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RUSSIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE IN JAAN KROSS'S NOVEL "THE CZAR'S MADMAN"*

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"The Czar's Madman", one of Jaan Kross's most famous novels, was published in 1978 and has been translated into many languages. It first appeared in Russian print in 1980 in the journal "Druzhba Narodov" («Дружба народов»), and as a separate publication in 1984, as translated by O. A. Samma[1].

This article is concerned with an aspect of this large and complex text that on first glance appears peripheral, but which is closely interwoven with the novel's primary theme: the fate of Estonians under foreign oppression. The point, perhaps, is not so much in the historical era described by Kross, when Estonia was incorporated into the Russian empire and was divided between two Baltic provinces, Estonia and Livonia, where the aristocracy consisted of Baltic Germans, while Estonians were, on the whole, peasant serfs. First and foremost, Kross is interested in how the Estonian nation springs forth from a downtrodden, illiterate people caught between two foreign and antagonistic powers (their Baltic landlords and their Russian governors). Thus, along with the protagonist, who is based on the real historical figure of Timotheus Eberhard von Bock, a Livonian nobleman and colonel of the Russian Guard who was imprisoned in the Schlüsselburg fortress by Emperor Alexander I in 1818 for his "outrageous" letter, there appears a fictional narrator, Estonian Jakob Mättik, the brother

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[1] Olga Samma (nee Levina, first married name Smolyan; 1912–1985), a German Studies specialist, student of Y. G. Etkind, author of research on F. M. Klinger and Schiller, and German translator, was an associate professor of Herzen State Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad until her retirement. In 1965 she married the famous Estonian literary figure Otto Samma (1912–1978) and moved to Estonia. She mastered Estonian to such a fine degree that she became the foremost translator of Kross's works into Russian. Kross himself highly regarded Olga Samma's translations [Kross 1982].

of Bock's wife, Ekaterina. Eeva, the former serf peasant who becomes Ekaterina von Bock, has a real prototype. However, so little is known about the real Kitty, as she was called by her husband, that this heroine can be considered the offspring of the author's creativity.

When "The Czar's Madman" was written, Malle Salupere had not yet solved the mystery of this surprising marriage. Her research, which in many ways clarifies and corrects the factual foundation of the novel, was published only in 1990 ([Salupere 1990]; republished: [Salupere 1998]; in Russian: [Салупере]). However, in a well-known article about Bock [Лыжин][2], one of those on which the novel was based, N. Lyzhin wrote that Timotheus was in unrequited love with a particular girl for 13 years, and compared his feelings to the love of Novalis and Zhukovsky. Salupere has established that the object of Bock's desire was Julie Catherine von Berg (1786–1817), who was married to Karl von Bock, Timotheus's brother, in 1813, and who died in 1817 [Salupere 1998: 76]. Her maid was an Estonian, Ewa, who was by no accident renamed Ekaterina upon her conversion to Orthodoxy (her name was recorded as Ekaterina Petrova at her marriage to Bock at the Church of the Dormition in Tartu): her name reminded Bock of his lost love [Ibid: 81].

Kross didn't know the name of Bock's beloved, but the story of his unrequited love was known to him in general strokes. This is why his handling of the marriage of Timo in the novel is so "ideological", as a gesture of the prototype. There is no doubt that Bock's marriage to a peasant, solemnized only a few months after the death of his beloved lady (the death on March 14, 1817, the marriage on October 12, 1817) and during a period of deliberation on his political memorandum, became an integral part of his social program: "I see a compatriot in every Estonian" [Бок: 193[3]; from here on, citations of this edition of the novel's translation are noted by page number only].

As author of a book about the Estonian's lot in life, it is important to Kross that the Estonian peasants Eeva and Jakob are able to become educated people in a short amount of time, and that Kitty makes herself not just a wife but a companion to Timo, as well as a real aristocrat, possessing all the charm of beauty, wit, and social grace, without losing her hard-working peasant roots. She is equally open to interaction with peasant women and the university intel-

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[2] The title of Lyzhin's article focuses on the conditions of censorship in the 1850s and is intended to hide the name of the protagonist.

[3] There appears to have been a change in Bock's feelings toward his wife later. See the draft of a letter to Alexander I, published by A. V. Predtechensky in his book on Bock: "With each day I am more attached to my wife — she is pregnant and persecuted by all. I could disappear, and then her fate would be terrible" [Предтеченский: 81].

lectual elite of Dorpat. And, of course, the Timo and Kitty of the novel are joined by deep mutual love. For Kross, the choice made by the Baltic nobleman for the benefit of the Estonian peasants must confirm in the eyes of the reader a pride in the Estonian people and confidence in their great potential. The transformation of yesterday's peasant into the peers of Parrot, Moier, Ewers, Zhukovsky, and others is emphasized repeatedly, and the heightened reaction of some of the characters (such as the Empress Maria Fyodorovna), who perceive the transformation as an unprecedented "miracle", can be interpreted as ironic (see: [Кросс: 147]).

Jakob Mättik is not at all just a "simple land surveyor", nor is he a person who loses his Estonian identity to gain another (as researchers sometimes write). This serious, reflective character, in his new and ever-tenuous class status, affirms his *Estonian-ness*. To Jakob (and to Timo), breaking class boundaries does not mean losing one's nationality. For exactly this reason, contrary to historical fact, Kross's Jakob writes his diary in Estonian. In the preface, which relates the history of the manuscript supposedly acquired by the author from an enthusiast of Estonian antiquity, who found it in blockade Leningrad, the question of language is specifically addressed:

> The Estonian language of the diary is punctuated with passages in other languages, French and German <implying the copying down of sections of Timo's writing by Jakob. — *L. K.*>, these parts are translated by me into Estonian, and the whole text has been unified, in order to make it accessible to the modern reader [Kross 1978: 6].

Meanwhile, researchers have noted that both in the beginning and in the second half of the 19th century, German was the language of educated Estonians:

> The Estonian language at the end of the last <the 19th. — *L. K.*> century was not developed enough to be used to exchange ideas in science, literature, art, and so on. Even in the Estonian students society, a stronghold of Estonian-ness, knowledge of the Estonian language in the 1890s was "very inadequate". The requirement to become fully fluent in Estonian within the first semester was added to the constitution of the SES only in 1900 [Karjahärm, Sirk: 194].

Of course, Jaan Kross knew all of this perfectly well, but something else better served the concept of his novel. That is why among the characters a number of educated Estonians appear or are mentioned: Friedrich Robert Faehlmann (1798–1850), a doctor and Estonian linguist and folklorist, General Karl Tenner (1783–1860), a famous topographer, and Otto Wilhelm Masing, Estonian minister and linguist (true, ethnically he was half German). Each by his profession shows that Estonians can match the level of European education, if only the door to learning is opened just a crack. No wonder Jakob's percep-

tion of Timo's memorandum changes when he reaches the thesis stating that all classes are equal before the law and that "knowledge equalizes the right to hold office" [Kross 1978: 132].

How are Russian history and culture presented in Kross's novel? In order to answer this question, we must first understand how the historical Timotheus (Тимофей Егорович) von Bock (1786–1836) treats them in his imagined speech to the Livonian Parliament, which he sends to Alexander I in the form of a memorandum.

Although Bock wrote his text in German and later translated it into French for the emperor[4], he spoke exquisite Russian (proven by his letter to Zhukovsky, published by M. Salupere [Салупере: 65–66]) and belong to a group of Baltic-Russophiles, who called each other by names with Russian diminutives: Timosha (T. von Bock), Fedinka (the future General Field Marshal Friedrich Berg), and Lusha (Karl Lilienfeld) [Salupere 1998: 73]. Accordingly, the choice of language in which to write to the emperor is also a sign of the author's independence, a gesture that puts him on the same level as his addressee. This must be emphasized, because Bock sees himself as Russian, and Russia as his fatherland[5]: "Livonia was always my native home, the dearest place on earth to me, but it was never my fatherland" [193]. Bock believes that the Livonian nobility must become "an integral part of the Russian nobility;" if not, it will be "just a small foreign colony"[6]. "We should be Russian, we can be Russian, we will become Russian", he proclaims to the Livonians.

This position has two explanations. The first is that this is a glorification of the Russian people resulting from the experiences of 1812:

> Even if Russia did not have a noble class, her people would all the same stand out among other civilized peoples. Anyone who has had reason to compare the lower classes of different countries has found that the Russian peasant holds first place in Europe in piety, love of the homeland, good-heartedness, effort, and acumen. Unfortunately, we lack a third class, and as a result, despite our great efforts, we con-

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4 The text was published in Russian translation by A. V. Predtechensky. Regarding the manuscript, see: [191].

5 M. Salupere notes that Bock attended lectures by A. S. Kaisarov at Dorpat (Tartu) University. More than likely, he remembered the famous "Speech about Love for the Fatherland", presented at Dorpat and then printed in "Syn Otechestva" («Сын Отечества») (1813. № 27). Similarities between the texts are clear.

6 Bock's logic is truly striking. Referring to the Baltics, he says: "We who have been deprived, because of the way things have gone, of the comfort of religion — our churches are temples of indifference — <...> how unhappy would we have been, if we hadn't even had a fatherland?" [193]. His criticism clarifies his idea to make of the Orthodox church dominant in a new, reformed Russia as "a temple of the gospel, of the people, and of tolerance" [200].

> stantly fall in the mud. But what prevents us from establishing a third class? With the Russian nation's remarkable capacity for improvement this could be done in no more than 20 years [194].

The use of the pronouns "we" and "us" is particularly characteristic in this discussion. Bock feels that he is a part of the Russian nation: "My heart belongs entirely to that great people alone, in close union with whom I undertook to make that which is most beautiful in the world" [193].

Of course, in using the word "nation" Bock implies not ethnicity, but citizenship and involvement in Russian culture. Bock demonstrates his deep knowledge of Russian culture by admiringly listing the names of outstanding poets (among whom he doesn't forget his friend Zhukovsky), sculptors, artists, composers, and actors[7], and confirms the existence in Russia of "statesmen with great merits, capable of solving tasks of a European scale" [194]. Bock does not forget the Orthodox clergy: "And although the government has weakened the clergy as a whole, the voice of Platon <Metropolitan Platon (Levshin) of Moscow. — *L. K.*> is heard with all the more strength" [Ibid].

Against this backdrop, Bock's criticism of the government, and particularly of the emperor personally, sounds especially harsh and uncompromising. Despotism and slavery are the vices of Russia. Bock asserts: "Demagogy and pharisaism have always been the first satellites of tyranny" [196], and he denounces Alexander I for precisely these vices. In his memorandum Bock produces a lofty rhetorical text of great accusatory strength. He calls the czar a Tartuffe: "vanity, insignificance, and despotism are his deities, to which he brings the country as a sacrifice" [198]. Alexander loves parades "because a parade is the celebration of insignificance" [Ibid] — the list of such accusations in the text is quite impressive. Of course, the vengeful czar never pardoned open discussion of the assassination of his father Paul I, nor criticism of his military settlements, nor protest against the mysticism of the Holy Alliance or the "prostitute" Krüdener[8], nor accusation of "betrayal of the homeland" [199] in relation to the Polish Question.

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[7] Compare: "Russians will go even further, but anyone who knows Derzhavin, Dmitriev, Ozerov, Krylov, Batyushkov, Zhukovsky, anyone who has studied Karamzin, seen Minin and Pozharsky <refering to the monument by I. Martos. — *L. K.*>, the works of Tolstoy, Yegorov and Utkin, anyone who has heard the liturgy of Bortnianskiy, who has seen Shusherin, Bryansky, Semenova and Danilova on the stage, anyone, gentlemen, would justly glorify these names, and will be all the more willing to do so if he is familiar with the ancient world" [194].

[8] Referring to Alexander and the Baroness Krüdener, Bock derisively writes: "Suppose there were an emperor who was not ashamed to enter into relationship with a prostitute, or a maniac, or a professional deceiver presenting herself as the chosen one of God…" [195].

Let us return to the second reason that Bock calls the Baltic Germans to join the "national nobility". In his opinion, the Baltic nobility possesses ancient constitutional rights, and can lead the Russian nobility in the fight against despotism and outrage. This utopian and aristocratic position had much in common with the views of Pushkin at the beginning of the 1830s, when Pushkin put his hopes in the feelings of independence and honor of the old Russian nobility and its ability to resist bureaucratic arbitrariness. Thus Bock imposes a grand mission on the Livonians in the reformation of Russia.

The positive program of Bock is the demand for reforms that would unify the nation: representative government, a constitution, public trials, respect for the rule of law, etc. He sees the nobility as the leaders of reform, since "they alone are civilized in the whole empire" [200]. In turn, the nobility "by demanding of the emperor justice, order, and civil freedom, guarantees these same rights to their own subjects", that is, to the peasants. By calling slavery "an institution that is as senseless as it is outrageous" [192], Bock puts forward a rather ambiguous question: "Is it in the interests of the noble class and of the country as a whole to separate the peasants from ourselves?" [193][9].

Returning now to the novel: in his interview about "The Czar's Madman", Y. M. Lotman [Lotman] has already noted several literary and historical parallels that are important to Kross's text: Pushkin's use of historical narrative in "The Captain's Daughter", Schiller's "Don Carlos" (which is significant specifically in the Russian context), Griboedov's "The Misfortune of Being Clever", and the parallel between the fates of Bock and Chaadaev. Lotman insightfully notes that "'The Misfortune of Being Clever' by Griboedov is Bock's story" [Lotman: 70]. Additionally, Kross translated Griboedov's comedy into Estonian in the early 1960s [Gribojedov], so he remembered well how Chatsky was declared insane because of his radical views. Obviously, Kross's translation work informed his own creative work.

It would be tempting to presume that Kross was aware of Y. N. Tynyanov's article "The Plot of 'The Misfortune of Being Clever'" [Тынянов], first published in 1946, in which the theme of alleged insanity received a wide historical-political context (parallels to the slander against Byron and to Chaadaev's situation), but we cannot confirm that he knew it. Similarly, we don't know for sure whether Kross read Y. M. Lotman's 1975 article "The Decembrist in Daily Life" [Лотман], in which Bock's memorandum is also cited. Meanwhile, Timo's code of conduct as it is presented in "The Czar's Madman" has striking parallels to Lotman's analysis of the everyday conduct of the Decembrists.

[9] In the novel, Jakob Mättik constantly returns with perplexity to this thesis.

In his interview, while discussing insanity as a form of protest, Lotman refers the research of Michel Foucault entitled "Madness and Insanity: History of Madness in the Classical Age". The book could have been known to Kross, since it was published in 1961 and reprinted several times in many languages before the 1970s. But, once again, we do not have the answer to this and other questions, and we cannot rule out that even the opening of Kross's archives might not clarify the matter. Kross was more inclined to cover the tracks of his creative searches than to direct researchers to their sources[10].

It seems that in the above cases we may deal only with typological parallels that speak to Estonian novelist's exceptional level of historical intuition and to his deep insight in to the Russian and European context at the beginning of the 19th century.

We turn now to how Bock's "Notes" is reworked by Kross in "The Czar's Madman" and how the Russia of Alexander I and Nicholas I appears to the novel's reader. Interpretation is given on two levels:

1) The level of plot — the arrest of Timo, his disappearance (his family doesn't know where and for how long he was taken), then his release and life as a "madman" under house arrest;

2) The level of ideology — the reception of Timo's ideas. In the story, Jakob Mättik finds a draft of the memorandum in the safe at Bock's estate at Võisiku, begins to study it, and copies it into his diary with his own commentary, which shifts from sharp rejection to gradual understanding of his brother-in-law's opinions[11].

The novel's version of Timo's memorandum often differs from the published original "Notes" of Bock. It was **created** by Kross according to the standards of the historical novel genre. Sometimes it is an arrangement of different parts of "Notes", but often contains significant additions and semantic shifts[12]; some very large sections are inserted by Kross from other sources, including, in part, S. M. Solovyov's "The History of Russia from Ancient Times"[13].

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[10] While speaking on "The Czar's Madman" in his lectures entitled "Autobiography and Subcontext", presented at the University of Tartu in 1998, Kross said practically nothing about his sources for the novel. See: [Kross 2003: 84–90].

[11] Regarding this character's evolution during the course of reading the memorandum, see: [Laanes].

[12] Compare, for example, Timo's letter to the emperor [Кросс: 93] with the text of the real letter: [Предтеченский: 80–81].

[13] A tour through Russian history in the era of Empress Elizaveta [Кросс: 96–97] is copied almost word-for-word from the corresponding chapter of S. M. Solovyov's "A History of Russia from Ancient Times": "All three Lopukhins and Anna Bestuzheva punish by death, break them on the wheel with their tongues cut out. Ivan Moshkov, Alexander Zybin, Prince Ivan Putyatin, and Sofia Lilienfeld punish by death — Moshkov and Putyatin draw and quarter, Zybin and Lilienfeld

Following is a striking example of semantic shift. Timotheus von Bock writes about Paul I:

> Paul paid with his life for his violence against the nobility, and if new examples of slavery have appeared since then, the desire for a peaceful and decent existence is felt all the more fiercely now (when the nation has declared its unity and strength) [194].

Here is how Kross "clarifies" this somewhat obscure passage:

> … The Emperor Paul paid with his life for his violence against the **rights of the nobility and against humanity**… and if since that time there is still **tyranny** and slavery, then the dream of a **lawful** and honest life today, when **the people have realized** their unity and strength, has become even more powerful [Kross 1978: 95–96] <Emphasis mine. — *L. K.*>.

We can see how the novelist underscores the anti-tyranny element of the text.

Let's look at one of many examples of interpolation. Kross has added to Timo's text a story about the cowardly conduct of Konstantin Pavlovich before Bautzen and his swearing at the hussars: "You bulls, the only thing you know is fighting!" [Ibid: 96]; what is more, in the Estonian text these words are written in Russian as follows: "Вы, быки, вы умеете только драться!" ("You, bulls, you know only how to fight!")[14]. This phrase is necessary for the support of the perturbed remarks of Timo (that also exist in the original from Bock): "Gentlemen, mud must flow in the veins in place of blood in order to swallow such an insult < … > I ask you: who are we? The Romanov family's cattle?" [Ibid].

The exaltation of Russian culture present in Bock's writing is preserved in Timo's memorandum. Kross's novel contains scenes with a sympathetic portrayal of Zhukovsky (regarding this, see: [Киселева, Степанищева]), as well as numerous extremely positive references to the Decembrists as honest and courageous fighters against tyranny. But on the whole, criticism of despotism and

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behead for not reporting when they heard dangerous conversations. Chamberlain Lilienfeld, for his negligence regarding what he heard from his wife, deprive of his titles and exile him to the country; Deputy Captain Lilienfeld, Lieutenant Akinfov and Adjutant Kolychov place in the army regiments; the nobleman Rzhevsky flog with the lash and send to the navy. The empress changed this sentence thus: the three Lopukhins and Anna Bestuzheva flog with the knout and, having cut out their tongues, send into exile; Moshkov and Putyatin flog with the knout, Zybin with the lash and send into exile, Sofia Lilienfeld, while she is pregnant, do not punish, but only pronounce that it is ordered that she be flogged with the lash and sent into exile" [Соловьев: 228].

[14] It appears that the source of this phrase is a scornful remark made by Konstantin Pavlovich to the Guard Jaeger Regiment, which met the Grand Prince at the beginning of the foreign campaign at the end of 1812 in "non-parade" clothing. The remark is related by N. Turgenev in the book "Russia and Russians": "These people only know how to battle!" [Тургенев: 27]. Regarding the question of bravery and cowardice of the Grand Prince, see: [Кучерская: 112].

of the despot sooner or later turns to Russia itself, a country ruled by slavery and repression. Accordingly, Timo, in contrast to his prototype, does not urge the Livonian nobility to become *Russian*. For Kross, this is conceptually important.

From the very beginning, the narrator Jakob Mättik judges those around him from the point of view of an Estonian peasant, for whom *every* nobleman, and above all, Germans (the local landlords), is an enemy. However, little by little he is instilled with the logic of his brother-in-law, that "thorn in the side of the empire", as Timo calls himself. As events unfold (the arrest, search, chase after the freed "madman", and denunciations), they become the impetus for the gradual broadening of his socio-political perspective. Consequently, Jakob begins to reflect on his own relationship with sovereign power, and the position he himself, his former supervisor, the Estonian Major Tenner, and Timo and Eeva's son, Jüri, should hold in relation to it.

As the narrative unfolds, Jaan Kross successively develops for the reader an image of the empire, where not honesty is sought, but obsequiousness, where service to the government easily turns into lies and even treason.

For just this reason, Kross makes almost no distinction between the Russia of Alexander and that of Nicholas. The gendarmes that arrive in Võisiku to arrest Timo [Kross 1978: 60] become one of the symbols of Russia. In a strict sense this is not an anachronism. Jaan Kross relied upon a published letter of Alexander I to the Livonian governor Paulucci, which refers to the possible sending of, truly, a gendarme[15].

The half-squadron of Gendarme Guards, dressed in blue uniforms, was established in 1815, and these were different gendarmes than those who later became subordinates to Count A. Benkendorf; their original function was to maintain order in the army. What is more, neither the above-mentioned half-squadron, nor the Gendarme regiment that was soon formed, later joined the Special Corps of Gendarmes, which arose during the reign of Nicholas I and truly became political police. But for the reader of "The Czar's Madman" the word "gendarme" should bring to mind only one association, so Kross resorts to this word many times in the novel. Not without reason "The Bee" («Пчела») is referenced; that is, the odious newspaper "The Northern Bee" («Северная пчела»), although it had not yet come out in 1822, when the action takes place. As with the gendarmes, even an educated reader of the novel who recognizes the name of the newspaper is not expected to remember that its publication

[15] Compare: "Send Mr. Bock with the messenger sent to you, giving to this last, if need be, one gendarme to help" [Три письма: 115].

began only three years later. It was important to Kross to fill his text with symbols and signs that establish a firm impression of Russia as a police state.

We will not multiply the number of examples. In conclusion, we will attempt to explain the function of this image of Russia, although it is relatively clear. Kross's treatment of Russia is on two levels: historical and contemporary. Historically, the novel is about the empire during the era of Alexander I and Nicholas I, which truly was a despotic government. Obviously, it is significant that imperial Russia did not arouse particular sympathy from Soviet authorities or from the censors, and this made Kross's fairly sharp novel more "passable". But, like any true historical novel, it has a second level.

Of course, as a novel about a political dissident who, having challenged the authorities and paid for his bravery with nine years of solitary confinement and civil death, refuses to flee the country in order to remain "a thorn in the side of the empire", "The Czar's Madman" was perceived as very topical in the USSR on the cusp of the 1970s and 80s. Lunatic asylums where Soviet freethinkers were imprisoned (including Estonians) for political dissent; physical methods of abuse in these special hospitals, prisons, and labor camps; the problem of compromise with authorities, before whom appeared, sooner or later, every thinking Soviet citizen; the question of fleeing the country (voluntarily or under duress) versus continuing life "under pressure;" the experience of informing and cooperation with political investigations — all of these Soviet realities are easily seen in the subtext of "The Czar's Madman"[16].

Clearly, Kross does not utilize any primitive allusions in his novel[17]. Rather, as a genuine historical novelist, he uses his text to answer those questions that concern his contemporaries and himself. The reader recalls that the Russian empire was not eternal. This provides yet another — this time, optimistic — subtext for the novel. It gives hope. Thus, it is certainly not an accident that "The Czar's Madman" pays so much attention to "the fate of Estonia".

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[16] In his lectures, Kross spoke of the "historical rhythms" between the 1820s and the 1970s: [Kross 2003: 88–89]. R. Veidemann writes that the presentation of the Estonian intelligensia in 1980 against the Russification of Estonia, known as "The Letter of 40", was, in part, inspired by the actions of the protagonist of "The Czar's Madman". See: [Veidemann: 323].

[17] Compare to Kross's own admission: [Kross 2003: 84].

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