80 Ignatieff, "French Emigrés in Russia: French tutors," 128; and Vidalenc 292.
81 Cited in Haumont 196. Of course, few émigrés were Montmorencys (and it is unlikely that a Montmorency would be a tutor) and not many became democrats but even a mild liberalism sufficed to establish a gulf with Russia.
82 Vidalenc 295.
83 E. M. Cioran, *Essai sur la pensée réactionnaire* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1977) 15. Almost all of de Maistre's important work was written in exile, most of it in Russia.

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naturalisé ma famille chez vous en faisant entrer la langue française jusque dans la moelle de nos os.”

Strangely, it is rumoured that de Maistre may have become formally Russian through naturalization.

In the Russian capital, de Maistre was one of those “ombres de diplomates qui depuis dix ans représentent à Petersbourg des fantômes des États.” His standing at the court to which he was accredited was pitiful. His material circumstances were miserable; the term “beggars” applies to him as much as to Louis XVIII. And de Maistre’s personal demeanour made him an odd figure.

To return to the opening scenes of War and Peace, we may note that de Maistre appears in Anna Pavlovna Scherer’s salon as the Vicomte de Montemart. Unlike the other émigrés at Madame Schérer’s, or those whom we have already discussed, Joseph de Maistre came to Russia with a grand plan.

As he approached Saint Petersburg, de Maistre wrote: “cette terre qui recule n’est pas du fait de mon exil, ce que je vois impuissant avec vous et qui s’éloigne du bateau où je me trouve, c’est notre civilisation toute entière.”

Well before his émigré contemporaries acknowledged the disappearance of the “monde français” de Maistre had drawn categorical conclusions from the disintegration of this world. In coming to Russia in 1803, de Maistre already had in mind the project of a new universalism in which Russia was to play the central role. Among the first sights he sought out in Saint Petersburg was the Falconet statue of Peter the Great, which de Maistre compared to that of Marcus Aurelius in Rome, asking himself whether Saint Petersburg would be the new Rome.

85 See F. Vermale, Joseph de Maistre Emigré (Chambéry: Dardel, 1927) 106.
86 Costa de Beauregard 361.
90 Cited by Miquel 35.
De Maistre’s question points to one of the fundamental traits of his philosophy. De Maistre was among the first post-revolutionary thinkers to reason in terms of specific nationalities, attributing to each nation a mission in the grand scheme of history. His quip is well-known: “j’ai vu, dans ma vie, des Français, des Italiens, des Russes, etc., je sais même, grâce à Montesquieu, qu’on peut être Persan [italics in original]: mais quant à l’homme, je déclare ne l’avoir rencontré de ma vie; s’il existe, c’est bien à mon insu.”92 But underlying this remark lies an universalist assumption. In the same work, De Maistre also wrote: “Chaque nation, comme chaque individu, a reçu une mission qu’elle doit remplir.”93

In de Maistre’s scheme of things therefore, “l’histoire marche depuis la naissance du Christ vers l’aboutissement d’une destinée propre à chaque nation.”94 And both France and Russia were to play a key part in this spectacular historiosophic scheme. De Maistre’s perspective on revolutionary France was not as dogmatic or intransigent as his commentators have sometimes made out.95 Before the Revolution, de Maistre was active as a freemason and he even owned one of the few sets of the Encyclopédie in Savoy. Having been a senator in a relatively liberal pre-revolutionary state, he was a partisan of ancien régime parlements and did not shy away from criticizing the monarchy.96 Nor did he confuse strong government with absolute government.97 Even de Maistre’s defense of the papacy was based, though only in part, upon the fact that it was the sole force capable of restraining sovereign power without breaking it.98 De Maistre also did not believe that the ancient regime could or should be reconstituted. Already in 1793 he wrote: “Le projet de mettre le lac de Genève en bouteilles est beaucoup moins fou que celui de rétablir les choses sur le même pied où elles étaient avant la Revolution.”99

De Maistre’s attitude to France was a mixture of respect and regret. “Rien de grand ne se fait dans notre Europe sans les Français ... ils n’en ont moins été choisis pour être les instruments de l’une des plus grandes révolutions qui se

93 Considérations sur la France 8.
94 Cited in Miquel 160.
96 Lafage 15.
97 De Maistre to Vignet des Etoiles, 28 October 1794, Correspondance, Œuvres complètes vol. 9, 80.
98 Lafage 68.
99 De Maistre to Vignet des Etoiles, 7 December 1793, Correspondance, Œuvres complètes vol. 9, 58.

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soient faites dans le monde et je ne puis douter qu’un jour (qui n’est pas loin peut être) ils indemnisent richement le monde de tout le mal qu’ils lui ont fait.”100 De Maistre voiced understanding for those émigrés who expressed joy at the success of their apparent enemies.101 He too could not wholly rejoice at France’s reverses. His enemies were, first, Jacobinism and then Bonaparte. The political problem, he wrote, was to persuade the French that the anti-French coalition was only fighting against Napoleon—“le champignon impérial,” he called him—and that France would never have peace with Napoleon.102

As an early commentator put it, for de Maistre even republican France was a “soldat de Dieu.”103 But France had betrayed its God and in doing so had perverted its very nature. Compared to the soldiers of the Armée de Condé or the French ouchiteli in Russia, De Maistre was steeped even more deeply in the traditions of the Enlightenment. Unlike these émigrés, however, he never managed to reconcile himself to the harm that the philosophers had done. Indeed, de Maistre’s entire philosophy was founded upon the refusal of the Enlightenment through the reaffirmation of religion. It was a “combat à outrance du christianisme et du philosophisme.”104 But de Maistre was not the advocate of just any religion: “Point de morale publique ni de caractère national sans religion, point de religion européenne sans le christianisme, point de véritable christianisme sans le catholicisme, point de pape sans la suprématie qui lui appartient.”105 De Maistre was, in spite of himself, too much a man of the Enlightenment to reject all forms of universalism but he found the universalism he sought in Catholicism.

In de Maistre’s grand plan, Russia, precisely because of its otherness, could save Europe, and France, from themselves. Uncorrupted by the Enlightenment and untouched by the Revolution, Russia possessed the qualities required for this redemptory role. It lacked only one fundamental property: Russia was not Catholic. Joseph de Maistre made it his task to overcome this obstacle.106

De Maistre’s first glimpse of Russians, before going to Russia, was not auspicious: “Les cosaques paraissent des tueurs plutôt que des soldats,” he wrote

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100 Cited in Miquel 220.
101 De Maistre to Vignet des Etoiles, 15 August 1794, Correspondance, Œuvres complètes vol. 9, 70.
102 Cited in Miquel 145.
103 Pingaud, Les Français en Russie 301.
104 Considérations sur la France 62.
105 De Maistre to Blacas, 22 May 1814, Correspondance, Œuvres complètes vol 12, 427-428.
106 Dieter Groh, Russland im Blick Europas (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988 [1961])123, citing Franz von Baader and Louis de Bonald remarks that de Maistre was not an exception among conservative thinkers in looking to Russia as an instrument of divine Providence for the regeneration of Europe.
of their entry into Padua. However, his attitude evolved positively, as much out of discouragement at historical developments elsewhere as out of personal experience with Russia. De Maistre, the least tender of philosophers, was to have tender words for the country and people of his exile. His enchanted description of a summer’s night in Petersburg is a literary classic. His affectionate characterization of the Russians is less well known. And he concludes the *Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* promising, “jusqu’à mon dernier soupir je ne cesserai de me rappeler la Russie et de faire des voeux pour elle. Naturalisé par la bienveillance que j’ai rencontrée au milieu de ses habitants, j’écoute volontiers la reconnaissance lorsqu’elle essaye de me prouver que je suis Russe.”

In de Maistre’s view, Russia could not undertake its historical mission without shedding the handicap of its Orthodox faith. The force which religion, “le grand supplément de la puissance civile” exerted on man was always in direct proportion to the consideration accorded to its ministers, wrote de Maistre; in Russia the Orthodox clergy enjoyed no consideration at all. The religion of this admirable people was purely external; it did not penetrate into the heart. Reflecting on Russia’s place between Europe and Asia, de Maistre did not consider “l’élément asiatique” a disadvantage; indeed, it could be the contrary. But its Christian Orthodoxy, defined by those “misérables Grecs du Bas Empire,” dragged it down and away from European civilization.

Ambitiously though perhaps quixotically, de Maistre plunged into a formidable campaign to correct Russia’s defects by intervening in the debate on educational reform. His immediate goal was to prevent Russia from any further contamination by the secular values of the Enlightenment but the ultimate aim was to bring Russia back to the Roman Catholic Church. These were grandiose designs that relied on internal support waiting to be mobilized. De Maistre’s arrival in Petersburg coincided with the creation of a Ministry of Public Instruction and de Maistre himself was soon solicited by the minister, A. K. Razumovskii, as well as by the traditionalist camp opposed to what would become the Speranskii civil service examination reforms. Allying himself

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108 *Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg*, *Oeuvres complètes* vol. 4, 2.
109 *Du Pape*, *Oeuvres complètes* vol. 2, 428.
110 *Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg*, *Oeuvres complètes* vol. 5, 280. This may have been literally true. See note 85 above.
111 “Quatre chapitres sur la Russie,” *Oeuvres complètes* vol. 8, 286 and 280.
112 *Du Pape* 426.
113 *Du Pape* 429.
114 David W. Edwards, “Count Joseph de Maistre and Russian Educational Policy, 1803–
with the historian Karamzin and the future minister of public instruction S. S. Uvarov, de Maistre took the lead in arguing against a modernist education that would prolong the blasphemies of the Enlightenment and other foreign influences. Russia should have Russian teachers, he argued, and it should have schools before it created academies. The most powerful available force for realizing this aim, he maintained, was not the unsuitable Russian Orthodox clergy but the Jesuit order, which was well established in the country.

De Maistre believed he could count on the understanding of tsar Alexander who showed him sympathy and even relied upon him for advice. Alexander, however, was a fickle monarch. "Nul souverain dans l’univers n’a pu rendre (encore aujourd’hui) autant de services à la religion, et bien peu de souverains lui font autant de mal, que l’empereur de Russie.” Alexander’s changing humour as well as his growing susceptibility to a Protestant-Pietist inspired illuminism, condemned de Maistre’s efforts. Although he did succeed in bringing about some conversions to Catholicism, notably among women of court circles, such as the wife and daughter of Rostopchin, de Maistre never succeeded in implanting Catholicism in the upper spheres of Russian society, much less in Russia as a whole. Alexander’s order to expel the Jesuits from Russia in 1817 led to de Maistre’s expulsion as well. This measure did not mark de Maistre’s defeat but only confirmed it.

De Maistre was bitter at the triumph of Orthodoxy in Russia which he associated with the success of Protestantism, a heresy related to Orthodoxy but even more harmful. One wonders whether he was fully cognizant of the incongruity of his own position. Having strenuously argued that each nation

115 “Quatre chapitres sur la Russie,” 290.
117 The argument on behalf of the Jesuits is especially vigorously argued in “Sur l’Etat du christianisme en Europe,” Œuvres complètes vol. 8, 519. De Maistre wrote this after leaving Russia. In Petersburg, he formulated even encrypted diplomatic dispatches in the knowledge they were being read by Russian authorities. See Lebrun 179–180.
118 Miquel 198, describes de Maistre as personal secretary to the tsar but the term advisor is more accurate. See also M. Stepanov, “Zhozef de Mestr v Rossii,” Litaturnoe nasledstvo 29–30 (1937).
119 “Sur l’Etat du christianisme en Europe,” Œuvres complètes vol. 8, 519. De Maistre wrote this after leaving Russia. In Petersburg, he formulated even encrypted diplomatic dispatches in the knowledge they were being read by Russian authorities. See Lebrun 179–180.
121 De Maistre to Cardinal Severoli, [December?] 1816, Correspondance, Œuvres complètes vol. 13, 476, and Du Pape 445.
should let itself be governed by its own traditions, he would have had to acknowledge that his project of catholicizing Russia was not merely chimerical but self-contradictory. Having fulminated against reformists and those who indulged in what would later be called “social engineering,” De Maistre had himself succumbed to the temptation of undertaking a most grandiose project of transformation.

Convinced as he was of the absolute truth of Catholicism, de Maistre may not have had the self-critical insight to realize the self-contradictory nature of his project. He and those influenced by him did realize, however, that their project had failed. Russia would not play the role assigned to it. Moreover, France, even the legitimist France of the Restoration, would not recognize papal authority as de Maistre conceived it. Europe could not recover the universalism it had lost nor create a new one. “Je meurs avec l’Europe,” wrote de Maistre at the end of his life, adding with grace, “c’est mourir en bonne compagnie.”

CONCLUSION

Nationalism is founded on disenchantment with the wider world. Physical estrangement from the world to which one believes oneself to belong as well as spiritual estrangement from the world in which one treads, provide a critical, though traumatic context for redefining collective identity. The painful discovery of a “cultural distance” dissolves certitudes and requires that one construct one’s universe anew.

For French émigrés of all ranks, Russia provided an even more searing confrontation with otherness than alternative lands of exile. The loss of status, indeed the loss of all bearings, already inherent in the fact of expatriation, was compounded by Russia’s strangeness in the eyes of the émigrés. Like other émigrés, de Maistre too could not accept the Russia to which he had come but, unlike them, he attempted to transform it. The failure of this attempt, and with it the attempt to recreate a new form of universality, was a lesson to him and to others.

Confounded with a world unlike anything they had known or imagined, the émigrés changed their moral direction and fell back on elements of the familiar—even at the cost of reconciling themselves with what they had rejected. As Baldensperger has put it, “une doctrine parfaitement cohérente de loyalisme

122 “Lettres à un gentilhomme russe sur l’inquisition espagnole,” Œuvres complètes vol. 3, 394; De la Souveraineté, Œuvres complètes vol. 1, 376.

123 Darcel 48.


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extra-territorial se transformera, chez la plupart des émigrés, en un attachement nostalgique pour la contrée qu’on avait fuie en prétendant la dissocier de la vraie patrie.”125 Even de Maistre may have found himself affected by this change of mood, in his writings as well as in his political reactions.126

The moral trajectory of the French emigration provides an emblematic account of the creation of a modern nationalist consciousness. This thesis is exemplified in the experience described here of those émigrés who went furthest, culturally, to Russia. Most émigrés returned to France before the Restoration, thus confirming the power of patriotic sentiment over ideological politics.127 Whatever its duration, however, the émigré experience transformed not only the consciousness of the émigrés but it fashioned the identity of France itself. Some émigrés, notably Louis de Bonald, celebrated the notion that the true patrie was not defined by the soil but by laws and a social order. Bonald, however, returned to France early and, significantly from our point of view, he had never been in Russia.128 The émigrés could have adopted Bonald’s version of what might be called a precocious civic nationalism, choosing the “dative” over the “native” in Martin Thom’s terms, but they did not do so.129 By transferring their loyalty from their king to their nation and to their land they foreclosed the option of self-identifying themselves with an alternative to the France they had fled. Recognizing that the “monde français” of their memories was gone or had never existed, they turned to recollections of their own intimate earlier surroundings. In doing so, they came to accept the “Grande Nation” for the sake of their “petit pays.”

Notwithstanding the importance of the emigration as a separate current in French belles-lettres and in spite of the persistence of divisions within French society created by the Revolution, the émigrés thus did not allow themselves to be defined in opposition to their homeland, whatever it might become. There could not be “Another France” or a “France Abroad,” to borrow the vocabulary of other European emigrations. There could only be one France. The lessons that the émigrés drew from their exile were those of a former soldier of the Condé who wrote in his family chronicle, “n’émigre jamais, fais-toi tuer sur le sol

126 *Soirées de Saint Petersbourg* 59. De Maistre was devastated by the Treaty of Paris’ provisions in 1814 to maintain his native Savoy in French hands and comforted by the reversal of this decision the following year.
127 One source estimates that 9/10 of all émigrés returned before the fall of Napoleon. As he puts it, Louis XVIII was the only émigré for whom return earlier was not an option. William Boyle, “Introduction,” *French Emigrés in Europe* xvii.
129 Thom, see note 13 above.
And even de Maistre admitted that emigration was an error, though not an offense. Excluding alternative conceptions of who they were and where they belonged, the émigrés repeated with ever-greater insistence, “il n’y a que la France.”

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130 Cited in D’Agay 42. See also the same author’s article “L’Armée de Condé et la Russie: 1797–1799,” *L’Influence française en Russie au XVIIIe siècle* 436.
132 Baldensperger vol. 1, 293.