

Title: The Frozen Desert and The Crystal World: Figurations of Aleksander Skriabin's Music in Evgenii Zamiatin's "The Cave" and *We*

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A great admirer of Aleksander Skriabin, Evgenii Zamiatin alludes to the composer's music in two of his major works: the dystopian novel *We, My*, 1920 and the short story "The Cave," "Peshchera," 1922. In these texts, Skriabin's music functions as a sign of spirituality, civilization, and imagination, which are incompatible with the new world order. The figure of Skriabin as an artist and prophet defines Mart's loftier pre-revolutionary incarnation--his personality torturously fluctuating between his former spiritually and culturally refined self and his current caveman's identity. Likewise, D-503 is deeply moved by Skriabin's music in I-330's performance. Zamiatin's female characters Masha and I-330 further embody the composer's worldview and work: both are pianists and performers of his music, destined to expire with the collapse of Skriabin's irrational and imaginary old world.

Still, in his literary appropriation, Zamiatin does not simply glorify nostalgically Skriabin's music; rather, he problematizes its very meaning within the context and the material culture of the Soviet 1920. This talk examines how Skriabin's late music both informs Zamiatin's texts and is transformed by them, as the author plays with and inverts Skriabin's philosophically charged notions of fire, light, and electricity; synaesthesia; and crystal transparency. By blending literary and musicological analysis, the paper shows how Zamiatin rejects Skriabin's Promethean rhetoric of divine light while embracing the composer's rhetoric of death in his final Opus 74. Still, although Skriabin's music is intimately linked to death in Zamiatin, the composer's notion of death as mystery and transfiguration becomes poignantly and ironically subverted in Zamiatin's ambivalent, disenchanted reworking. In the post-revolutionary years, Zamiatin renounces the mystery of death itself, denying humanity transcendence. Thus, Skriabin's scores burn not in a transformative conflagration of the world, but as plain paper, alleviating Masha's warmer sleep into death.