Scando-Slavica
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t716100751

“Ps: What is to be done with the novel?” Voronskij, Zamjatin and my
Robert Vaagan

To cite this Article Vaagan, Robert(1997) “Ps: What is to be done with the novel?” Voronskij, Zamjatin and my’, Scando-Slavica, 43: 1, 39 — 51
To link to this Article DOI: 10.1080/00806769708601096
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00806769708601096

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
ROBERT VAAGAN

"PS: What is to be done with the novel?"
Voronskij, Zamjatin and My*

Browsing through the books on display in Dom knigi in St. Petersburg in September 1996, I was pleased to note Evgenij Ivanovič Zamjatin's novel My (written 1920).1 When it was first published in the Soviet Union, in Znamja in 1988,2 almost three generations had passed since its completion. Several new editions were soon to follow, a few of which are listed in the bibliography. A new appreciation of Zamjatin in Russia is evident, e.g. when Akimov states that his

[...] proizvedenija, sozdannie v pervyje pjeftnacat' let literaturnoj raboty [i.e. 1911-1926 — author's comm.], stali odnoj iz veršin russkoj literatury XX veka. Posle poluvekogo zabvenija i zapretov E. I. Zamjatina snova stali pečatat' na Rodine. (Akimov 1995:251).3

* The present article is a spin-off from my forthcoming doctoral thesis "Iskusstvo videt' čeloveka: Aleksandr K. Voronskij and Krasnaj nov' 1921-27". I am much indebted to Tat'jana I. Isaeva, Voronskij's only remaining granddaughter, for her gostepriljusstvo and velikodushe during my stay in Moscow in September 1996. Her generosity extended to giving me access to family archival material. I would also like to thank my supervisor Professor Geir Kjetsaa, University of Oslo, for his unfailing support and sound judgement, and Dr. Lidija A. Spirdonova, Head of Department, IMLI A. M. Gorkij, Moscow, for valuable assistance. Associate Professor Aleksej Perminow, University of Oslo, and Cand.philol. Raisa Cirkova, Oslo, both offered valuable comments and assistance relating to biographical parts of this article. Eila Tervakko, Slavonic Library, Helsinki University, has offered kind and efficient assistance on more than one occasion. Finally, I remain grateful to the Norwegian Research Council for having financed my visit to Russia in September-October 1996.

1 While some scholars date the completion of My to 1920-21 (e.g. Heller 1988:56), Zamjatin himself stated that My was written in 1920, cp. his letter of resignation to the All-Russian Union of Writers (VSP) dated 24. September 1929 (Ginsburg 1970:301).
3 "(his) output, created during the first fifteen years of (his) literary endeavour [i.e. 1911-1926 — author's comm.], has become one of the outstanding features of Russian literature in the XX century. After half a century of oblivion and suppression, they have begun to print E. I. Zamjatin again in the Motherland" (author's translation).
Robert Vaagan

Russian readers may now study the novel's richness of imagery, sound, colour and myth — even its mathematics and the application to society of The Second Law of Thermodynamics — all of which continue to intrigue the West (Sicher 1991:225-32; Collins 1973:52ff). Nonetheless, it remains to be seen to what extent Russian readers will emulate their Western counterparts and recognize Zamjatin's masterpiece primarily as an early and perceptive diagnosis of the totalitarian state. Indeed, it was the novel's dystopic vision of Communism in the shape of the fully collectivized, rationalistic and scientific "Single State" led by a "Benefactor" supported by omnipresent "Guardians" etc. that led to its suppression for so long in the Soviet Union (Collins 1973:39-41; Brown 1982:53-61).

In the autumn of 1922, My was rejected for publication by Aleksandr Konstantinovič Voronskij, the liberal Marxist editor of the first Soviet "encyclopedic" literary journal Krasnaja nov' (KN). As he made explicit in a letter to Zamjatin in October-November 1922, the novel was ideologically unacceptable and made a chilling effect. In a PS he added "What is to be done with the novel?". Voronskij went on to elaborate his criticism in an 18-page literary portrait of Zamjatin in KN 1922#6(10).4 This amounted to the first extensive Soviet criticism of Zamjatin and his works (Shane 1968:56). Prior to this the deputy leader of the Central Committee's department of agitation and propaganda, Ja. Jakovlev, in an article in Pravda on 5 March 1922, had accused Zamjatin of contrarevolutionary writings (Galuškin 1992:12-13). Voronskij, reviewing in KN a collection of stories including Zamjatin's "Sever", had written i.a. that

Zamjatin — bol'soj chudožnik i umnyj čelovek... [...] Oktjabr' bol'no udaril Zamjatina. Takie vešči, kak skazočki Cerkov', Arapy s prisvis-tom i vesělým ržaniem perepečatany zarubežnoj ėmigrantskoj pressoj — i v samom dele, im tam boleee umestno, čem v osažděnnom sovet-skom legere. Ėto agitki chudščego kačestv... (Voronskij, KN 1922#3 (7), pp. 267-8).5

In his more comprehensive literary portrait Voronskij wrote favourably of Zamjatin's pre-revolutionary stories of backward tsarist Russia and his

---

4 KN, Vol 6 (10), 1922, pp. 304-22.

5 "Zamjatin is a great artist and a discerning person. [...]. October has hurt Zamjatin painfully. Such things as the short tales Cerkov' and Arapy are reprinted with jeers and laugh-ter by the foreign emigrant press — and actually they are more at home there than in the besieged Soviet camp. This is agitation of the worst kind" (author's translation).

Scando-Slavica, Tomus 43, 1997
sатires of British society,6 but he repudiated Zamjatin's post-revolutionary work, especially *My*. Voronskij's view of an ideologically estranged Zamjatin in post-revolutionary Soviet Russia served to amalgamate a hostile official attitude towards Zamjatin. In *Literatura i revoljucija* (1923) Trockij was to discard Zamjatin in the following terms: "I dažhe flegmatik i snob Zamjatin obnarůžil u našej revoljucii nedostatok temperatury" (Trockij 1923:69).7 Official disapproval was compounded by the appearance of an English edition of *My* in 1924,8 the year Zamjatin turned to drama (Heller 1986:290), and was further aggravated by the publication in 1927 of a Russian version in the emigré journal *Volja Rossii* in Prague.9 An outright defamation campaign by RAPP10 against Zamjatin (head of the Leningrad section of VSP11) and Pil'njak (head of the Moscow section of VSP) was unleashed in 1929 (Struve 1971:223-9), the same year Zamjatin's collected works in four volumes (excluding *My*) were published in Moscow. The campaign i.a. drove Zamjatin to address a well-known letter to Stalin in June 1931 requesting permission to emigrate (Zamjatin 1990, Vol. II, pp. 404-9). Aided by Gor'kij (Heller 1988:60), he was allowed to leave for one year. He left in November 1931, never to return.

The lives and fates of Voronskij and Zamjatin reveal several striking similarities as well as contrasts: Both were born in 1884 in the region of Tambov. Both were sons of priests, both became Bolsheviks, both were highly erudite and both saw literature as their main vocation. Both occupied central roles in Soviet Russian literature and criticism during the 1920s, and both were branded as "heretics", though for different reasons and not simultaneously: Zamjatin, having welcomed the October revolution, quickly

---

6 Collins (1973:7?) argues, unconvincingly in my view, that neither *Ostrovitjane* (1918) nor *Lovec čelošovekov* (1921) are to be read as anti-British satires, but rather as expressions of universal conflicts. While I would not preclude such a reading, the settings in both cases are firmly British, a point that evaporates if one adheres to Collins' line of argument. Zamjatin himself, in his letter to Voronskij, asserts that he pointed his finger at stupidity and hypocrisy "among the English".

7 "And even the flegmatic and snob Zamjatin has discerned a lack of temperature in our revolution" (Trockij 1923:69) (author's translation).

8 *We. Translated by Gregory Zilboorg, Dutton, New York 1924 (286 pp.).

9 *Volja Rossii*, No 2 (February) 1927, pp. 3-33; No. 3 (March) 1927, pp. 3-32; No 4 (April) 1927, pp. 3-38. Shane (1968:239) notes "Many alterations, chapter 14 omitted".

10 Rossijskaja asociacija proletarskich pisatelej (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers).

11 Vserossijskij sojuz pisatelej (All-Russian Union of Writers).
became disenchanted with post-revolutionary developments, e.g. doubting in his essay "Ja bojud" (1921) whether real literature had any future in Soviet Russia (Zamjatin 1989:503). Voronskij remained a Bolshevik, openly sympathizing from 1923 with Trockij. He developed his own form of Marxist literary aesthetics and criticism, i.a. embracing Freudian-inspired concepts like "intuition" and the "subconscious", and advanced many Fellow Travellers in KN, which he made into a leading literary journal during his editorship 1921-27. His attempts to enrich Soviet Russian literature only pitted him in an increasingly acrimonious struggle with proletarian critics opposed to "Voronščina". Dikušina, Isaeva (1995:271) believe that Voronskij within a year after publishing his Zamjatin portrait had become so disillusioned by the opposition he met that he, by late 1923, privately shared much of Zamjatin's pessimism. Whereas Zamjatin eventually was allowed to emigrate and died impoverished, but peacefully, of a heart attack in Paris 10 March 1937, Voronskij was accused of being a Trotskist and was forced out of KN in 1927. Twice expelled from the party, in 1929-30 and 1935, he fell victim to Stalin's purges and was shot 13 August 1937, a date only recently confirmed (ibid. p. 276).

The published correspondence between Voronskij and Zamjatin includes 4 letters, of which 3 from Voronskij to Zamjatin, dated October-November 1922, 21 March 1923 and 9 February 1926, respectively (Dinerštejn 1983:571ff). The fourth letter, which seemingly was the first they exchanged, can be dated to late September 1922, and is from Zamjatin to Voronskij (Galuškin 1992). Voronskij's letter of October-November 1922 was a direct answer to Zamjatin's letter. The exchange and contents of these two letters, which in my view are insufficiently contextualized by Galuškin (1992), in fact largely explain the non-publication and subsequent fate of

---

12 In the article "O proletarskom iskusstve i o chudožestvennoj politike našej partii" (KN 1923#7(17) pp. 257-76), Voronskij e.g. refers no less than 9 times to Trockij, and only twice to Lenin. Moreover, Trockij's Literatura i revolucija (1923) is referred to 3 times.

13 In the article referred to in footnote 12, Voronskij i.a. emphatically rejected the existence of, and the need for, a distinct proletarian literature.

14 Galuškin, whose article is predominantly concerned with the arrest of Zamjatin in August 1922 and his ensuing non-extradition in 1922-23, barely mentions My, and states explicitly that "Pozvolim sebe ostavit' bez interpretacii i ocenki pozicii autorov etich pisem, predstavljajuščesja nam dostatočno opredelěnnymi". In the footnotes, Voronskij's letter is quoted based on Dinerštejn (1983:571-2), with some alterations and supplementary comments.

Scando-Slavica, Tomus 43, 1997
Zamjatin's masterpiece. The two other letters referred to are far less interesting and need not concern us further.\(^{15}\)

In Zamjatin's letter to Voronskij, which I have translated below, he obviously expects to leave the country in the imminent future, and he thanks Voronskij for assisting in his release from jail. Indeed, Voronskij in 1922 was at the pinnacle of his career, with direct access to Lenin's wife Krupskaia, head of Glavpolitprosvet, and even to the ailing Lenin himself, who had appointed Voronskij chief editor of *KN* in March 1921. Zamjatin himself relates that he was imprisoned twice, in 1905-6 and in 1922, both times subjected to solitary confinement. In his brief autobiography of 1924 (he wrote 3 autobiographical sketches in all, but his personal life still remains much of an enigma), he also relates that he was exiled 3 times, in 1906, in 1911 and again in 1922 (Ginsburg 1970:6). His departure from the Soviet Union in November 1931 would prove to be his fourth, and final, exile. The mass arrest of intellectuals in August-September 1922, in which Lenin took active part, involved also Zamjatin, who was arrested 16-17 August 1922 and spent approximately 5 weeks in prison. While many were immediately deported, Zamjatin, who looked forward to emigrating, was pardoned through the intermediation of Voronskij and Pil'njak, and his request for an exit visa was rejected, along with the requests of several others (Shane 1968:40; Galuškin 1992:14; Volkogonov 1994, Vol.II, pp. 179-82). This is the context in which we ought to interpret Zamjatin's letter:\(^{16}\)

Dear Voronskij,

Yesterday I was released from prison — and, it seems this was in large measure due to your energy, which you brought to bear in Moscow. Thank you — in this you have particularly helped my mother and my wife. Personally I fared not too bad, and it was more cheerful than being imprisoned in the same Špalernaja\(^{17}\) in tsarist times [when my health became quite ruined in genuine, strict, confinement (isn't it amusing? Then I was

\(^{15}\) Voronskij's short second letter dated 21 March 1923 expresses regret that Zamjatin is leaving the country, offers him financial help, and wishes him good luck. Voronskij's third letter, dated 9 February 1926, briefly informs Zamjatin that Larissa Rejsner has died.

\(^{16}\) I have translated the letter in full with Zamjatin's deletions in brackets, from Galuškin (1992), but taken the liberty of shortening and marginally supplementing Galuškin's footnotes, as well as omitting a few that seemed superfluous in our context.

\(^{17}\) Prison located in Petrograd on Špalernaja street (from 1918 Voinova street) where Zamjatin had been incarcerated from December 1905 - March 1906.
incarcerated as a Bolshevik; but now I was jailed by Bolsheviks?). The main thing, though, is that before going abroad and really starting to work and splash out everything on paper (obviously this will happen), not having seen [who sits in prison, and how, and for what — would be a shame {a new Russian prison — to me, as a writer, would have been a shame}. I say this in complete seriousness. I do not know whether I shall be able before my departure to go and see you in Moscow. What I would like to tell you and P. S. Kogan18 and other contemporary critics (but not the reckless Okunev,19 not Sergei Gorodeckij20 — with these who yesterday chanted "God bless the tsar" and now "The International" — I simply cannot endure to talk): You should all change your views somewhat: You write about "White agitation-tales of Zamjatin"; P. S. Kogan writes that "Zamjatin obviously wants to be with his islanders"; Sadojiev21 writes about Zamjatin as a "White guard writer", but in the GPU there are after all literate people and the result is obvious. I repeat, to me all this is endurable: I am a strong person, I have temporarily disembarked from a constantly rocking vessel, to sit on shore [abroad]; and work seriously [abroad] — and this may well be to my advantage. But already Pravda is fuming about the former "New Russia",22 about the Serapion Brethren, and [this may lead to] who can say that such critics will not themselves experience the journey Gorochovaja23 -Spalerna-Berlin? To younger people, more pliant than I, such constrictions could prove disastrous. So: it's time you Communists learned to distinguish white from other colours. The whites are not at all those who see [shortcomings in daily life] faults all around and have the courage to talk about them. And the reds are not at all those who loudly applaud whatever is being done — War communism — hurrah; [NEP] red speculators and proletarian bourgeoisie — hurrah! So you call my tales "white". Let's see then, if this is the case. I clearly recall the day I wrote my Arapov (that would be in 1919). In the morning I read Pravda: on the first page a list of however many shot, on the second — an article in which the author bashed

18 Petr S. Kogan (1872-1932); Soviet Marxist literary critic and scholar. President of the State Academy of Arts (1921).
19 Jakov M. Okunev (real surname Okun') (1882-1932); Soviet Marxist writer and journalist.
20 Sergei M. Gorodeckij (1884-1967); Acmeist poet. Publicly repudiated Gumilev.
21 Ilja I. Sadojiev (1889-1965); Soviet poet and translator.
22 Only the two first issues of the Petrograd newspaper Novaja Rossija appeared — in March and June 1922 under the editorship of I. G. Leznev — before it was suppressed by the authorities.
23 In Petrograd-Leningrad the regional headquarters of the state security service was located at Gorochovaja Street No 2, in conjunction with an interrogation prison (Rossi, 1991, Vol. I, p. 85).
away at some (I don't remember any longer) — bourgeois court, which had conferred capital punishment on a communist. Don't you really pause to discuss: this is evidently either stupidity or hypocrisy. The class struggle is a war. In war you act as in war. It's ridiculous [to be indignant] [to condemn] [to use foul language] to castigate the enemy for not positioning himself to be hit. [I cannot stand neither stupidity nor hypocrisy]. My disposition prevents me from ignoring stupidity and hypocrisy. I pointed my finger at these traits among the English, and in Tsarist Russia. I haven't stopped doing this now. And you seriously consider this as being white? Probably I shall never be able to [look] dispassionately at the death penalty. I am not that kind of vegetarian. I understand killing in wars, where man [kills, himself smelling of, risking being killed] buys the right to kill at the price of his own life. But whatever you want — I cannot accept killing a tied person [killing is immoral to me]. The main thing, though, is that I am convinced that this is unnecessary and damaging for power itself. Let the Balachovičes do this, but why should the revolution do this? In a prostitute I pick up on the street I do not look for cleanliness, but in the woman I love, I do. [This is what I describe in Cerkov' Bošija]. Exactly for this reason in Cerkov' Bošija I speak of execution harsher than I wrote about it previously — in Uezdnoe, in Ostrovitiane (this question has always tormented me). And you also consider this as "white"? And you seriously consider as "red" the cannibalism of Gorodeckij, when he oppresses Vs. Ivanov: women all over Russia are crying on the graves of their husbands about this criminality towards Ivanov, nevermind whether they are red or white. [I am convinced you have the same opinion as me of Gorodeckij]. I am writing to you because I know: you are not Gorodeckij. Perhaps when they began to vilify me I should immediately have answered them and said who I am, and reminded them that during the war when Gorodeckij wrote Sreten'e cara — they sentenced me for an antimilitary story, and even earlier, when Gorodeckij was a decadent, I sat in solitary confinement, a Bolshevist. But I earnestly read too little of all the Gorodeckij's, Knajesjov's and Okunevs in order to answer them. Well, this is all I had to say to you as a farewell. Since it appears that I after all [will be sent] am going abroad. It's better like this. In view of all the fuss about me now [to stay here now, with this attitude towards me, which has been created] and in the future — it's difficult for me to stay here. You will understand this. It will be hard for

24 Stanislav N. Bulak-Balachovič (1883-1940). White guard general. Associated i.a. with massacres of kulaks, priests and landowners as well as pogroms of Jews i.a. in Belorus
25 A reference to Na kutil'kach (1914).
26 Vasilij V. Knajesjov (1887-1937); Soviet poet and critic. From 1918 regular contributor to Krasnaja gazeta in Petrograd, in which he i.a. severely attacked Zamjatin's essay "Ja bojus" (1921), on 18 October 1922.
me abroad, too — exactly because I am not white, but this is already another, and I believe easier, matter. If they are going to send me to somewhere in the Russian interior, or leave me in St. Petersburg (for the time being the signature concerning the non-exit has been withdrawn) — I shall ask you to help me go abroad — temporarily.

Your sincerely respectful,
E. Zamjatin

At this time Voronskij was in possession of Zamjatin's novel My in manuscript form, passed to him by Piļ'njak for possible publication in KN. Voronskij, who had already published literary portraits in KN of the promising newcomers Vsevolod Ivanov and Boris Piļ'njak, decided that his third literary portrait was to be of Zamjatin. The choice was hardly surprising in view of Zamjatin's stature as a writer, literary organizer, lecturer, essayist and editor: He had worked with Gorkij, first in the Union of Practitioners of Imaginative Literature (Sozuz dejatelej chudožejstvennoy literatury) 1917-1919 and then, from 1919, in World Literature Publishing House (Izdatel'stvo Mirovoy Literatury); he was a leading figure for the Serapion Brethren, he was an active member of the House of Writers (Dom Pisatelej) and the Petrograd House of Arts (Dom iskusstv) from 1919 where he lectured, he had taken part in the formation of the Petrograd section of the All-Russian Union of Writers (VSP) in the spring of 1920. Voronskij also had to take into consideration that Zamjatin edited the journals Dom iskusstv (1921) and Sovremennyj zapad (1922-24). Notwithstanding his many organizational activities, the four years from mid-1917 to mid-1921 were also to be Zamjatin's most active period as a writer: one novel, a play, two

---

27 The correspondence between Piš'njak and Voronskij shows that they more than once disagreed on the merits of manuscripts. As leader of the state publishing house Krug 1922-27, Voronskij received several manuscripts from Piš'njak, who served as board member of Krug 1922-23 (cp. Dinerštein 1983:55ff).

28 Their co-operation started shortly after the scandal provoked by Zamjatin's Na kul'čach (1914), which was confiscated by the tsarist authorities, cp. Zamjatin's reference to his "antimilitary story" in his letter to Voronskij. Gorkij invited Zamjatin to join the pacifist journal Leiopis', which Zamjatin did before departing for Britain in 1916 (Heller 1988: 54).

29 Later Zamjatin also briefly edited Russkij sovremennik (1924).

Scando-Slavica, Tomus 43, 1997
Voronskij, Zamjatin and My  47

tales, fifteen stories, fourteen fables, four vignettes and a dozen articles

In a sense Zamjatin therefore could not be ignored, and his provocative
post-revolutionary work called for a comprehensive Marxist response, a
challenge Voronskij rose to.31 Whereas Voronskij had unequivocally praised
Vs. Ivanov and (with some reservations) also Pił'njak in his first two literary
portraits, in his third portrait he issued Zamjatin with a public warning about
the dangers of his present course. He nonetheless tried to alleviate some
tension in the following letter:32

Moscow. October-November 1922

Dear Zamjatin!

Forgive me for not having answered your letter immediately. I was leav-
ing for St. Petersburg, I still am, and I wanted to talk to you personally
instead of sending you a letter. I am, however, going to St. Petersburg later,
so in the meantime I am writing. Two hours ago I finished a long article
about you for the next issue of Krasnaja nov'. In the article I seek to
answer much of what you wrote me about. I both damn you and praise you
exceedingly. I praise you for Ueznnoe, Alatyr, Na kuličkach, Ostrovitjane
and Lovec čelovekov, but as for Drakon, the short stories and My — this is
quite another matter. Again you'll be accusing me of denunciation. But in
the first place — you are the worst denouncer because you are denouncing
primarily yourself: if "well-educated" people read me, then they read you
all the more. Secondly, the well-being of the revolution comes before
anything else, this is all I postulate. I think it's acceptable to criticize others,
those who are being silenced, since this is what we had to pay for with our
blood, with exile, with imprisonment and victory. There was a time when
they ridiculed us in writing from all corners (1908-17), and we had to be
silent. Let now those be silent, if circumstances in the worst case dictate this.
In front of me I have your novel My which I have received from Pił'njak. It
makes an exceedingly depressing impression. Honestly, is this all October
has inspired you to, that these are our last days? What do you mean by the

31 Marxist literary criticism at this time was sparse and rudimentary, a lack Voronskij
sought to redress particularly from 1923 with the publication of his two "program" articles
"Iskusstvo, kak poznanie žizni, i sovremennost' (KN, Vol 5, 1923, pp. 347-84), and "Na
pervale" (KN, Vol. 6, 1923, pp. 312-22).

32 I have also here translated the letter in full, based on Dinerštejn (1983:571-2), where
practically no deletions by Pił'njak are marked. The few footnotes given by Dinerštejn have
been omitted since they seemed superfluous in the context of the article. I have, however,
supplemented one footnote of my own.

Scando-Slavica, Tomus 43, 1997
"most jesting and serious work"? Rather the most dismal and misanthropic. We are not accustomed to this type of satire. You see, it's all rather out of place. Take this Wells, about whom you have written so well and talented, he nevertheless saw in us, in Communists, something positive and great, while you only describe us in black. This is wrong. But this must be your own business, I am not your adviser. We remain far apart. You write "one should not kill a tied person", but I don't understand this. Why not? Sometimes one cannot, other times you can. It all depends on circumstances, on how brutal the struggle is, on the objectives, of who and how your enemy is and what he has to fight with, which means he uses. You certainly are on the perimeter of the real struggle today, and thus not positioned to judge what is to be done and not be done. Well, enough of this, we do not agree. Here is, again, what I ask you to forgive me for. At the end of the article I comment on the novel My rather categorically. For various reasons it made me shudder, and I could not help thinking of it while I wrote the article. Moreover, the novel is boring and heavy to read. It is necessary, in my opinion, to remove this thing about the nose, the elections — this leads nowhere and gives the novel a character of intrigue. Possibly the novel in this case could be published somewhere. Na kulichkach is charming. That part about the spider's web is very good. Here there's a lot of lyricism. In general I have a split opinion of you: one is linked to Uezdnoe, the other to Cerkov' Božija. That is why I am so concerned with you in the journal (denunciation). For the time being, take care. Write. It would make me very glad. We, i.e. Krug, are considering buying Uezdnoe from you. I asked today that they send you an advance. Do you agree? By the way do you know we are from the same place, I'm a seminarist from Tambov, Usmanskij-region.

Greetings. Happiness.
A. Voronskij

1 Dom Sovetov (previously hotel National), No. 217
PS: What is to done with the novel?
No. 1 of the almanac Krug will appear in about ten days' time

Most of Voronskij's ideological arguments in the 18-page portrait today seem outdated, and time has certainly proven Zamjatin to be the more politically farsighted of the two. We need therefore here only recall a few

---

33 Voronskij is referring to Zamjatin's first autobiographical sketch (cp. Ginsburg 1970:3-4), most probably prefacing the manuscript of My, where he states that My is his "most jesting and serious work" ("...samaja moja šutočnaja i samaja ser'ěznaja veše").

Scando-Slavica, Tomus 43, 1997
points raised in the portrait in order to understand the non-publication of *My*. Voronskij first states that Zamjatin's authorship 1913-1922 confirms that talent and intellect are of little value when an author feels alienated and looks around in a hostile way. Commenting favourably on Zamjatin's pre-revolutionary writing, Voronskij is negative with regard to the ideological content of his post-revolutionary work, especially *My*. He sees in Zamjatin's authorship a struggle between the forces of life-giving energy and deadening entropy. Zamjatin appears largely a pessimist, in Voronskij's view, since entropy (lethargy, inertia) gains the upper hand most of the time, which also explains Zamjatin's negative view of the October revolution. Essentially he has not progressed from the backwardness and primitivism described in *Uezdnoe* (1913). Voronskij is troubled by the implications of the comment of No.1 when he tells D-503 that the winners of the two hundred years' war (the Bolsheviks) had made one mistake only: they had decided theirs was the last revolution. This must lead to Communist conservatism, which Voronskij finds meaningless.

Here Voronskij fails to reflect on the ambiguous ending of *My*: Despite the "lobotomization" of D-503 and the execution of I-330, the revolt of I-330 is carried out, and the Glass Wall is ruptured, releasing energy. Zamjatin may have been prompted by Voronskij's portrait to develop further his concepts of entropy and energy in the essay "O literature, revoljucii i entropii" (1924) (Zamjatin 1990, Vol. II, pp. 387-93) in which he also expounded his argument for the eternal revolution.

Invoking Lenin and the ideals of socialism, Voronskij firmly stamps the unpublished novel *My* as a political pamphlet on contemporary Soviet Russia, not a utopia (sic) of the future. *My* gives a depressing and terrifying impression, it is a parody of Communist society, harmful and untrue, and Zamjatin is treading on very dangerous ground ("Na očen' opasnom i besslavnom puti Zamjatin. Nužno ěto skazat' priamo i tvěrdо" (Voronskij 1922:321). If Zamjatin had meant to describe War communism, then he has failed to recognize that this was not representative of true, future, Communism. In Voronskij's view Zamjatin has neglected to take into consideration all the external threats confronting the revolutionary Soviet state. Moreover, Voronskij believes it's artificial to construct a dichotomy between vegetative and organic life, on the one hand, and Communism on the other. This implies a primitivism, an idyllization of man's natural condition, a stage of development that mankind long since has progressed from. Typical of Zamjatin is also the novel's emphasis on individualism: The protest of D-503
Robert Vaagan

is generated by narrow-minded love for I-313, the leader of the uprising, and therefore must end pessimistically. Voronskij summarizes that:

S chudožestvennoj storony roman napisan prevoschodno. Zamjatin dostig zdes' polnoj samostojatel'nosti i zrelosti. Tem chuže, ibo vsë to pošlo na služenie zlomu delu (ibid., p. 320).

Small wonder that Voronskij's two subsequent letters to Zamjatin were so brief, or that none of Zamjatin's work appeared in KN. In KN 1923#2 (12) Voronskij reverted to Zamjatin's authorship:

... ot bor'by s uezdnym on perešel k bor'be s russkim kommunizmom, počemu-to rešiv ostavit' v teni i Uezdnoe i Ostrovitjane i Lovec čelovekov. Esčë raz — možno obo vsem étom iskrenno požalet', ibo ot tego proigryvajut' revolucija, pisatel' i iskusstvo (Voronskij KN, 1923#2 (12) p. 344).

Zamjatin's response to Voronskij's PS can only be guessed at, but we must assume that the manuscript at least was returned to Zamjatin.

Bibliography:

At this stage Voronskij evinced no interest in such "irrational" aspects confronting D-503 as love and imagination (Sicher 1991:229) However, some 3 years later, reacting to the advent of Freudism in Soviet Russia from 1923, the artist's intuition, irrationality and subconscious were to become central aspects of Voronskij's literary aesthetics (possibly under the influence of both Zamjatin's essay "Psychologija tvorčestva" (1920-21) as well as My), cp. "Frejdizm i iskusstvo" (KN, Vol.7, 1925, pp. 241-62).

"From an artistic point of view the novel is superbly written. Zamjatin has here achieved complete independence and maturity. All the more pity since all this serves an evil cause" (author's translation).

"From warring with the province, he has shifted to warring with Russian Communism, having for some reason decided to denigrate both Uezdnoe, Ostrovitjane and Lovec čelovekov. Again — one can only sincerely regret all this, since all stand to lose: the revolution, the writer and art" (author's translation).

Scando-Slavica, Tomus 43, 1997


Leon Trockij: Literatura i revoljucija, Moscow 1923.


— My: roman, povesti, rasskazy, p'esy, stat'i i vospominanija (ed. by E. B. Skorospelova), Kišinëv 1989.
— My, Moscow 1991