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THE TOLSTOYAN TRADITION AND ESTONIAN THEME IN JAAN KROSS'S NOVEL "PROFESSOR MARTENS'S DEPARTURE"*

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Jaan Kross's novel "Professor Martens' Departure" (1984) is about a hero whose prototype was famous attorney and diplomat, premier specialist in international law, and author of the seminal work "Collected Treaties and Conventions concluded between Russia and Foreign Nations" Friedrich Fromhold (or Fyodor Fyodorovich) Martens (1874–1909). Professor Martens was born on August 15, 1845 in Pärnu and died in Petersburg on June 7, 1909 (regarding the ancestry, biography, and diplomatic and scientific work of Martens, see: [Биографический словарь: 6–12; Грабарь: 306–313; Курс международного права: 288, 290–297; Leesment: 354–355; Рахумаа, Ярвелайд: 68–76; Пустогаров]).

The action of Kross's novel takes place on the last day of the protagonist's life. The novel has almost no external chain of events: Martens is traveling from Pärnu to Petersburg, but only makes it to the station at Valga; the novel ends with his death. The main part of the book is dedicated to describing the events of Martens' internal life: the protagonist "practices" his future confession — an open discussion with his wife that is to occur upon his arrival in Sestroretsk (his dacha outside Petersburg). The compositional unity of the text is built on the development of several *micro-plots* (repeating or parallel from the point of view of the events described), a series of *intersecting motifs*, and a particular pattern of *character structures* (the main character is juxtaposed with "foil" characters that give shade and definition to one aspect or another of his inner world).

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The *repeating micro-plots* are made up of Professor Martens' life events, to which he returns several times in his memories. These include the so-called Vodovozov plot (Martens' musings about the "libelous" article about him by the journalist Vasily Vasilyevich Vodovozov in the second additional volume of the Brockhaus and Efron Dictionary)[1]; the recollection of the signing of the Portsmouth agreement between Russia and Japan in 1905 and Martens' particular role in the drafting of that agreement; and the recollection of Martens' acquaintance and subsequent increasing intimacy with his future wife, the daughter of Senator Tur.

The *parallel micro-plots* overlap in part with the repeating ones; they are connecting simultaneously with both the protagonist and his counterpart-namesake, Georg-Friedrich Martens, a German diplomat, attorney, and professor at Hettingen University, who died in 1821[2]. For example, both Martenses encounter arsonists under similar conditions, the younger Martens in 1863 in Petersburg, the senior Martens in 1774 in Hettingen. Each man survives the threat of death: the senior Martens nearly drowns, thrown to the fates by local artisans in Hamburg during a flood, while death comes to the younger Martens in the form of his arrested nephew, the Social Democrat Johannes; both cases emphasize the socio-cultural contradictions between the threatened protagonist and those at fault for his potential death. However, the parallel plots sometimes act as "sources" and parodies of the novel. For instance, Martens' story in the 14th chapter about his "main" or "general" idea (an unquestionable reference to Chekhov's "A Boring Story" (1889), whose main character, the internationally-known scientist and privy councilor Nikolai Stepanovich, suffers deep

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1 See: [Kross: 42; from here on, citations of this edition of the novel's translation are noted by page number only] and compare to [Водовозов: 1450]. The article about the hero's prototype, F. F. Martens, was published in the third additional *half*-volume of Brockhaus and Efron's Encyclopedic Dictionary (that is, in the *second* additional volume, precisely as stated in the novel). The article's author wrote: "In February, 1904, M <artens> wrote in 'Novoe vremya' an article about the opening of military actions against Russia by Japan, in which he argued that Japan violated international law by beginning a war without declaring military action. The self-contradiction into which M — fell was noted in print, having, in his composition about the Eastern War, derided Turkey for its archaic protest against the opening of military action by Russia in 1877 without a preliminary announcement of war, and having asserted (as in his course on international law) that formal notice, as a mandatory requirement, had faded into history as completely useless. It was also noted, that M — could not have known of the note from the Japanese government dated January 24, 1904 (not officially published in Russia), that was an unquestionable declaration of war" [Ibid].

This publication must be considered one of the novel's many documentary sources. However, this article, with rare exception, will not concern itself with the sources of "Professor Martens' Departure", as such extensive and diverse topics, without a doubt, are worthy of a separate study.

2 Regarding the relationship of these two characters see: [Jõgi, O.: 419].

doubt regarding the meaning of his life and academic work and believes the reason for this doubt to be a lack of a "general idea," see: [Чехов]) is parodied in chapter 22 (in Professor Martens' dream about the naval battle, in which all his "main" ideas are devastated and turned inside out).

The *intersecting moments* of the novel include, first and foremost, the themes of *liberation* and *fear of death.* (Compare, for example: "And when you go out of the gate onto Gartenstrasse — whether with Katya or alone… Total, well almost total liberation. Exactly as if you're returning to childhood carefreeness" [11]; "I was seized by such a joyful feeling of liberation, and at that time I experienced such a rush of energy, such that I haven't felt in ages" [110]; "*Complete candor — why?* I'll tell you why: *from fear of death*" <italics mine> [43].) The semantics of these themes change depending on the internal state of the protagonist; nonetheless, they always maintain a certain steady semantic core.

Finally, in the role of the protagonist's *"foils"* appear those characters with whom he compares himself, including not only the senior Martens, but also the protagonist's brother August, a doctor on the isle of Madera, in honor of whom the island's residents erected a statue during his life; Alexander Mikhailovich Gorchakov, state councilor and addressee of Pushkin's epistles; Russian prime minister Sergey Yulyevich Witte; Estonian composers Alexander Saebelman (Kunileid) and Artur Kapp; attorney and musical critic Platon Vaxel; Alfred Nobel, founder of the Nobel Prize; and, finally, Leo Tolstoy, about whom, incidentally, the novel says very little directly.

In this way, Martens' recollections of his past and life's latest events unfold as a series of micronovellas or microplots, and their repetition in the novel's stream of consciousness is caused (at the level of plot) by the protagonist's striving for the limits of *openness*. It is difficult for Martens to admit the ambiguity of his thoughts and actions; thus, in practicing his future confession, he doesn't tell himself and his imaginary interlocutor (his wife Katya) everything at once, but piece by piece, returning repeatedly to the facts already laid out and gradually *deepening* his level of openness. The initial impetus to confession was the previously-mentioned article by Vodovozov, in which the author, in particular, caught Martens in inconsistency and in an outright lie. So, in 1879 (after the end of the Russo-Turkish War) Martens published a book entitled "The Eastern War", in which he rather arrogantly responded to Turkey's statement to Russia, who supposedly attacked Porta was without warning. From the point of view of modern international law, wrote Martens, an official declaration of war is not necessary; furthermore, the Turkish government, on whose orders practically the entire Bulgarian population was destroyed, had no

right to point fingers at the more civilized country of Russia. Meanwhile, in 1904, when the Russo-Japanese War began, Martens published an article in the newspaper "Novoe vremya", which blamed Japan for starting a war with Russia without warning. From Martens' point of view, Vodovozov not only erected yet another serious barrier to his becoming a potential Nobel laureate, but also deliberately ruined his reputation in the eyes of posterity (the article in the "Encyclopedic Dictionary" does not assume, according to Martens, a journalistic or polemic orientation). Martens is stung by Vodovozov's accusations, but also admits his guilt (showing his equivocal conduct), and is recently outraged by Tolstoy's "denunciation" of the government: "…I myself know that there are people of various moral levels in high places. Let's say, from Stolypin, well… even to Tolstoy… Although I cannot one hundred percent believe his last. No! He allegedly published another brochure, 'I cannot remain silent' or something like that. And I ask, why can't he keep silent, if everyone else can? Mm? I can completely" [110]. In the end, Martens declares that he can't and doesn't want to keep silent: "But I don't want to anymore, Katya, you hear? I don't want to anymore. Let it be not before the whole world. But before you, at the very least. Though I ought to have laid out all my cards before the world" [161]. (Compare to Tolstoy's 1908 article "I cannot remain silent": "But this is terrible. It should not be, and one cannot live like that. I, at least, cannot live like that, I can't and I don't want to and I won't" [Толстой]).

Martens' confession is that of a man left an orphan in his earliest years who has decided, come what may, to achieve brilliant professional achievements through his own efforts and to earn himself a place among nobility. Martens' internal monologues, which become more and more honest as a result of the hero's difficult struggle with himself, reveal the basic contradiction in his life, which, as Martens sees it, lies in the fact that his efforts to serve the government and czar in diplomacy and science have always run counter to his never outwardly expressed critical attitude toward the Russian emperors and those close to them.

The key to interpreting Martens' confession becomes the *ethical position of late Tolstoy*[3]. In part, this circumstance explains the author's choice of plots for his hero's confession. (It is widely known that in the 1900s Leo Tolstoy wrote a series of passivist articles; the most famous of these was "I cannot remain

[3] The question of the reflection of the Tolstoyan tradition in the novel was raised in the review of its Russian translation; see: [Немзер: 56].Compare also: "'Professor Martens' Departure' <…> wonderfully combines with the narrative tradition we have come to associate with Russian writers of the 19th century" ("Arbetarbladet" 29.VII 1986), quoted by: [Saluäär: 1428]). Regarding the interconnection of the Tolstoyan theme with the context of Estonian culture, see: [Haug 1990: 4].

silent", which Martens could have read in one of the many foreign languages he knows)[4]. Martens torturously reflects on the most important episodes of his diplomatic, scientific and publishing work, which are related to the theme of war: his contradictory coverage of the events of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and the Russo-Japanese War in his research and publications on international law; his participation as an expert at the signing of the peace treaty between Russia and Japan in 1905. Although the hero's historic prototype, the world-renowned attorney Martens, did much to curb war and establish peaceful relations between countries (regarding this, see: [Пустогаров: 145–196]), this aspect of the real Martens' work is not so important to the author in the protagonist he has constructed.

Another significant and repeated theme in the hero's thoughts is the lie in his family life, the Tolstoyan overtones of which need no special evidence.

The author refers to the plots and images from an entire series of publications, and not only from Tolstoy's later works ("Memoirs of a Madman", 1884–1903; "The Death of Ivan Ilych", 1886; "The Kingdom of God is Within You", 1893; "Master and Man", 1895; "Ressurection", 1899), but also, for example, to the symbolic imagery of "Anna Karenina" (1875–1877). The correlation can be seen most clearly with "Memoirs of a Madman" and "The Death of Ivan Ilych". By all appearances, Kross did not choose these works merely by accident. The protagonist in both stories is not only an official, but an *attorney*, a specialist with a law degree. They both come to an understanding of moral truth, like Martens, gradually and thanks to illness (Fyodor, the hero of "Memoirs", begins his confession while residing in a madhouse). It is Fyodor of "Memoirs" who bears the closest resemblance to Martens, and it is this text that Kross's novel most closely mirrors. The hero of "Memoirs" undergoes changes while on a *journey*, and he begins to experience *fear of death* while in a hotel room (fear of enclosed spaces plagues him as it does Professor Martens, who is situated in a train compartment for the duration of almost his entire confession): "Terror, fear! It seems as though death were terrible, but when one recollects, when one thinks of life, it is the agony of life that overwhelms" [Толстой XII: 48]. As in Kross's novel, the symbolism of color becomes just as important to the hero of "Memoirs": horror materializes for Fyodor in the form of a "red and white square" (a room), while Martens' attention is drawn to the light brown walls and *dark violet* upholstery of his train compartment, to the shades of color and other details of the compartment's interior. As in Kross's novel, Fyodor's sole confidant is his wife (although, as already noted, Martens'

[4] In 1908 Tolstoy's article was published in Russian only in fragments.

interlocutor is imaginary, while in Tolstoy's story she is completely real). Both characters, having decided the fates of other people from the heights of the law, now subject themselves to moral judgement.

Recall that *fear of death* is one of the themes found throughout the novel. The hero begins to experience fear, having felt the unrighetousness of his life: "*Complete candor — why?* I'll tell you why: *from fear of death*" [112]; "But you know why I want to change. I told you, because of fear. Let's not repeat of *what* the fear is…" [234].

While Tolstoy's hero turns to the lives of the saints and the Gospel to overcome his fear, and finds in them the answers to his doubts[5], Professor Martens associates the Gospel with falsehood and the vanity of modern Christians[6] (at the same time, it must be noted that the hero's position coincides with Tolstoy's in its criticism of modern Christanity). Kross's hero, more than likely, denies or doubts in the existence of God (just like the hero of "Memoirs of a Madman"); however, during the course of his confession the concept of "sinfulness" becomes clear to him. The origins of this clarity date back to childhood impressions of religious faith: "…my sudden self-criticism is nothing more than the naïve, Early Christian hope, arising from *fear*, that honesty protects one from death [171]. Thus, in this statement by Martens, modern Christianity is utterly unobtrusively (implicitly) contrasted with Early Christianity, upon which Russian religious reformers at the beginning of the 20th century based their ideological constructs.

Another difference between Martens' *fear of death* and subsequent spiritual transformation and that of Tolstoy's corresponding characters (Fyodor and Ivan Ilych) is the lack of direct compassion or pity for his loved ones (his wife, children, serfs, etc). Martens needs the wife to whom he confesses in his mind and whom, from time to time, he sees before him, for moral support. Martens feels guilty before her and experiences tenderness and gratitude toward her, but does not feel compassion. The depth of his repentence does not extend to the discovery of the existence of the gravitational pull of a loved one. In fact, until

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[5] From "Memoirs of a Madman": "From that moment I began to read the Holy Writ. To me the Bible was incomprehensible and alluring, the Gospels softened me. But most of all I read the lives of the saints" [Толстой XII: 52].

[6] Compare: "And now the problem of those who humiliate, or self-abase. By the way, the Christian religion exists in a large part for such types. In it they have their organizations, sects, movements: all those saints, wretches, holy brothers, dogs of the Lord and so on, right down to the eunuchs. And they all strive nota bene — meaning toward the opposite of the goal which Matthew states directly in the Gospel: *he who humbles himself will be exaulted*" <Kross's italics> [401].

the end of the novel he remains an individualist, a man pursuing first and foremost his own interests[7].

Another of the novel's themes, which also correlates to the publications and fictional prose of later Tolstoy, is that of *liberation* (it's possible that Kross was familiar with Bunin's book about Tolstoy, the title of which includes this theme)[8], which arises at the very beginning of the first chapter. The theme has several meanings, each depending on the content the hero puts into it. At first liberation is just a holiday in Livonia, his homeland, far away from work, myriad responsibilities, the conventionality of life in society: "And when you go out of the gate onto Gartenstrasse — whether with Katya or alone… Total, well almost total liberation. Exactly as if you're returning to childhood carefreeness" [234]. Once Martens considered liberation the completion of academic work (the disappearance of doubt in his own creative and intellectual abilities); his infidelity to his wife with Yvette became "liberation" from societal conventions.

The semantic content of this image gradually *deepens*. Martens begins to believe that liberation is initiation to "his own" national culture (Estonian). He recalls prominent representatives of the nation, who were able to lay the foundation of a national tradition in several areas of culture and science: Hella Wuolijoki, the first female of Estonian descent to receive a Masters degree and who studied Estonian folklore at the University of Helsinki; Alexander Saebelmann (pseudonym: Kunileid) and Artur Kapp, founders of professional Estonian music; and Ludvig Puusepp, founder (along with V. M. Bekhterev) of the world's first psycho-neurological hospital at the Psycho-neurological Institute. Each of these acquaitances of Martens is not ashamed of his Estonian and democratic heritage; to the contrary, they emphasis it (this undoubtedly is explained by the time — in the 1900s the national liberation movement was beginning in Estonia). Martens himself, having built his career predominantly during a period of Russification of the Baltic provinces, never highlighted his

7 Regarding this side of Martens' character, see: [Jõgi, M.: 90]. Note also Kross's own characterization of the novel's hero, who deserves, in his words, "respect," but not "reverence" [Kross 1984: 7].

8 In Bunin's 1937 essay "The Liberation of Tolstoy", Tolstoy's death, in particular, is treated as "liberation" from the sins of life, or moral enlightenment. This interpretation is based on the ideas of Tolstoy himself, as laid out in several fictional works. Compare, for example, the description of the hero's death in Tolstoy's story "Master and Man": "He understands that this is death, and is not the least bit distressed by this… 'I'm coming, I'm coming!' joyfully, emotionally says his entire being. And he feels that he is *free* and nothing more holds him back" [Толстой XII: 339]. Kross may also have been familiar with Tolstoy's "My Life" (1892), in which this notion is given a broader interpretation: "Not only are space and time and reason forms of thought, and the essence of life is outside these forms, but all our life is ever-growing submission to these forms and then *liberation* from them" [Толстой X: 500].

Estonian-ness in aristocratic circles; moreover, he presented himself as a Baltic German. During the course of his confession, he admits to this *lie* to his wife. Liberation, by means of the deepening of Martens' confession, becomes *liberation from lies* in every aspect of his life. Characteristically, all of the above-mentioned Estonian cultural and scientific figures are depicted in the novel as serving the cause of their *nation*, and not the cause of the empire. Their goal becomes not a personal career (what Martens has), but *the construction of a national culture*. They are oriented on the nation as a *whole*, counting themselves and their work simply a *part of that whole*. The correlation of all of these secondary characters with beloved Tolstoyan protagonists (especially in "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina") who feel themselves a *part of a whole* (whether of family, a nation, or peasant society) is completely obvious. Not by accident did Kross include a character in his novel by the name of Platon, behind which (as in the majority of cases) is hidden a real historical figure: the Doctor of Law and head clerk of the office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, musical critic Platon Alexandrovich Vaxel. He is Martens' *only* close friend, and this special status alone distinguishes this character among all others in the novel. It is to him that Martens, at the edge of despair, writes a confessional letter from Portsmouth in 1905 and admits that he is ready to seek a position as professor in the universities of Wester Europe (a letter similar in content was written by the real Martens, though not to Vaxel, but to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Lamsdorf — regarding this, see: [Пустогаров: 232–233]). Vaxel's conduct is not oriented so much toward career successes, as toward establishing and strengthening friendships (it is he who acquaints Martens with the Estonian composer Artur Kapp, and he is the link between Martens and Martens' brother, August, who lives on Madera). This character values human connections much more than advancement on the career ladder. Martens turns to Platon Vaxel during one of the most difficult moments of his life for just this reason. Nonetheless, Vaxel seems similar to Tolstoy's Platon Karataev only in part: Platon Vaxel is noble by birth, he is no stranger to career success (he is head clerk of the office), and his propensity toward building friendships and enjoying music in salons, Martens himself explains, is due to the needlessness of forging a path upwards from his earliest years. It is worth noting that Vaxel is one of Martens' many foils in the novel, as he believes that if his life had turned out differently he would have become a musician. (The theme of music in the novel directly relates to "liberation" as moral enlightenment[9].)

[9] Compare, for example, the hero's denial of Nobel's "anti-musical" stance: "Well, from a simply humanistic point of view, and overall, perhaps the inventor of nitroglycerin and dynamite didn't

Finally, as already noted, several coloristic images become overarching into the motifs in the novel. First and foremost is the combination of *dark violet* and *light brown* (the colors of the upholstery and walls of Martens' train compartment)[10]. Here one can glimpse a reference not only to "Memoirs of a Madman" (the depiction of Tolstoy's hero's worries as he sits in a hotel room is supplemented by its visual impressions: he notices the red and white colors), but also to "Anna Karenina" (those same red and white colors are noted by the narrator in describing Anna's trip to Petersburg on the railroad; Anna's red bag appears, in particular, in the scene of her suicide). However, it is not merely the repetition of the motif of color on the background of the heroes' psychological stress that points to the similarity of Tolstoy's texts to Kross's novel. The color violet, that in particular symbolizes repentance and mourning, also appears in "Anna Karenina": Kitty, desiring that Anna go to the ball in violet, turns out to be deceived not only by Vronsky, but deceived even earlier in her desire to see Anna in violet; Anna appears at the ball in a black dress, foreshadowing thus the totally unambiguous symbolism of this color in not only the outcome of the ball for Kitty, but also her own death. As has been shown, the events taking place with Kross's protagonist agree completely with both symbolic meanings of the color violet: *repentance* and *death* are the very two most important events that characterize the last day of the life of professor Martens.

If the novel's protagonist primarily sees Leo Tolstoy as a rival[11] and is unaware that, on the last day of his life, he is thinking almost exclusively in Tolstoyan terms, then the novel's author, evidently, absolutely deliberately projects everything that happens to his hero on the Tolstoyan tradition. Like Tolstoy's heroes Ivan Ilych and Anna Karenina, Martens redeems his sins and dying suffering with death, following after a torturous acknowledgement to himself of unjust deeds (the novel depicts the Tolstoyan notion that government service in the Russian empire precludes the possibility of a humane treatment of others), which either hastened the march of death or even caused it directly. Martens' death occurs in the last — 33rd — chapter of the novel, a symbolic number that alludes to the death of Christ[12]. According to the au-

believe in God (or, maybe, he began to believe when he fought with death at San Remo, how should I know?), but he should have believed in *sin*" [414].

10 In his review of the novel, Toomas Haug noted the particular tangibility and materiality of the fictious world of the novel (see: [Haug 1985: 493]).

11 Compare: "…I was almost awarded the Nobel Prize… (It's strange to think of this, but in ninety-two this honor was closer to my grasp than, say, *even* to Tolstoy)" [340].

12 The belief that Jesus Christ died at the age of 33 has remained the most widespread version of all the views of Christ's death in the cultural consciousness of the masses.

thor's conception, the death of Martens symbolizes the end of an entire historical era. If Martens, being a native of the lower classes, ambitiously paved himself a road to success and achieved international acclaim, but in doing so forgot his roots, then the next generation of his compatriots, as shown in the novel, already think not only of themselves, but first and foremost of the fate of the entire Estonian nation. Thus the novel contains yet one more justification of the historical Martens: the 1900s, understandably, was a much more favorable period for nation-building than the last third of the 19th century, when Martens made his name. As already mentioned, the national (Estonian) theme of the novel is closely intertwined with several key images from Tolstoy's prose.

Tolstoy and the Tolstoyan tradition (much like Martens' young compatriots) are contrasted in the novel with imperial life and the empire itself, which is represented, essentially, by secondary characters — not only by czar Nicholas II, but also by members of the Russian government and diplomats, including, among others, Sergey Yulyevich Witte, chairman of the Committee of Ministers; Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin, minister of internal affairs; Alexander Petrovich Izvolsky and Vladimir Nikolaevich Lamsdorf, both ministers of foreign affairs; and Baron Roman Romanovich Rozen, a diplomat. All of these (with the exception of Witte) are depicted schematically, without a hint of any kind of psychological depth. This is a deliberate technique employed by the author; Kross denies the above-mentioned characters the complexity mental life and moral dilemmas, depicting them in the manner of late Tolstoy exclusively as ambitious careerists. Such a high regard by the author for Tolstoy and the Tolstoyan tradition can be explained not only by the similarity of the creative settings of Kross's prose to Tolstoy's, but, evidently, also by the heightened attention given to the figure of Tolstoy after his death ("departure") in Estonian publications[13]. Clearly, the "departure"[14] (death) of Martens, after admitting to himself the ambiguity and dualty of his work as an academic, a diplomat, a teacher, and a published writer, is the only means of attaining freedom, freedom from lies. That is why the death of the novel's protagonist can be interpreted as an act, similar to that implemented by the Russian author in 1910 near to his death ("departure" as "liberation").

13 Regarding this, see: [Palamets].

14 Compare the title of the Russian translation, "Professor Martens' Departure", which is consciously focused, by all appearances, on the death of Tolstoy by the novel's translator, Olga Samma.

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