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TOLSTOY ON POGROMS? I. Teneromo (Feinerman): “Reminiscences about L. N. Tolstoy. Pogroms” (Translation and Commentary)

After a dark spell of pogroms broke out against the Jews in the 1880s and the ruling Hamans of St. Petersburg organized a new series of persecutions

and restrictive measures, Russian society began to speak up. One could hear authoritative voices of protest, and Lev Nikolayevich was among the first to express his indignation.

Have a look, he said, gesturing. Dillon has sent a protest, drawn up by a group of writers, for people to sign. I am adding mine with joy and a sort of pugnacious resolution, and am ready to keep writing on this occasion.¹ After serfdom I cannot see anything more terrible than this foul torture and humiliation of a whole people. Imagine: To lock up people as if they were caged animals, to hedge them in behind exceptions and disgraceful laws, to place them under the charge of the basest and most venal warders whose bribe-taking gave rise to legendary lore; to push these people away from the sphere of reasonable and human activity, and, most importantly, from the land and from working the land. To undertake all this, moreover, with a sole, revolting purpose of inciting mobs against Jews whenever this conveniences Petersburg, just as lions were let loose against prisoners and Christians in ancient circuses.

Is this not terrible! Just as the Caesars and their obsequious courtiers used to amuse the mob with bloody entertainments, and thus could distract its eyes from the crimes of the court; so now does this bureaucracy—no less obsequious but even more autocratic—set up an enormous circus and gave it the name of the “pale of settlement,” maintaining prisoners within this circus for the same bloody entertainments, and with the same base purpose: to distract the eyes of the people from a whole bonfire of crime that the criminal hand of bureaucracy has started all over this enormous country.

And they arrange for these entertainments exactly when the country begins to experience an awakening, and the falseness of their autocracy becomes apparent to people. When the paw of arbitrary rule clenches too hard on the throat of the country, and the oppressed begin to sound an ominous death rattle threatening to tear apart this

rapacious oppressive paw, then the country would be kindly welcomed to a feast. And heralds would gallop from town to town, summoning the beggarly and escheated ragtag crowds to raze Jewish dwellings and shops.

For a long time I did not believe in this; I hesitated to utter my silent judgment on our governmental camarilla.

I could not admit to it now that for so many years we have been professing Christian faith and—however poorly and however little—also the major commandments of this teaching about tolerance towards others, and about peaceful love towards people that are familiar to us, after all, and that, let me say this without bragging, are so close to the Russian heart... So now, when this vile enterprise could be so quickly exposed, I could not believe this, I could not believe that now would the government officers venture such a despicable and stinking thing.

I was elucidating the Jewish “question”² using historical conditions and ways of life, but I never thought that the affair was so terribly simple, so nakedly criminal.

But now, after the horrors at Kiev, Balta, Elisavetgrad and dozens of other places, and based on how this affair has been going on, how it has been kindled and how it has petered out, I can see clearly that they had *their*³ hands in this deed. At the appointed hour, and with all of it prearranged, the people who were confident of their immunity—bribed and incited as it were by the police—would pick a fight at the market or at revelries in town, over one issue or another out of a hundred such, and would then fling themselves into this business, with a hoot and a holler—smashing, burning, killing, and raping women for all to see. They tore babies apart and threw them out of the window, pushed women in labor down into a tub, pouring boiling water over them until they died, and then waited with chilling stupidity until the end of labor so they could tear the newborn baby apart and toss it out likewise.

And soldiers with firearms charged with live cartridges were right there on hand to egg on the lads: “Chop, chop. Finish it off in a jiffy. Do not tarry!”

And they would be the ones to divvy up the loot with the gendarmes, and would even get into fights with them over how they were splitting the deal. Officers kept silent, district gendarmes fussed around, generals were making detours, and all of it had the appearance of something well coordinated, running according to an agenda, and everyone was very pleased.

Could there be any doubt after all this that this is the hellish plot of the authorities, and that its criminal hand is the conductor? And in the very way the affair is organized?

A certain man in white marches ahead with a piece of black cloth or a drum in his hands. He waves his hand: A team of lock-pickers with master picks, files, and drills storms a shop, breaks loose padlocks and steps aside to give way to those behind. The looting begins, with skill, commonsense and without the kind of fuss one would observe during break-in or larceny. And then, when the goods have been taken away, torn to shreds and trampled upon, a detachment of arsonists moves forward. They douse oakum with kerosene from cans, toss it around in different places, set it on fire, and quickly join the hooting and hollering crowd that crosses over from this shop to others, following the drum signal.

This is how it was in Balta, Kiev, and other places; precisely this careful manipulation, hidden behind hollering and connived drinking-bouts with broken-open barrels and bottles, this very cold and malicious criminality of the organizers, who mind their business and do it calmly and without haste—all of this offers the best proof that this vile affair is the doing of the keepers of public order, either undercover policemen or those who act with their blessing.

I had a conversation at some point with a governor of one of those pogrom provinces:⁴ “This

will never happen again,” he told me when the topic touched on the devastations. He gave himself away completely with this resolute tone. His confidence may be explained only by the fact that they are holding the reins. Should they wish, they could issue a call for a pogrom; should they not, there will be no pogrom.

It is so obvious that the ruling spheres have worked out a formula for such cases. When a governor does not want a pogrom in a given town, he says to the head of police, “Public order in town is your responsibility.” And head of police immediately gets this, and there will be no pogrom in town.

In the same vein, a minister talks to a governor, and one only needs to know how to read government documents. The cruelty of this sycophantic language is especially horrific in its call-for-action formula. Someone ordering a pogrom sends a cable: “Do not obstruct the expressions of national feeling.”

I was told of this in several places. To think that, in such a state of bloodthirstiness, people can mastermind such sacrilege. National feelings, Russian national feelings consist of breaking up furniture, tearing apart pillows, and breaking skulls of old people and women using table legs? Goodness! I am all astir inside, boiling with indignation against such calumny against the [Russian] people. These bloodstained chieftains do not deserve to tie up their baste shoelaces, or touch the hem of their clothes. And they are appointed to lead the people!

Or take this for one of such expressions: I cannot remember whether this was somewhere in Kiev or Kunavin or somewhere else. A puny junior police officer succumbed to a sense of pity, took the side of a Jew, and attempted to push away the thugs.

A senior in rank rebuked him sternly: “Do not obstruct the outpouring of national feeling!” Just think about this expression, almost a classic

apothegm. Something unbelievably fateful speaks through the mouth of a Russian police officer.

A whole ethnicity, the tribe that is so old, has lived through so much, and given so much to the world, is turned into a trough for the wrath of the impoverished Russian⁵ people, who have been driven to despair by the arbitrary rule of administrators.

The Jews are the chute that carries away the vehemence of the Russian people!

Such a curse has not been envisioned even by the prophets. “People!” I’d like to cry out to everyone. “What are you doing? Why are you aggravating your lawless deeds and becoming participants in the wrathful acts of destiny? Why are you calling this wrath upon your own heads through your unprecedented cruelty towards others?”

This mammoth country, which now seems indestructible, colossal, and eternal, will rot through and fall to dust like a putrid tree should it allow these worms of hatred gnaw at its heart.⁶

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Notes

The note by Isaak Borisovich Feinerman (Teneromo) (1862–1925), one of the most colorful and adventurous Jewish followers of Tolstoy, is located in the papers of Herman Bernstein (1876–1935) at the institute for Jewish Research in New York (713–40–816). It is published and translated here for the first time. Publication based on terms of fair use was made possible by special permission of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. I thank YIVO for their long-term support of my projects.

The note bears no date, and is handwritten on strips of thin blue-colored paper—perhaps postal paper—with a very limited writing surface per page. At fourteen inches lengthwise, the pages are very

narrow (4.5 inches wide). The entire note fits on eighteen single-sided leaves, 1 through 18.

This note should not be confused with Teneromo's chapter "В погромные дни" [In the days of the pogroms] in any extant edition (1908 or later) of Teneromo's *Л. Н. Толстой о евреях* (41-46). Neither is it found in any of the numerous short and longer chapters on Tolstoy and the Jews/Hebraic/Jewish topics. Nor was it included in the early-Soviet period, when censorship concerning tsarist atrocities against the Jews would no longer have been an issue.

The handwriting, based on comparison of Feinerman's hand with his original letters to Tolstoy in the manuscript division at the Tolstoy State Museum and in his archive at RGALI, appears to be authentic. I thank the Tolstoy State Museum (ГМТ) and Russian State Archive for Literature and the Arts (РГАЛИ) for granting me access to the original documents, and for their help in facilitating this research in 2011-2012.

A future issue of *Tolstoy Studies Journal* will include "Tolstoy in the Papers of Herman Bernstein: On Civic Freedoms, Pogroms, and the Jewish Question," my article-length commentary on Tolstoy's papers in Bernstein's archive. It will provide a more complete discussion of Bernstein's (and Feinerman's) attitude towards Tolstoy's treatment of topics pertaining to pogroms and the Jewish question.

An excellent succinct overview of Teneromo's career may be found in Eliasberg (Элиасберг).

1. According to Feinerman-Teneromo, Tolstoy expresses willingness to "write and write again" on the topic of pogroms, but this claim contradicts Tolstoy's numerous disclaimers to the contrary (Меджибовская 73-108).

2. The word "вопрос" ["question"] is enclosed in quotation marks in the original Russian.

3. The word *их* is underscored in the original.

4. Tolstoy would have at least theoretically had a chance to converse with "a governor" of one of the fifteen provinces within the Pale of Settlement since the

pogroms of the 1870s and the early 1880s. Emile Dillon and Vladimir Soloviev indeed approached Tolstoy with a request to write against the persecution of the Jews. When he refused that request, he still eagerly added his signature to the protest authored by Dillon and Soloviev. Tolstoy wrote to Soloviev and Dillon discussing the issue in 1890: "You will express my own thoughts and feelings because the basis for our disgust about the oppressive measures against the Jewish nationality is one and the same—our consciousness of a brotherly link with all nations and especially with the Jews among whom Christ was born and who have so much suffered and continue to suffer from the heathen ignorance of so-called Christians" (March 15, 1890; PSS 65: 45). On this, see also "Переписка Толстого с В. С. Соловьевым" 268-76 and Меджибовская 85-86.

5. The word "Russian" is capitalized in the original, although spelling rules do not require this.

6. The note continues on leaves 16-18 in the same tone as in the concluding paragraphs of the selection, and the subsequent text is unlikely to be Tolstoy's. Although the note is undated, it is obvious that it could only be dated after 1889-1890 because of the mention of Dillon and Soloviev and, most probably no earlier than the 1900s when Feinerman began signing his work using his pen-name "Teneromo": This is exactly the way the note under review is signed. At the end of the note, he supplies Bernstein with his address in Elisavetgrad. Additional details and commentary are provided in my "Tolstoy in the Papers of Herman Bernstein: On Civic Freedoms, Pogroms, and the Jewish Question." I regret the typographical error beyond control in the just released article «Еврейский вопрос» Толстого» where this same note is referenced and cited extensively in the Russian original: The more commonly used abbreviation YIVO should not have been omitted after the complete transcription of the same spelling from Yiddish into Latin script.

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Hemingway and Tolstoy: “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” and “Death of Ivan Il’ich”

Drawing some parallels between Hemingway’s “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” and Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Il’ich*, Hugh McLean noted the similarity between the two “biological” writers, by which he meant their interest in “birth and death” (McLean 207).

However, one must make a fundamental distinction between Hemingway and Tolstoy’s “biologism.” The former remains on this side of the instinctive, of the here and now. The latter crosses over into the super-empirical, to the idea of “moral force” (a phrase from the afterword to *The Kreutzer Sonata*) as a means of personal transformation. Tolstoy and many of his characters strive to be “above the world” (PSS 42: 208), as he says of Svetlogub in *Divine and Human*. In Hemingway, this takes the form of absolute trust in the earthly.

McLean rightly notes that the “unheroic death” in “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” is a response to *The Death of Ivan Il’ich*. Harry’s final insights do not lead to “transcendence” or “redemption,” but rather conjure up feelings of “aggression against his wife” (McLean 209–210).

Here I examine the interrelationship between the two texts, focusing primarily on the composition of narrative and the placement of characters, the portrayal of their relationships with one another and with the world in the context of their fictional reality. Additionally, I look at Tolstoy and Hemingway’s artistic philosophy through the lens of twentieth-century philosophical thought.

Hemingway’s narrative style is similar to Tolstoy’s. Both use introspection; in both the narrator and author attempt to “read” the minds of their protagonists; and they both convey inner monologues in which memories of the past alternate with thoughts of the coming end. Hemingway’s narrator, like Tolstoy’s, knows everything about his characters, but perhaps reveals himself less, as if refusing to share the entirety of his knowledge.

Hemingway’s narrator supports his protagonist’s self-criticism that only leads him to disenchantment with the past and present. Disappointment and even the meaninglessness of life is one of Hemingway’s central themes, if we exclude *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Where Ivan Il’ich is a judge and man of high society, Harry is a writer, that is, a man of high society to the second power. Moreover, given Harry’s profession, one cannot help but draw parallels with Hemingway himself, for whom Harry is surely a double. In this way, Hemingway’s affinity for the image of Harry is revealed.

Ivan Il’ich is not such a close figure for Tolstoy, though Tolstoy does endow him with his own fears and hopes, his own confession and exhortation.

Ivan Il’ich’s profession as a judge lends him a certain amount of officiousness that, for the author,