

**ENGLAND IN ART INTERPRETATION
OF THE WORLD OF E. I. ZAMYATIN***

V.I Kopelnik., L.P. Tsilenko

Department of Foreign Languages, TSTU

*Represented by Professor M.N. Makeyeva and
a Member of the Editorial Board Professor V.I. Konovalov*

Key words and phrases: art interpretation of the world; characteristic features of his English style; English theme; personal experience.

Abstract: The article describes some peculiarities in art interpretation of the world of E. I. Zamyatin. It is devoted to the English theme in his works. The comments of his contemporaries are given. The fragments from his letters are presented. The attempt is made to analyze the most characteristic features of his English style.

Russian prose writer E.I. Zamyatin was frequently named an «Englishman» in literary circles. J. Annenkov portrayed E.I. Zamyatin on a well-known canvas against a background of an English newspaper «Times» with an English tube. A lot of literary reviews contain the criticism of the western civilization in creative work of the writer which he conducted during all his life.

The English theme did not only strongly take roots in the works of the Russian writer, but also became the major part of his interpretation of the world. Therefore its analysis allows understanding genuine ideals of the writer, to understand the sense of his creative way more deeply and to become aware of ideological and art peculiarities even of those his works in which, apparently, the English theme is absent. First of all it concerns his main creation. It is a novel «We».

For the first time E.I. Zamyatin got acquainted with the West shortly before the First World War, being already a well-known writer in Russia, the author of a story «District». The first business trip abroad to Berlin was short-term and did not make an impression on engineer and beginner writer E.I. Zamyatin. Later he explained the reason of it in the autobiography of 1928: «Berlin has seemed to me of the condensed, 80 % Petersburg. England is another: everything was as new and strange in England as once in Alexandria and in Jerusalem» [1].

From March 1916 till September 1917 E.I. Zamyatin was living in England, working on ship-building shipyards, building ice breakers in Glasgow, New-Castle, Sunderland, South-Shields. His stories «Islanders» (1917), «The Hunter of human beings» (1918) written during business trip were based on English reality.

Zamyatin's contemporary Victor Shklovsky wrote: «Zamyatin who had arrived from «district» Russia saw undescribed and unfamiliar England. It was England during

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the First World War, but a portrait of the country made by Zamyatin was generalized. His England was satirical, a kind of parody, Englishmen were relative, grotesque...» [2].

E. Zamyatin simultaneously took out the verdict to old imperial Russia and condemned «mechanically civilized» life of bourgeois England. It was V. Shklovsky's opinion that E.I. Zamyatin's sight at England was a sight on the part of a Russian person, harsh and precise: «Zamyatin was skilful to take a detached view slightly from above. He was skilful to see things undescribed, to see it anew, and it was a necessary, but very rare quality in art. He was named an «Englishman» in Russia, but perhaps only his tube was English» [2].

Why «the English theme» began constant in Zamyatin's creative work, becomes partly clear of the remained letters of the writer dated by June 1916–1917 [3]. The young prose writer felt loneliness from mechanical monotony of the civilized industrial city. On March 4 (1916) he wrote the following: «A Russian engineer met me in New–Castle, I passed the hardship very conveniently with his help. But New–Castle itself was so disgusting. All the streets, apartment houses were identical, completely identical, as grain barns in Petersburg near Alexander–on–Neva lavra. When passing by I asked: «What are those warehouses for?» – «They are apartment houses»... Next day it was possible to leave for London. It took us six hours. Similar short–cut warehouse towns were flashing by. Such absence of imagination was horrible. I had been in London since Saturday doing nothing, walking and staring, doing shopping» [3].

E.I. Zamyatin frequently asked in his letters to the wife to send the Russian literature, complained of his loneliness and despondency which captured him in noisy London. He sneered: «What wonderful people Englishmen are: the most indecent for them is to leave a spoon in tea...» [3, p. 197].

He wrote about New–Castle the following: «The city is big, but absolutely boring. Russian public is attractive a little; the silliest theatres are something like a vivid cinema, English audience is virtuous. Melancholy» [3, p. 198].

The writer told with humour to the wife that he couldn't get used to an English way of life, that is to get up early and to follow the routine steadily: and the maid «was at first frightened: whether he died or not», but later got used to [3, p. 202].

«I live without pleasure and without sorrow, and I feel, that I am mouldy, as a stagnant pond in summer. I cannot write», – he ascertained in the letter to the wife dated by May 17, 1916 from New–Castle [3, p. 204].

Further this state of mind called into being «Islanders» and «The Hunter of human beings». He wrote about it to his wife in June, 1916 the following: «Joking aside, staying in such New–Castle affects like a certain bullpen: a person becomes sensitive because of the severe loneliness. Just think about a person dreaming all night long. His dreams are rosy, blue and red. He dreams instead of sleeping or bringing about his dreams as quickly and easily as only possible. And he has been doing it for 20 years. I think it's much better to ask for the most correct and pitiless policeman in other words common sense» [3, p. 210].

«Blue and pink» became a part of «The Society of honourable bell ringers», were rethought in the stories «Islanders» and «Sunday gentlemen». Though E.I. Zamyatin did not reflect the process of the work on English stories in the letters, the definition was repeated twice when he described himself as «an eternal visionary eternally climbing as my clerk in the sky which does not exist» [3, p. 214]. It showed that deep dissatisfaction of the surrounding him «geometrical city», the desire to escape from chaining, «calcifying» mechanical paradise. It helped him to create the satirical art world of «Islanders» and «The Hunter of human beings».

«I was sinking in melancholy day by day, night by night... I was extinguishing the fire in myself...» wrote down E.I. Zamyatin in New–Castle on July 31, 1916 [3, p. 215]. At this time he «poured the fire» in the lines of his works on an English theme.

Obviously, the motive of «a bottom», i.e. his perception of England as an ocean, the island shipped on a bottom of «a crazy dairy – pink fog», was so clear, that passed to the images of his above mentioned works which arose in new variants in dramatic art of 1920s (the play «The Society of honourable bell ringers» and the script «Vault of Gunton»).

Being in England E.I. Zamyatin got used to «the civilized West» with great difficulties. It was so due to some personal disorders, the serious attacks of depression caused by crisis in family relations. The image of England absorbed in itself all these subjective factors of a life of the writer of those years. But gloomy perception of the West as «a peak of a civilization» was doubtless deeper than personal experiences of the prose writer and found out some common underlying reasons. We think that the writer did not feel a special difference between spiritual solitude of «district Russia» and leveling of spirituality in the West.

The statement of a German researcher of creativity of E.I. Zamyatin R. Goldt which tells that «it is easy to lead parallels of English cities with architecture of the Uniform state» in the novel «We» is reasonable. But this is not the only «English motive which suggests that «We» is similarly directed both against Bolsheviki's totalitarianism, and against the western mechanical and utilitarian culture which for Zamyatin is not less fraught with violence than the Soviet authority. Being in the Parisian emigration, Zamyatin confirmed that «this novel is like a signal about the danger menacing to a person, mankind from hypertrophied authority of machines and authority of the state no matter which one» [3].

E.I. Zamyatin persistently emphasized the same idea in the interview given to known French critic Frederick Lefevre on March 23, 1932: «I am afraid that I am an incurable heretic. Short-sighted critics have only seen political lampoon in my novel «We». It is not absolutely true for this novel. It is a disturbing signal caused by double danger, menacing to mankind: excess of authority of machines and excess of authority of the state. Americans...saw in the novel the criticism of Ford» [3].

R. Goldt fairly marked, that Russian perception of Europe always varied from the originality and was beyond an unequivocal choice between admiration, imitation and denying. «Development quite often passes to discharge» causing the most fantastic interpretation [3, p. 324]. Zamyatin's perception of «the western civilization», – so the writer named the western culture, is inextricably related with philosophy-aesthetic views of the artist.

In the obituary notice devoted to Anatole France in 1924 he marked, that Russian culture sailed away «in unknown way from the coast which is called a western civilization» [3].

It is amazing that the main thing in the western culture for E.I. Zamyatin was that the writer considered only as «external forms» of civilized England.

R. Goldt comes to a conclusion that «there is no concrete criticism of the concrete phenomena in Europe at Zamyatin. Why it was so? Zamyatin perceived the western validity through a prism of ready literary – philosophical models, first of all F. M. Dostoevskij's ideas. Hence, the common mood of decline on which the background of the reality was washed off prevailed and gave up the place to a myth. Zamyatin is not an analyst in the West, but he is Iov, surprised to unquietous indifference to «days of grief» [3, p. 328].

It is thought, that Zamyatin's attitude to England was even more complex and more ambiguous, carrying not only general philosophical, but also national interest.

So, England for the writer during this period was simultaneously a parameter of a universal way «to progress» and a symbol of everything which was not Russian, European, underlining egoism, specific features of a Russian soul, and an embodiment of the urban totalitarian tendencies leading to the levelling of a person.

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Англия в художественном мировидении Е.И. Замятина

В.И. Копельник, Л.П. Циленко

Кафедра иностранных языков, ГОУ ВПО «ТГТУ»

Ключевые слова и фразы: английская тема; личный опыт; характерные черты английского стиля; художественное мировосприятие.

Аннотация: Описываются особенности изображения Англии в художественном мировидении Е.И. Замятина. Представлены комментарии его современников, выдержки из писем Е.И. Замятина. Предпринимается попытка проанализировать наиболее характерные черты английского стиля писателя.

England in der künstlerischen Weltauffassung von E.I. Samjatin

Zusammenfassung: Es werden die Besonderheiten der Darstellung Englands in der künstlerischen Weltauffassung von E.I. Samjatin beschrieben. Im Artikel sind die Kommentare seiner Zeitgenossen, die Zitate aus den Briefen von E.I. Samjatin vorgestellt. Es wird den Versuch unternommen, die am meisten charaktervollen Striche des englischen Stiles des Schriftstellers zu analysieren.

Angleterre dans la représentation artistique du monde de E.I. Zamiatin

Résumé: Sont décrites les particularités de l'image de l'Angleterre dans la représentation artistique du monde de E.I. Zamiatin. Sont citées les commentaires des contemporains de E.I. Zamiatin, les extraits de ses lettres. On tâche d'analyser les traits les plus caractéristiques du style anglais de l'écrivain.