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**CONSTRUCTING WALLS.  
THE ANTI-UTOPIAN PARADIGM  
OF THE SPLIT WORLD IN 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY  
RUSSIAN LITERATURE**

Utopia is a basic topos generated by human mind, by its teleological thinking. What a paradox, however, that Plato, the philosopher imagining his ideal and rational, hierarchically arranged Republic, did not find place for those “useless” who work with imagination and fantasy, for poets and artists. The Renaissance era, attributing to the humans a power that can change the world, turned again toward the dreams of a perfect society. Thomas Moore created this word itself and imagined *Utopia* (1516) on an Island, similarly to Francis Bacon’s Bensalem on New Atlantis (1624), so did Campanella by his *City of the Sun, Civitas Solis* (1602)—because the Best State was imaginable only as a safely distant space, cut off from every real and experienced. An eschatological New Jerusalem, a proto-socialistic utopian state was realized by Anabaptists in Münster in 1534. The idea became literally stone reality in Arc-et-Senans, the ideally and rationally organized royal salt-works, built by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux in France (1771–1779), and in Robert Owen’s building *New Harmony* in Indiana (1825), just to mention a few.

Everywhere the ideal, perfect state is small, as a laboratory model, and hermetically isolated, encircled by endless oceans or cordoned by solid walls—this is the main tragic ambivalence of the utopian thinking, producing the genre of anti-utopia, or dystopia. I argue that anti-utopia is not simply the antithesis of utopia. Utopia aims to solve social problems by means of philosophy: it depicts a rational social construction of an ideal society where slavery runs the society and personality is a privilege, where vertical walls separate the small test-tube of history of the real world and horizontal class strata divide the population. Hence, anti-utopia is an organic sequel, a next step after utopia, a logical continuation of it. Literature only shows and

proves the failure of the utopian philosophy—a realized utopia turns inevitably into a totalitarian dictatorship. The ideal society's rationally planned frames become cords that fetter all kind of freedom, and a good governor's strong will transforms in a personality cult. In Russian scholarship anti-utopia and dystopia mean practically the same phenomenon, while in Western context anti-utopia include also a parody of the genre of utopia and dystopia is rather about the negative deformation of the society itself.<sup>1</sup> Both utopia and anti-utopia are set on imaginary lands of u-topoi (non existing countries) hence represent philosophical patterns.<sup>2</sup>

Russian culture was a greenhouse for utopian thinking. If in England the fast and pioneering development of industry and critical philosophy produced utopian aspirations, in order to go even further, and show the defects of the existing societies in a satire, in Russia it was the desperate ambition of an underdeveloped society that had the dream to skip over the milestones of the evolutionary development and to leap into an imagined perfect state. Russia was big enough, an irrational never-ever land, as it appears in Gogol's famous image of the Troika rattling into the endless steppe (*Dead Souls*, 1835–1841).

Chernyshevsky, one of the so called Socialist Democrats of 1860s in his most influential novel *What is to be done?* (1863) outlined the future socialist society as a Crystal palace made of glass and iron (the image itself was taken after the 1851 World exhibition in London). This local utopia of a size of a building appears only in a dream, that of Vera Pavlovna (ch. 4). It was immediately given a sharp response and mocked by Dostoevsky in his *Notes from Underground* (1864, ch.10) considering the Palace being an attack of rational thinking against human nature, individuality and free will. However, this critic comes from not a reliable narrator, practically a madman—the Crystal Palace and the underground are both unliveable spaces.

The utopia of Russia as a Third Rome, an ideological and political invention of Ivan the Terrible lived on not only in Russian religious

<sup>1</sup> See Veira, F. *The Concept of Utopia*; Fitting, P. *Utopia, dystopia and science fiction, The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Ed. Claeys, G. Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2010. pp. 135–150.

<sup>2</sup> Marquis de Sade set the plot of his *120 days of Sodome* (1775) in a closed space of a chateau in the Alps, hence, one can see it as a sexual utopia. His novels' were written also in an isolated space—in prison.

orthodoxy, but also in the imperial expansionism of the Giant State and in the idea of Panslavism in the 19th century. A new version of it was the Eurasian idea developed after the October revolution among Russian émigrés, who (trying to justify somehow the existence of the new Soviet state) attributed to Soviet Union the Messianic role of redeeming unifier of Europe with Asia.

Anti-utopia gains a special meaning exactly at the historical watershed moment of October revolution, because the theory of utopia was applied in practice. Lenin's idea of skipping capitalism and leaping from feudal society to communism was started as an experience over 145 millions of people.<sup>3</sup>

Evgenii Zamiatin was the first author of literary anti-utopia with his classic *We* (*My*, 1920). But already in 1916 he published *The Islanders* (*Ostrovitiane*), about the mechanical and depressing monotony of an English small town, with its dull system of labour and the vicar's soulless family life, with many similarities between the two novels. The very same pattern appears in his drama *Saint Dominic's Fires* (*Ogni Sviatogo Dominika*), where the plot is set at the time of the Spanish inquisition, that is an overt allusion or even answer to Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor legend in *Brothers Karamazov* (1879–1880)—where Christ's second coming ends with a second execution.<sup>4</sup> Nazi ideology also argued that the Order (*Ordnungdenken*) prevents exactly the coming of the chaos of the Antichrist. Max Weber's thesis is that continuous technical development over-sizes the rational and bureaucratic aspirations of the society and puts aside the precarious value-oriented thinking (1905).<sup>5</sup>

Zamiatin, arrested in 1906 by Tsarist regime and in 1922 by the Soviet, underlined in an interview later in Paris emigration during the 1930s that his satirical warning was not only about the future Soviet

<sup>3</sup> In 1917 the population was 144 644 000. Krausz Tamás, *Bolsevizmus és nemzeti kérdés*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest 1989. p. 133.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Schmitt, a proto-Nazi theorist uses Dostoevsky's Legend... "as a starting point and takes sides with the Grand Inquisitor". See Muth, Heinrich, *Carl Schmitt in den deutschen Innenpolitik des Sommers 1932*, "Historische Zeitschrift. Beihefte. New Series, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Weimar Republik" 1971. 1. pp. 75-147.; Hell, Julia, *Katechon: Carl Schmitt's Imperial Theology and the Ruins of the Future*. The German Review (2009) 84. 4. pp. 283-326. Quoted in: Tóth Olivér István, *A bennünk élő Nagy Inkvizitor – Carl Schmitt és Dosztojevszkij. Eotvozet. Acta Szegediensis Collegii de Rolando Eotvos nominati*. Benedek N. M., Gellerfi G. (eds.), Eötvös Collegium, Budapest 2011. 51-56.

<sup>5</sup> Preface to his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905).

state, but of any totalitarian machine-like society.<sup>6</sup> *We* sets a paradigm for anti-utopias already in its title, because the opposition of Us to Them is a general human pattern for exclusion, since the collective enemy creates a psychological trap of a tight and closed community, the feeling of togetherness by threat. Human brain has a tendency to think in symmetric notions, especially when thinking of enemies.<sup>7</sup> As Andrei Syniavsky points out, finding the class-enemy was the turning point in socialism that before the revolution used to be “a nice utopia, a fantasy of dreamers and philanthropists about the Golden Age”.<sup>8</sup> Ervin Sinkó, a Hungarian émigré in the Soviet Union, during the 1930s, called this psychological manipulation “the castle under blockade” syndrome.<sup>9</sup> We are alone, we are menaced, everybody around is our enemy, so we are heroes and we need an extreme vigilance, control and discipline in this special condition: traitors should be punished, etc.—the formula of totalitarianism is all set.

Zamiatin’s *One State* is a steel-and-iron city (with reference to the Crystal Palace) is surrounded by a wall, even covered by an ever-blue artificial sky, but the Mephi revolutionists dig a tunnel under the wall, and outside it Zamiatin let us see the green steppes with naked men and women, who live happily in nature. Rationality is opposed to instincts, order to nature, bleak grey to warm and lively green, transparency to intimacy. Zamiatin put down basic strategies of the genre of anti-utopia: satiric attitude; allegorical imagery and double vision with distant, first-person narration (here in diary-form). In the plot also several patterns were mapped out: an eye-opening love-story; medical intervention (brain-ectomy) eliminating free thinking and imagination; overall spying, control and persecution; art subservient to the power, panegyric-fabrication in praise of the tyrant-leader.

But there are two more relevant aspects in Zamiatin’s novel. Firstly, Zamiatin could also realize that the utopia was a common element

<sup>6</sup> Orwell wrote about *We* and its influence on Huxley’s *Brave New World*, in 1946, to be influenced two years later himself in his 1984.

<sup>7</sup> See Koselleck, R. *Zur historisch-politisch Semantik asymmetrische Gegengriffe. Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtliche Zeiten*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1979.

<sup>8</sup> Sinyavsky, A. *Solzhenytsin kak ustroitel’ novogo edinomyслиa* (1985). *Puteshestvie na Chornuiu rechku*. Zakharov, Moskva 1999. pp. 330-331.

<sup>9</sup> Sinkó Ervin, *Egy regény regénye*, Fórum Könyvkiadó, Újvidék 1988.

of Avant-garde art and that of communist ideology. The construction of the cosmic spaceship *Integral* with spirals and geometric form raises associations with Vladimir Tatlin's famous and not realized Constructivist plan of the Monument to the 3rd International (1919). Secondly, he discovered very early that the new ideology makes use of an otherwise attacked idea of so called God-building ideas: by using or misusing the fact that undereducated Russian people were accustomed to believe naively in God, to being told by Orthodox Church and clericals what to do. So the new socialist ideology was interpreted for them as a new religion and new faith, with a new God, the new type of the Man who can rule everything and create in collective work an earthly paradise of communism. Not only Gorky as early as in 1908 in his *Confession* sermonized this idea as its apostle, but also the futurist Mayakovsky in his *The Bathhouse* (1928) structured a world, coming out of capitalist hell toward a social utopia of communist Heaven.

Andrei Platonov's *Chevengur*, was written in 1929, is very special as it sets back the plot to 1924, as if communism were already realized by 12 naive fanatics who kill all other people in the city declaring them bourgeois, thus creating a grotesque, ante-dated utopia.

After the 1920s there is no more ways to believe in a perfect society, the ration-ruled order turned out to be a sort of prison. This is the main realized metaphor in Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation for a Beheading*, written in emigration, in 1935–1938. Artistic Nabokov who insisted all his life that art is not for expressing ideas or teach people, enveloped the philosophical message in an abstract, figurative, even esoteric text. Characters have names of mixed nationality (Cincinnatus, Pierre, Rodion, Roman, Marfinka, Emma). Both historical time and space are undefined, but a duality of space is obvious. *Here* and *there* parts of the town are set against, the park of Tamariny sady (in Russian *Tam* means there) represents for imprisoned Cincinnatus the space of imagined freedom. But when he flees off the prison, crosses the river to go home, when he opens the door of his flat, he realizes to be in his prison cell again. In this fantastic vicious circle of space there is no way out, because the prison is encircled by another general prison of the absurdly totalitarian society, and the other world of youth and love is also a false dream of paradise. The city landscape starts to deform at the end of the text—as if electricity is fading in the moon, also trees collapse. From this puppet-and-paper scenery of reality the

only escape leads toward another dimension, to the more real realm of imagination. At the very end of the novel after his execution a second, a real Cincinnatus stands up and goes out of this picture, as if by the Moebius-strip, toward those who are similar to him.<sup>10</sup>

Anti-utopia returns to the Russian literature after a long silence and in its form of sharp satire. True that Vladimir Voinovich's *Moscow 2042* (1986) was also written in emigration, but by someone from a fresh émigré wave of the 1980s. In the city of the fulfilled communism newspapers are printed directly on toilet-paper, results of soccer-matches are reported before the game, and the inedible meals should be consumed with an only spoon, attached to the tray by a symbolic chain, of course, only for those without privileges. Outside the city wall ill, old and disabled people are subjects of medical experiments for finding the elixir of eternal life. In the laboratories, hidden in an underground city with perpendicular streets and equal blocks, stubborn people are "annihilated" and "utilised", turned into "secondary material". In the first parts of the novel Voinovich's aim is to destroy the illusions of those Western communists who still nurse some hope for the Soviet future (one of them is portrayed in the novel as a real fellow-traveller" of the narrator on his time-travel to the future). Voinovich attacks also the monarchist, politically conservative emigration. There is a brilliant parody of Solzhenitsyn (a deterrent utopist in his essays): Karnavalov returns from his American exile on his white horse and institutes the dictatorship of the Pravoslav orthodox monarchy.

After the fall of the Soviet regime, one would suppose that anti-utopian exposure is finally out of the range of literary interest, and outdated from the point of view of philosophy. Once the failure of the so called ideal society was proven by the practice of history, there is nothing to show or prove in theory anymore. However, the turning point of the year 2000 raised again the question: which way Russia should follow?

<sup>10</sup> After 1938, Nabokov returns to the anti-utopian genre every decade: *Bend Sinister* (1946) is the most political in his whole oeuvre, about a "grotesque police state", as he formulates in his introduction. Here Russian and German totalitarianism are mixed, as he said in *Strong Opinions* (1956). Even the humble *Prin* (1957) plans lectures on Tyranny, on Nicholas the First, "on all the precursors of modern atrocity". And in *Pale Fire* (1962) words against prejudice go together with the characteristic of "historical hells: diabolical persecution and the barbarous tradition of slavery". Nabokov, V. *Pale Fire*. Penguin Modern Classics, Hammondsworth 2011. p. 172.

<sup>11</sup> Term or label of Trotzky for those intellectuals and writers, who were not for, but neither against the revolution.

Tatiana Tolstoy's *The Slynx* (2000) is an encyclopaedia of anti-utopian patterns of Russian literature and also their parody. We are in the future, after the atomic explosion, the Blast, but the society's development is somewhere in the early Middle Ages. Here Tolstaya follows the idea by Nikolai Berdiaev, who proclaimed that the 20th century is in fact a New Middle Age(s).<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that at T. Tolstoy the atomic explosion is a last point and result of the high level technical development that caused the return to the past. "Stone Age, decline of Europe, death of Gods" says Nikita Ivanovich the *raisonneur* of the novel. T. Tolstoy's chronotopos is postmodern in all categories, obviously referring and contrasting to that of Zamiatin. Zamiatin's threefold, Hegelian model of entropy suggests an endless development in the sequences of "revolution—consolidation—preparation for revolution" by heretics (as thesis-antithesis-synthesis). This spiral consists of small circles, opposed both to the linear concept of earthly heaven of vulgar communism and to the redemption-oriented Christianity. In *The Slynx* not only future, present and past slur in each other, denying any hope for progress, but the totalitarian society itself is a parody of itself. Tolstoy tends to rewrite also the past, because history is a matter of chance in the postmodern literature: in her short story *Plot* (*Siuzhet*) Pushkin who did not die, at the age of 80 hits the child Lenin with such a force that Lenin becomes an obedient servant of the Tsar who engages Stalin as a Minister of the Interior. In *The Slynx* civilization, comfort and culture have disappeared, only ridiculous nonentities change in the role of the Dictator. Fyodor Kuzmich, the Murza (Tatar king) is expressly a dwarf, with a huge palm, an attribute of the tyrant power already at Zamiatin's Great Benefactor. A victorious revolution helps only to enthrone the next petty dictator, the former head of the cruel secret police. New dictators come and go in an eternal return, like spring returns every year. Instead of freedom and personality cheap-shot personal interests move the history.

In postmodern literature anti-utopian thinking is again a main issue. The coming time before us is depicted either unrealistic (e.g. computer-created, or populated by cosmic not-human beings, placed in far future), or surreal in a much too reality-like way, like fantasy games. Tolstoy's funny new creatures are half-monsters, half-animals, suffering from mutations because of radiation. Living in limited space, they do

<sup>12</sup> Berdaev, N. *Novoie srednevekovie*, Berlin, 1924.

not have any experience of other worlds, so do not want to change anything. The role of rebels in this society is played by those intellectuals, the Oldeners, who are somehow conserved by the Blast and live until age of 2-300 years, hence becoming anachronistic recollections of the culture. A special culture, however. For example, when someone of them dies, they collect objects left from the lost civilisation, and read a list of them as a recitation. This act of collection stands for recollection: Pushkin's poems, Party membership card, user manuals of any household machine or the machine itself can be put on the grave for the memory.

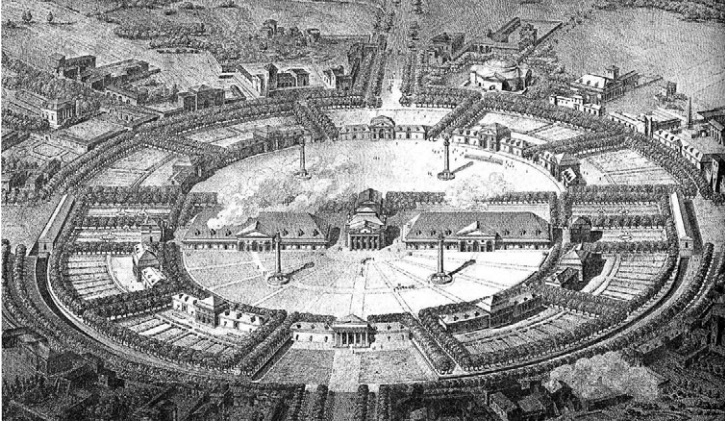
The secret library, source of all citations used as slogans perish in the fire of the so called Revolution, so even power has no more so called Cultural basis. While in Zamiatin's *We* the rebellious Mephi are executed and become martyrs, in *The Slynx* a Nabokovian theatre is played, the Oldeners survive even the execution—the sublimated end suggests the consolation that intellectuals are the keepers of Fire and survive everything.

T. Tolstoy invents a new language, as if not only the civilization, but the language were also exploded into small pieces and put together again but not in a right way. Once rabbits fly here, words must mean different things as before. The yoke, outdated for the 21st century, is a new invention in those days. Newly created, never existing words organically grow in this post-historic language.

The young protagonist, a Scribe becomes from an average dependant a real fanatic of books, but with a special approach: for him high culture means to put books on the upper shelves in order to keep away from mice, the basic food, and low culture is put on the bottom shelves. Books and old things are usually prohibited in anti-utopian futures. Political power means owning books, it is prohibited for average members in this society by the tyrant. Not only because Free-thinking is a crime—also because he plagiarizes the old masters by wishing to become his people's sole writer, so books would unveil him. Real books are confiscated by Saniturions.

If classic utopias were built on far, isolated islands, here we are in the middle of the Russian steppe, because Russian distances isolate better than the ocean, there is no need for walls. Strange people seen on the horizon are called tschetchens, a general name for enemies. The hierarchy of this society is a medical one, who has less "consequences", who is more human-like, is placed higher. Naturally, it is





contemporary Russia that is twisted and perverted in this future vision, but the scary Slynx in the novel is a mythological personification, a symbol for the evil.

Several transparent binarities are present in Tolstoy's novel: the importance and impotency of art and culture in general, the animal in humanity of mankind, the future that turns out to be in fact our past, so our present is again a far future for it—history appears as a roundabout in a very small circle.

Viacheslav Kuritsyn, suggesting in 1992 that postmodernism is the only literary stream alive, chooses the following title: "Postmodernism, the new primitive culture".<sup>13</sup> Mikhail Epstein underlined the parallel treats of postmodern literature with that of communism era, and one of them is the utopia. If communism was stated to be the last phase of the development of the societies, or of the world, a collection of all achievements of human knowledge, postmodern can be also defined as such. Since postmodern literature mixes everything. Synchronically or vertically, all strata of genre and style, of high and popular culture meet in a hybrid of ideologies and aesthetic values. Historically all writers and poets merge in intertextual citations, allusions, ironic language-games. Postmodern is an eclectic simulacrum with a feeling of being at the very end of it.<sup>14</sup>

This sense of being a summary is also a sort of end-game. While the never-existing communism declared about itself to be the ideal

<sup>13</sup> *Novyi Mir*, 1992. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Epshtein, M. *Postmodern v Rossii: literatura i teoriia*. Elinina, Moskva 2000.



end of history, here, in postmodern, the post-historic idea means that history has been finished, there is no way ahead. The time of extreme moral positions and true believers in literature has gone. Differences of opinion make the paradoxical and difficult principle of pluralism. There is no good choice, there is no rational progress, there is no evidence of “what is to be done” (to paraphrase Chernishevsky.) We have no more hope to give definite, one-size-fits-all answers—fortunately. Be it the case, it would be a real return in the history.

Anti-utopia first embraced social satire (Zamiatin) than raised question of existentialist philosophy and morality (Nabokov) later returned to the critical satiric focus (Voinovich). Postmodern anti-utopianism—T. Tolstoy—does not know social criticism, nor can return to any firm moral system of values. There is no more enemy to accuse, we are the only responsible ones for the eternal return of totalitarian dictatorship, that is not even ambivalently grotesque anymore, but overtly and chaotically absurd.

According Parrag Khanna, the Director of the brain trust Global Governance Initiative and Senior Research Fellow in the American Strategy Program at the New America Foundation, the Middle Ages of the 5th to 15th centuries is an ideal metaphor to characterize our times. “It was an age of plagues and progress, commercial revolutions, expanding empires, crusades, city-states, merchants, and universities. It was multipolar, with expanding empires on the Eurasian landmass, and apolar, with no one global leader. The new Middle Ages—synonymous with the age of globalization—have already begun.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *McKinsey Quarterly Special Issue*, February 2009.