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College of the Holy Cross
Worcester, Massachusetts

The Thesis of Kelly A. Gallagher

entitled Writing Dystopia: Zamyatin's Writing Philosophy, Genre, and the Protagonist of *We*

is submitted to the office of Scholar Programs in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with College Honors at the College of the Holy Cross, and has been read and approved by the following:

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Writing Dystopia

Zamyatin's Writing Philosophy, Genre, and the Protagonist of *We*

WRITTEN BY KELLY A. GALLAGHER
ADVISOR: PROFESSOR OLGA PARTAN
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COLLEGE HONORS PROGRAM, MAY 2022

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how Russian author Yevgeny Zamyatin (1884-1937) came to write one of the first literary dystopias. I argue that he designed dystopia in his novel *We* as a place that threatens the creation of what he considered “true literature,” in order to show why his conception of true literature is essential to the survival of the human spirit. The first chapter synthesizes Zamyatin’s critical essays and biographical details to reveal his writing philosophy, which I characterize as his belief that “creative revolution” sustains literature’s movement forward into the future. The second chapter explores why Zamyatin’s philosophy may have drawn him to the utopian genre and compelled him to create its antithesis. The chapter argues that Zamyatin’s vision of “true literature” opposed the goals of literary utopias, and that he developed a dystopian novel because he already saw the dystopia present in utopia. Finally, the third chapter examines how the written word operates as a “weapon” in *We*. Literature serves as a weapon either for enforcing the dystopian One State government’s lies, or for resisting such lies in favor of searching for truth. The protagonist D-503 is ultimately able to spiritually purify himself and reclaim his humanity through writing.

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Portrait of Yevgeny Zamyatin, by Yuri Annenkov (1921).

INTRODUCTION

> "Russian writers are accustomed to going hungry. The main reason for their silence is not lack of bread or lack of paper; the reason is far weightier, far tougher, far more ironclad. It is that true literature can exist only where it is created, not by diligent and trustworthy officials, but by madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels and skeptics."
>
> Zamyatin, "I Am Afraid"[1]

Yevgeny Zamyatin (1884-1937) embodied all of these characters, to different extents, and they all come out in his novel *We*. Zamyatin's famous quote, from one of his critical essays, reveals his understanding of writing as something both intensely sensitive to the society it is produced in and intensely personal. Madmen, hermits, heretics, rebels, and skeptics necessarily develop their natures in opposition to society. A "madman" is only mad because he deviates from societal norms; a hermit's solitude is defined by his rejection of -- or from -- society; skeptics doubt the dominant culture, heretics develop beliefs contrary to the status quo, and rebels act according to their dissenting opinions. In contrast to the "diligent and trustworthy officials," the convictions these unconventional individuals put to paper are their very own. They don't attempt to elevate dogma, or any other established societal standards -- they are all dreamers who create something new and unique. For Zamyatin, this paradoxical tradition of tradition-breaking had long thrived especially in Russia, where creative genius often clashed with the authoritarian tsarist rule. Yet he felt that this tradition was at risk of finally disintegrating under the Bolshevik government, resulting in an urgent need to protect it.

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[1] Yevgeny Zamyatin. "I Am Afraid." *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 57.

Zamyatin's beliefs about what constitutes true literature emerge through his protagonist D-503 in *We*, a novel which was mostly written in 1919-1920.[2] The novel, set in a dystopian society during the 30th century, takes the form of D-503's diary. D-503, a content and loyal citizen of the totalitarian One State, is commissioned by the government to praise his society in a document that will be used as propaganda in the One State's expansionist campaign to new planets. D-503 often directly addresses his imagined audience, but he also digresses into a more personal realm, where he is clearly no longer thinking of his audience and only writing to work through his own thoughts. As D-503 writes, he unintentionally discovers a sense of self which contradicts the One State's tenet of collectivist identity, unleashes a literary imagination, and develops a soul. His growth as an individual violates the One State's laws and social norms, which he feels the need to confess to his writing, but he hides his development from the regime in an effort to protect his newfound, cherished, and forbidden humanity. Yet he begins to resist the regime more and more, whether it's through refusing to have his imagination surgically removed or showing compassion to so-called "criminals" who have also transgressed the One State's rules.

The first chapter of this thesis argues that Zamyatin's writing philosophy advocated for the necessity of creative revolution in order to propel literature into the future. Synthesizing Zamyatin's critical essays about literature and writing fiction reveals his concept of revolution, which can be described as "creative revolution." Creative revolution is a new idea, technique, or literary work that does not just rebel against the status quo, but also contributes to a constant process of innovation. The focus is on nourishing new life and forging ahead into the unknown, instead of settling for the comfort of the known. Creative revolution is the antithesis of

[2] J.A.E. Curtis. *The Englishman from Lebedian' - A Life of Evgeny Zamiatin (1884-1937)* . Academic Studies Press, 2013, p. 114.

"destructive revolution," which occurs when its proponents tear down opposition in order to prove superiority. The tenets of a particular destructive revolution become dogma intended to limit human thought, rather than challenging and expanding it. Zamyatin was troubled by the Bolsheviks' attempts at political dogmatization, and found that their influence infiltrated the world of literature, where they rewarded those who sang their praises and censored not only criticism, but anything that could be "temptation"[3] to consider different perspectives. Such a literary environment promised stagnation. In Zamyatin's conception, heresy (oppositional views which can spark innovation), love for humanity, a sense that one's work is an extension of one's self, imagination (or madness), and finally the intentional use of literary techniques all contribute to the vitality of literature that keeps its sights on tomorrow.

Given the writing philosophy laid out in Chapter One, Chapter Two of this thesis argues that Zamyatin's beliefs about writing led him to create dystopian fiction in order to explore the danger of his philosophy's demise. As Zamyatin understood it, the literary utopian genre is defined by the depiction of stagnant, perfected societies. He was not the first writer to distrust the genre's intentions, but he differed from his predecessors in his opinion that the heaven of utopia was hell itself. Utopian societies' goal to achieve stasis is contrary to Zamyatin's preference for constant revolution, and since he viewed revolution as essential to literature's survival, he would have seen the utopian genre as advocating for conditions which would stifle true literature. His abhorrence for the dangerous values of literary utopias likely led him to write a novel in the style of what would become known as dystopian fiction -- the presentation of hellish societies, rather than paradisaical ones. Chapter Two argues that Zamyatin designed the totalitarian regime in *We* to threaten the creation of true literature. The One State views itself as a utopia, because it aims to give its citizens happiness, but in order to do so, it strips its citizens of their freedom and

[3] Zamyatin, "I Am Afraid," p. 58.

individuality, turning them into machine-like beings that are supposed to behave predictably and obey their makers without the ability to question them. In the One State, ciphers are conditioned to accept a collectivist identity, technology is a source of dehumanization rather than revelation, and the concept of family is repressed. This dystopian society ultimately stifles ciphers' capacity for producing true literature. Yet D-503 demonstrates that contrary to the One State's claims, the human qualities necessary to create imaginative writing have not actually been successfully eradicated in society. Ciphers have only been conditioned to believe so.

Chapter Three of this thesis argues that in the One State of *We*, the written word functions as either a tool for intellectual subjugation to the regime's lies or liberation to search for truth. D-503 describes how literature is used to intellectually and emotionally persuade citizens to accept the regime's ideology as the only truth. However, when he begins to compose his records, the regime's influence on his mind begins to break down. Writing challenges him to examine himself and discover qualities that the regime has attempted to suppress in its population. Even though he's attempting to "record" his experiences, rather than write creatively, creativity is necessary to accurately convey his experiences. He unintentionally unlocks his imagination, leading him to contemplate possibilities beyond the limits of his own experiences or his One State education. D-503's writing becomes a form of confession as he admits to his imagined audience what he hides from the authorities. Self-examination, imagination, and confession spiritually purify him by engaging him in a constant cycle of searching which keeps him in touch with his humanity. His humanity is evidenced by his love and compassion for others, as well as his sense of connection to other individuals (as opposed to being simply part of the homogenous "we"). Ultimately, writing helps D-503 to reclaim his humanity.

In summary, this thesis argues that Zamyatin's vision of true literature, whether experienced as a writer or a reader, fosters humanity and thus challenges the influence of ideology. The thesis concludes by contemplating how Zamyatin's vision of dystopia, which predicted many aspects of the Soviet Union, continues to apply to modern Russia. The One State regime operates in a manner similar to how Vladimir Putin has long presided over Russia, a resemblance which has been reinforced by Putin's decision to invade Ukraine in February 2022 and his domestic tactics during the ensuing war. His regime attempts to inspire blind loyalty to the government through propaganda; it vilifies and terrorizes dissenters; and it presents its narrative as the single true narrative, while suppressing access to the counternarratives which challenge this claim. Of course, Zamyatin's novel is a limited lens for examining the war in Ukraine and the current political situation in Russia, but it also provides us with insights on how to explore the complex relationship between fiction and reality.

Chapter One: Creative Revolution in Zamyatin's Writing Philosophy

The seeds of the ideas that Zamyatin explores in *We* are scattered throughout his biography, stories, and literary essays in the years leading up to the writing of his masterful novel, but the build-up wasn't obvious. Zamyatin, who first began to receive attention from literary critics in 1911 and became more prominent throughout the 1910s, mainly wrote short stories (рассказы - *rasskazi*) and novellas (повести - *povesti*) typically set in the small towns, villages, or garrisons of provincial Russia. These stories are characterized by their employment of local dialects and took the form of the "folksy *skaz*," or "tale."[4] His novella *The Islanders* (1918), a satire of English society which was inspired by Zamyatin's experience as a naval engineer designing icebreaker ships in England during WWI, signals a departure from his folksy tales. It anticipates *We* as "an urban tale" that is "more spare in its language" and "more modernist in its narrative organization."[5] *The Islanders* expands on the satirical elements of Zamyatin's earlier stories by demonstrating "the smug self-satisfaction of the spiritually bankrupt urban bourgeoisie, which were neither more intelligent nor more human than the provincials;"[6] this satire builds up to *We*, which is connected to the satirical tradition of the anti-utopian genre. Yet readers of *The Islanders* could not possibly have expected the futuristic setting of *We*, featuring speedy "aeros," the Table of Hours dictating every citizen's schedule, and the horrifying totalitarian One State. How then, did Zamyatin come to write one of the first literary dystopias?

This chapter aims to demonstrate that Zamyatin believed that his conception of revolution, called here "creative revolution," propelled literature into the future, and that his writing philosophy ultimately inspired his vision of a literary dystopia. Zamyatin was attuned to

[4] Alex M. Shane. *The Life and Works of Evgenij Zamjatin.* University of California Press, 1968, p. 97.
[5] Curtis, p. 65.
[6] Shane, p. 133.

his contemporaries' writing and he had strong opinions about whether their writing accomplished what literature should during the ferment following the Russian Revolution of 1917. He voiced such opinions in his critical essays about the state of contemporary literature and about the writing process, both of which demonstrate his energetic engagement with literary theory and his passion for original works of literature. Many of his essays include ideas that readers of *We* would recognize. More significantly, his critical compositions and other biographical material can explain, as best as it is possible to explain the creative process, how Zamyatin came to write the book that would usher in a new literary genre: dystopia.

Zamyatin's core beliefs about literature, which encapsulate the topics of rebellion and revolution, imagination and irrationality, and originality, were influenced by a variety of events in his life. He advocated for writing that was free from dogma and contributed to the constant evolution of human thought. He emphasized the importance of creation in the creative process, as opposed to essentially copying previous literature or simply destroying other works which challenge one's beliefs (a Bolshevik response which distressed him beginning in the late 1910s). He was so sensitive to the generative elements of literature that he considered writing to be an experience of parenthood -- specifically of motherhood -- and he cherished writing as his *only* experience of fostering new life. Zamyatin felt that the qualities he valued in writing were in danger during the years following the Bolsheviks' seizure of power, and after his experience in England he was also disappointed in the West's ability to nurture such qualities. To an extent, *We* is specifically a writer's dystopia, where Zamyatin dramatizes a struggle for creative freedom and progress, demonstrating their importance for the endurance of the human spirit.

Tracing the Origins of Rebelliousness

From his days in school, Zamyatin associated writing with rebelliousness. In an autobiographical essay, he reflects that when he graduated from gymnasium in Voronezh, the school inspector showed him the literary work of another alum, which included an epigraph deriding the school. As Zamyatin remembers it, the inspector told him:

> "Fine, isn't it? He also finished with a gold medal, and what does he write? Of course, he ended up in prison. My advice to you is: Don't write. Don't follow this path."[7]

Zamyatin clearly takes pride in his defiance of his advice, given that he included the anecdote in an autobiography so short that every detail must have been carefully selected. The anecdote conveys an understanding of writing as rebellious; writing can challenge the social status quo to such a degree that institutions such as schools criticize it and the law censors it. Zamyatin wryly notes that the inspector's "admonition had no effect," emphasizing how rebellious he was in pursuing writing despite warnings against it. The anecdote also elucidates Zamyatin's understanding of rebellion as defiance against the status quo, as maintained by authorities or dominant cultural beliefs. He viewed writing, then, as a form of resistance.

Zamyatin's rebellious character shaped the course of his entire life, but the scarcity of literature obviously influenced by his political activities during his youth indicates that he was more invested in the idea of rebellion than the goals of any specific movement. In the summer of 1905, as a student of naval engineering, he returned from a stint studying on the steamship *Rossiia* to Odessa just in time for the mutiny on the battleship *Potemkin*.[8] Zamyatin spent a day

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[7] Yevgeny Zamyatin. "Autobiography (1929)." *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 9.

[8] The crew of the ship, "already demoralised by the defeats during the Russo-Japanese War," protested against "being served rotting meat." The officers threatened them for speaking out, and the crew broke into mutiny. The naval squadron sent to repress the uprising also rebelled (Curtis 13). The mutiny was the first demonstration of revolutionary activity in Russia's armed forces, and as such is considered one of the key events in the 1905 Russian Revolution (Harcave, 420).

and a night wandering around Odessa “amid shots, fires, rioting.”[9] He wasn’t personally involved in the mutiny, but he reveled in the revolutionary spirit it sparked in the city, dangerous as it was. He returned to St. Petersburg in the midst of the 1905 Revolution, which was an anti-tsarist uprising triggered by the events of Bloody Sunday in January of that year and is considered a precursor to the Russian Revolution of 1917.[10] Zamyatin was enthralled by the whirl of strikes and student meetings, and he was eager to join in the dissemination of ideas, covertly using a printing press in his dorm room to create pamphlets.[11] He joined the Bolsheviks because “[i]n those years, being a Bolshevik meant following the line of greatest resistance.”[12] Evidently Zamyatin was then primarily interested in the rebellious spirit. Though his acute political understanding should not be discredited, he seemed more attracted to the spirit of rebellion than to specific policies. After all, the Revolution does not feature heavily in the content of his stories. “Three Days” (1913), inspired by Zamyatin’s time in Odessa, is the only story to closely explore an aspect of the Revolution. Aside from that tale, it only plays a minor role in “One” (1908) and “An Impractical Chap” (1914).[13] Still, the consequences of his political involvement shaped his life. His party activity led to his arrest in November of 1905 and imprisonment in the spring of 1906. His political record defined his life for much of his twenties, and he spent the years between 1908 and 1911 dodging the authorities in Petersburg, since he was officially banned from Petersburg after his arrest.[14]

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[9] Zamyatin, “Autobiography (1929),” p. 10.

[10] Sidney Harcave. “Nineteen-Five Revolution.” *Dictionary of the Russian Revolution*, edited by George Jackson and Robert Devlin, Greenwood Press, 1989, p. 419.

[11] Yevgeny Zamyatin. “Autobiography (1924).” *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 5.

[12] Zamyatin, “Autobiography (1929),” p. 10. With the phrase “In those years,” Zamyatin pointedly clarifies his early support for the Bolshevik party and expresses his disdain for the brutal methods and conformist, authoritarian attitude of the Bolsheviks after the 1917 revolution.

[13] Shane, pp. 112-13.

[14] Curtis, p. 26.

Zamyatin's rebellious political activities turned out to be conducive to writing. Being a rebellious character guided his writing career in unexpected ways. He credited his struggle with the authorities in Petersburg as an impetus for his writing career: "If I have any place in Russian literature, I owe it entirely to the Saint Petersburg Department of Secret Police: in 1911 they exiled me from Petersburg, and for the next two years I led an extremely isolated life in Lakhta. There, in the white winter silence and the green silence of summer, I wrote *A Provincial Tale*."[15] He considered *A Provincial Tale* as the beginning of his serious writing career,[16] thus connecting his development as a writer to his rebellious political activity. His nod to the Secret Police's role in his journey as a writer is ironic (and perhaps a little smug), because their attempts to punish him for rebelling against authority set him down a path on which he became an even more outspoken critic. His use of irony demonstrates his pride in continuing to defy authority through his writing.

Yet Zamyatin's exile was not a direct source of inspiration for the content of his stories, as was the case with his earliest political involvement. While in Lakhta, he didn't write about his anti-monarchical activities, nor did he write in protest against his persecution. Instead, the effect of his exile on his writing was essentially that it gave him the time and space to write. The distinction is even more clear when one takes into account Zamyatin's stimulus to write the story: he was traveling by rail from Lebedyan' to Petersburg (evidently before his exile), and when he opened the blinds of his window at a station, he spotted a station policeman with "a heavy forehead pulled low over the tiny, bearlike eyes, [and] a grim square jaw."[17] The officer's distinctive appearance and the name of the station, Barybino, inspired the character of Anfim

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[15] Yevgeny Zamyatin. "Autobiography (1922)." *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 4.
[16] Zamyatin, "Autobiography (1924)," p. 6.
[17] Yevgeny Zamyatin. "Backstage." *A Soviet Heretic*: *Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 192.

Baryba, a schoolboy in the provinces who is expelled from his home after failing his exams and becomes increasingly cruel and inhuman through his adventures.[18] Zamyatin's story is rooted in a deep interest for his characters, unlikable though they were, and the contents of his story explore their lives in the provinces. It's not a commentary on his exile, and in fact his inspiration for the story struck before his exile. He didn't write *A Provincial Tale* to rebel, but because a brief impression had set his imagination aflame.

Zamyatin's attraction to rebellion began to evolve after his exile, perhaps as a result of the persecution which became characteristic of his writing career. No records indicate that he continued his socialist political activity after his 1905 arrest,[19] but his stories continued to ruffle the authorities' feathers, during both tsarist and Bolshevik rule. For example, his story "At the Back of Beyond" (1914), which paints a graphic picture of the unpleasant sexual practices of an officer serving at a naval base in the Far Eastern town of Vladivostok, was targeted by the censors when it was published in the journal *Zavety* for its offensive depiction of Russian officers. The journal was forced to reprint the issue with a different story in place of Zamyatin's.[20] He experienced even more serious consequences after the Revolution; he was detained by the Bolshevik police, known as the Cheka, several times in 1919, likely due to his "oppositional publications."[21] Perhaps Zamyatin's persecution, as well as his transition from a politically-active student to a dedicated writer, inspired him to think about rebellion in a new light. If rebellion was going to be followed by such severe punishment, it had to be more meaningful than resistance for resistance's sake. Zamyatin's interest evolved from rebellion to revolution -- from defiance against the present, to defiance with a vision for building the future.

[18] Shane, p. 100.
[19] Curtis, p. 27.
[20] Ibid, pp. 41-42.
[21] Ibid, p. 99.

Revolution in Literature

"What is revolution?" Zamyatin raises this question in his essay "On Literature, Revolution, Entropy, and Other Matters," which he answers by defining revolution as when "[t]wo dead, dark stars collide with an inaudible, deafening crash and light a new star…."[22] Revolution, then, is a transformation from death to life. In his original text, when describing the creation of a new star, Zamyatin uses the word "зажигают"[23] (za-zhi-*ga*-yut), which can be translated as "to light," but the translation "to ignite" conveys Zamyatin's point more forcefully. The Russian prefix "за-" has connotations of setting a process into motion, so his choice of the word "зажигать" emphasizes how the distinct end of one era triggers the beginning of the next, separate era. The "dead, dark stars" of Zamyatin's analogy have ceased to offer light. In order to serve a purpose, they cannot simply be revitalized or become themselves new, but instead they must be used to contribute to the creation of something entirely new. Zamyatin's stars could suggest knowledge -- their light serves to guide in the dark of ignorance. However, they die out, just as thinking that was once enlightening can lose its capacity for revelations. The creation of new stars from the dead is necessary to keep the night sky bright.

Throughout his essay, Zamyatin argues that the role of literature is to constantly foster revolution. He writes that artists and writers "sink into satiated slumber in forms once invented and twice perfected. And they lack the strength to wound themselves, to cease loving what they once loved, to leave their old, familiar apartments filled with the scent of laurel leaves and walk away into the open field, to start anew."[24] Inventing an effective literary technique can be enlightening, but it can only contribute to progress through the process of its creation. If writers

[22] Yevgeny Zamyatin. "On Literature, Revolution, Entropy, and Other Matters." *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 107.
[23] Yevgeny Zamyatin. *Лица* [*Litsa*; *Faces*]. Inter-Language Literary Associates, New York, 1967, p. 249.
[24] Zamyatin, "On Literature," p. 112.

allow themselves to be "satiated" by perfection, they lose the hunger to pursue new inventions, locking them into a torpid state akin to "slumber." Slumber itself is akin to death, as Zamyatin notes, and these writers will no longer be creating works which are alive. For Zamyatin, literary perfection is not the endgame, because "great literature… knows no final numbers."[25] Literature must constantly evolve to remain alive, and in fact mistakes are more conducive to this ambition than perfection. Zamyatin distinguishes not between the dead and the living, but between "people who are dead-alive, and people who are alive-alive." The former "also write, walk, speak, act," but are restricted to flawless perfection, while those who "are constantly in error, in search, in questions, in torment" are truly alive.[26] The unwillingness to move beyond perfection deadens literature and prevents it from achieving its true goal of always pushing forward into the untested and unknown. Zamyatin's demand that writers "wound themselves" by pushing beyond the comfort of perfection acknowledges how painful it is to break away from the safety of tried-and-true formulas. Yet he is uncompromising about the necessity to prioritize innovation in order to produce what he calls "true literature" -- literature that is alive and which fosters new life through revolution.

Creative vs. Destructive Revolution

Zamyatin's essays and fiction implicitly distinguish between true revolution, and the illusion of revolution, which he witnessed in the form of the Bolsheviks' institutionalization of their beliefs. True revolution is part of an eternal process, in which it aims to create and to contribute to a lasting cycle of creation. Thus true revolution can also be described as "creative revolution." Creative revolution involves destruction, as all revolutions must involve destruction to some extent as "dead, dark stars collide," as Zamyatin described revolution. Yet the emphasis

[25] Zamyatin, "On Literature," p. 111.
[26] Ibid, p. 110.

of creative revolution is not on collision, but on the ignition of a new star. The goal of creative revolution is, simply, *to create new life*. Creative revolution is the antithesis of "destructive revolution," which Zamyatin wouldn't consider to be revolution at all, but this chapter will refer to it as such in order to draw a clearer contrast between the two ideas. Destructive revolution directs collisions in order to obliterate opposing ideas, not to ignite new ones. Zamyatin opposed the destructive revolution he saw during the Russian Civil War, during which the Bolsheviks aimed not for discovery and growth, but for the imposition of "Bolshevik Communism as the sole truth."[27] Their goal indicates that their "revolution" was meant to be what Zamyatin called a final revolution, a term he used in *We* to describe a social, political, or cultural movement that is meant to impose supposedly immutable rules. It might be called "revolution," but it's not truly one if it's not open to eventually giving way to another revolution. Zamyatin argues that there was no such thing as a final revolution. In his essay, he cites a passage from *We* in which he compares the "final revolution" to "the final number," which of course doesn't exist because "the number of numbers is infinite."[28] Every revolution is followed by another revolution, so there's no final revolution. The new life of creative revolution is meant to eventually give way to another life, and another. Destructive revolution is intended to be an end, not a part of a cycle.

For Zamyatin, the role of creative revolution in fiction begins with the heresy of opposing the status quo, but opposition is not the end goal -- keeping literature moving forward into the future is. His aversion to the "status quo" wasn't simply perversity, but an aversion to stagnation, which is always a risk when people wish to maintain the status quo. Zamyatin was in favor of shaking up the social order, and he viewed heresy -- a view contrary to dogmatic beliefs -- as the key to accomplishing this. He considered heretics to be "the only (bitter) remedy against the

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[27] Shane, p. 22.
[28] Zamyatin, *We*, qtd. in Zamyatin, "On Literature," p. 107.

entropy of human thought" because they challenge stagnation in "science, religion, social life, or art."[29] Heresy wasn't simply for the sake of standing against the status quo, because an oppositional view can be as stagnant as the original view. Heresy was in service of intellectual progress -- the idea which would ignite the explosion that is revolution. Heresy still had to be a constructive force, a belief he demonstrates in his article "Tomorrow" when he describes how revolutions evolve: "Yesterday, the thesis; today, the antithesis, and tomorrow, the synthesis."[30] He advocates for antithesis, a stance against the status quo of the thesis, but both had to be synthesized into something new:

> Today is doomed to die -- because yesterday died, and because tomorrow will be born. Such is the wise and cruel law. Cruel, because it condemns to eternal dissatisfaction those who already today see the distant peaks of tomorrow; wise, because eternal dissatisfaction is the only pledge of eternal movement forward, eternal creation.[31]

By looking beyond what already exists in the present, creative revolution facilitates the "eternal movement forward" into a future of its own creation. The movement forward is never complete, leaving its contributors in "eternal dissatisfaction." Yet this recalls Zamyatin's quote about the artists who sink into "satiated slumber" once they achieve perfection. Dissatisfaction is more productive than satisfaction, constantly propelling artists forward. To effectively move forward, in a manner which can be eternally sustained, artists can't stop with heresy. Their antithesis must be synthesized. True artists don't seek to destroy the past, but to build on it, even when swerving off into a completely unexpected direction. In this way, creative revolution doesn't seek to kill

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[29] Zamyatin, "On Literature," p. 108.

[30] Yevgeny Zamyatin. "Tomorrow." *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 51.

[31] Ibid.

old ideas the way destructive revolution does -- in a way, creative revolution keeps them alive by turning them into a fresh, new concept.

Although Zamyatin desired revolutionary writing, he warned that authors needed to avoid an ideologically-driven approach in order to foster the creative revolutions that imbibe literature with life. Attempts to write a literary work which pushes an ideological agenda will likely produce stagnant prose, as Zamyatin suggested when he wrote that a writer "who can only photograph the people and events he had actually seen, is creatively impotent and will not go far."[32] Writers who wish to advocate for an ideology through their literature cannot write creatively, in the same way that writers attempting to "photograph" their previous observations lack creative potential, because in both cases the artists are limited by what they already know. In order to ignite a creative revolution, writers must be willing to push beyond what they know and surprise themselves in the realm of the unknown. The writing process must be searching. It should be a freedom from what's been accomplished before, while ideology is fettering.

In order for heresy to have a creative capacity, instead of simply becoming another stiff form of ideology, Zamyatin advocated that writers open themselves to inspiration, allowing their ideas to develop organically. In one of his lectures on writing fiction at the *Дом искусств* (House of Arts) in Petrograd, Zamyatin explained to his students that while it's certainly legitimate for a writer to create a plot through the process of "deduction," in which the writer begins working with an abstract idea, ultimately "the writer who uses [this method] risks slipping into scholasticism." Zamyatin preferred the "inductive" process, in which

> some trivial and often unremarkable occurence or person strikes the writer's imagination and gives him the initial impulse. The writer's creative imagination at

[32] Yevgeny Zamyatin. "Theme and Plot." *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 166.

> such a time is evidently in a state that may be compared to that of a solution in the process of crystallization. It is enough to throw the last pinch of salt into the saturated solution, and the entire solution begins to solidify, crystal growing on crystal until there is a whole fantastic structure.[33]

Even just considering this method evidently captures Zamyatin's imagination, prompting a lengthy and passionate comparison, whereas he describes the deduction method relatively clinically. The metaphor of chemical reaction is very similar to his metaphor of creative revolution as being ignited by the collision of old ideas, both describing how new ideas are formed. His metaphor about creative impulses complements the metaphor of creative revolution by emphasizing that a collision should not be forced, but must instead develop organically. Revolution is necessary for maintaining the spark of life in his conception of true literature, so it must also come *from life* in order to avoid "slipping into scholasticism." An unplanned genesis allows an idea to remain dynamic, meaning it can lead a writer in many unexpected directions which may allow them to transcend the limits of their personal history.

Sacrifice and Love in Revolution

Genuine revolutions often come with a great personal cost for the heretics who inspire them, illustrating that one of the clearest distinctions between creative and destructive revolution is who suffers as a result. As a breach from the status quo, creative revolution often encounters strong opposition. Zamyatin experienced this himself as many of his works were censored, or he was himself criticized or even arrested for his rebellious opinions.[34] He was also aware of the Russian government's historical trend of persecuting its most innovative writers, including many

[33] Zamyatin, "Theme and Plot," p. 166.
[34] Alex M. Shane. Introduction. *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, pp. xi-xii; Curtis, p. 99.

of his contemporaries; he noted in one of his autobiographies that he'd been arrested in 1919 alongside several other writers and artists, including the poet Alexander Blok.[35] Zamyatin believed that true heretics must be stubborn and "not bow to anything," thus resisting pressure to conform.[36] However, this stubbornness in the face of the dominant culture's disapproval often leads to the heretic's suffering. Zamyatin considered Christ to be one such heretic[37] who was punished by the dominant culture for challenging the status quo. He calls his crucifixion a "victory," believing that "Christ victorious in practical terms" would have led the heretic to become "a paunchy priest in a silk-lined purple robe, who dispenses benedictions with his right hand and collects donations with the left."[38] Zamyatin doesn't explicitly explain how heretics become corrupted, but the image of Christ as a representative of an institution is associated with personal material gain as Christ exchanges "benedictions" for payment. This image suggests that Christ could have become the "paunchy priest" by making his beliefs palatable to masses, allowing him to assimilate into a dogmatic institution and thus compromising his convictions in order to enjoy material comforts. His crucifixion, then, is a victory because it demonstrates his refusal to compromise his beliefs. Heretics who follow in Christ's footsteps must be willing to be hurt for the sake of their convictions, of their art.

A heretic's willingness for self-sacrifice distinguishes creative revolution from destructive revolution. During the Russian Civil War, Zamyatin found that the Bolsheviks did not suffer themselves, but made *others* suffer as they strove to canonize their beliefs as the only acceptable ideology. Zamyatin wrote a number of short works expressing his contempt for the Bolsheviks' methods, beginning with "Thursday" in late 1917. The story is about how an

[35] Curtis, p. 99.
[36] Yevgeny Zamyatin. "Scythians?" *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 33.
[37] Zamyatin, "Tomorrow," p. 51. Here Zamyatin explicitly calls Christ a heretic.
[38] Zamyatin, "Scythians?" p. 22.

"ignorant older brother (called "*bol'shen'kiy*" to associate him with the Bolsheviks) mindlessly slaughters anyone and anything which disagrees with him."[39] One of his other significant works of the period, "The Dragon," which was first published in March 1918 and later appeared in English, depicts a "'dragon' man who boasts of having mercilessly despatched a member of the intelligentsia."[40] Both works were clearly written with the political intention of condemning the Bolsheviks for their violent reaction to their opponents, which elaborates on Zamyatin's philosophy of revolution, indicating that he demanded more from heresy than dissent for its own sake. A belief or opinion that opposes the status quo is not inherently the same as revolution -- it must have creative potential in order for it to be truly revolutionary.

Zamyatin considered love for humanity essential for creative revolution. Zamyatin found that many works of contemporary Russian literature were motivated by hatred, which is why he didn't consider such literature to be "genuine." True literature is creative, but Zamyatin warned that "[i]t is not possible to build on negative emotions" such as hatred, because it has a "destructive effect upon the human psyche." Literature produced on such foundations cannot contribute to further revolution. He concluded that "genuine literature will come only when we replace hatred for man with love for man."[41] His phrase echoes his earlier assertion, written in 1921, that "true literature can exist only where it is created, not by diligent and trustworthy officials, but by madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels and skeptics."[42] The two statements are not contradictory, but complementary. The revolution and change necessary to propel

[39] Curtis, p. 88.
[40] Ibid, p. 89.
[41] Yevgeny Zamyatin. "The Goal." *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 127. This essay was written several years after Zamyatin finished *We*, but it is still useful for understanding his writing philosophy at the time he wrote the novel. The beliefs he expresses in the essay align with his love for humanity and conviction that creation is essential in literature, evident in his essays written before or during the production of *We*. It is likely that the essay articulates explicitly for the first time long-standing opinions.
[42] Zamyatin, "I Am Afraid," p. 57.

literature forward, to keep it original rather than predictable, stale, and dogmatic, are often produced by writers on the fringes of society, but their perspectives must still be grounded in love for humankind (even if they disagree with the ideology of the social institutions they sustain). Misanthropes have little to offer humankind -- how could they gift the object of their resentment with anything constructive?

Zamyatin's writing may sometimes lead readers to expect that he thought poorly of the masses, but ultimately a thorough reading of his works conveys that he was an undeniably fierce lover of the human spirit and humankind. He could be very reserved and distant from other humans,[43] and his writing sometimes suggests that he was a solitary artist, especially given his praises of the true artist as "a solitary, savage horseman -- a Scythian," who values above all else "freedom, solitude, his horse, the wide expanse of the steppe."[44] Such declarations indicate that Zamyatin relishes an artist's separation from the masses, viewing it as one of the qualities which enable the artist to create true art. Yet Zamyatin complicates this impression of writing later in his essay, criticizing a contemporary literary critic, R. V. Ivanov-Razumnik, for his vision of the Scythian. Zamyatin argues that Ivanov-Razumnik's conception of the Scythian neglected "the Russian tenderness and love for the lowliest human being, the least blade of grass," which he credits as "the fundamental, the best" quality "of the Russian soul," a soul he also defines by "the unquenchable Russian longing for peace, for all mankind."[45] Zamyatin certainly values the

[43] Curtis describes him as someone who "never seemed to belong to his own time… nor did he ever quite belong to his own place -- he fitted in neither to provincial Lebedian', nor bourgeois England, nor Soviet Leningrad, nor émigré Paris" (2). She also described "the apparent cold restraint of his outward manner," perhaps enhanced by the "somewhat formal guise as an 'Englishman,'" which he had adopted after living in England (87). These descriptions match the image of Zamyatin as a solitary, isolated revolutionary fighting against the masses. Yet one should not mistake the adult Zamyatin as friendless and uncaring -- he "knew everyone, corresponded with everyone, participated in countless organisations and journals" (Curtis 3). His students remembered him as disciplined, sometimes even severe, yet many of them remembered him with affection which must have been reciprocated (Curtis 108). It's likely that Zamyatin was perhaps restrained in his displays of emotion, but deeply felt himself to be in kinship with his fellow humans, with a "faith in brotherly love" (Shane, Introduction, xv).

[44] Zamyatin, "Scythians?" p. 21.

[45] Ibid, pp. 29-30.

Scythian's ability to resist assimilation into the dominant culture, arguing that Scythians must necessarily be solitary, because "if they can be counted in hosts, they are not stubborn, freedom-loving Scythians."[46] Yet he did not view a Scythian's lonely existence and rejection of the masses as a rejection of the human spirit.

Zamyatin himself demonstrates love for "the lowliest human being" in many of his stories. The personalities of characters such as Baryba and the grotesque Chebotarikha from *A Provincial Tale*, or the lewd officer from "At the Back of Beyond," demonstrate Zamyatin's full awareness of humankind's capacity for depravity. Though these characters can often be quite monstrous, he insists that as he wrote his stories, he was in love with such characters, reflecting that "there is, perhaps, beauty in ugliness, in hideousness."[47] Zamyatin does not romanticize these characters -- they are still ugly and hideous. But his ability to find "beauty" in these qualities suggests that he still saw them as human beings, even though he vehemently opposed their behavior. Perhaps it was Zamyatin's ability to recognize the capacity for depravity as a mark of being human that gave him hope that this baseness could be overcome. He viewed true literature as a key to saving people's humanity in Russia, arguing that "the only weapon worthy of man - of tomorrow's man - is the word." He describes the word as a "weapon" in order to draw a contrast to the violence he saw overwhelming Russia: "The brutal Middle Ages are returning, the value of human life is falling precipitously, a new wave of European pogroms is rolling on."[48] He demonstrates that violence is dehumanizing, including the violence employed in destructive "revolution." However, humanity can be reclaimed through the written word, through true literature and creative revolution.

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[46] Zamyatin, "Scythians?" p. 33.
[47] Yevgeny Zamyatin. "The Psychology of Creative Work." *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 161.
[48] Zamyatin, "Tomorrow," p. 52.

Childbearing

Zamyatin and his wife Lyudmila Nikolaevna (neé Usova) never had children, an element of Zamyatin's life which went on to influence both the content and conception of his writing. The couple was grieved by their childlessness, and consoled themselves by regarding a teddy bear named Misha and a boy doll called Rostislav as family members, a fact well known to their acquaintances.[49] For example, poet Anna Akhmatova later signed a photo portrait for Rostislav, who was also depicted waving beside Zamyatin in Yury Annenkov's 1921 portrait.[50] Curtis also identifies Zamyatin's students (and even the icebreaking ships he designed as an engineer) as surrogate children.[51]

Zamyatin's writing, too, was a sort of surrogate, though the word "surrogate" might not accurately capture the sentiment. Writing wasn't a replacement for parenthood, it was another experience of it. He wrote himself, "My children are my books: I have no others."[52] Zamyatin often associated writing with reproduction, which he expressed through D-503's first diary entry in *We*:

> I suppose this resembles what a woman experiences when she first hears a new pulse within her -- the pulse of a tiny, unseeing, mini-being. This text is me, and simultaneously not me. And it will feed for many months on my sap, my blood, and then, it will be ripped from my self and placed at the foot of the One State.[53]

The last sentence in D-503's analogy might be slightly more violent than Zamyatin's own experience, since D-503 is writing with the intention of providing a service to the One State, but

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[49] The pair's family unit was completed by the presence of their housekeeper Agrafina "Agra" Pavlovna Grozdova, who looked after the Zamyatins from 1913 to 1931, at which point the couple left the Soviet Union (Curtis 39).
[50] Curtis, p. 104. The portrait can be seen on page 4 of this thesis.
[51] Ibid, pp. 104-5.
[52] Yevgeny Zamyatin."A Piece for an Anthology on Books." *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 131.
[53] Yevgeny Zamyatin. *We*. Translated by Natasha Randall, Modern Library, 2006, p.4.

the first part of the description likely reflects Zamyatin's own experience. Though one can't assume that a novel reflects a writer's opinion, Zamyatin did reiterate the comparison while lecturing at the House of the Arts, around the time he wrote *We*, indicating he found the analogy reflective of his own experience. Indeed, he rather plagiarized his own novel in his lecture "Theme and Plot" when he describes the characters of novels as "living people" who "had been given birth by the writer, who created them out of himself."[54]

Another one of Zamyatin's lectures on writing from this period expands on the analogy of motherhood. He acknowledged that the idea wasn't original to him and mused, "No wonder [Heinrich] Heine wrote in his *Gedanken*: 'Every book must go through its natural process of growth, like a child. No honest woman gives birth to her child before nine months.'" He put it in his own words as well:

> [Motherhood] is a most natural analogy because a writer, like a woman, like a mother, creates living people who suffer and rejoice, mock and are laughed at. And like the mother, who creates her child out of herself, the writer also creates his people out of himself, nourishes them with his own self - with a certain nonmaterial substance which is a part of his being.[55]

Zamyatin here reflects on two interesting aspects of the writing process. As his passage from *We* also demonstrates, the writing process can be likened to having a child in the womb, due to the effort of creating a piece of literature out of one's own self. Zamyatin's "certain nonmaterial substance" is more abstract, but it echoes D-503's description of nourishing his writing with his "sap," expressing a part of oneself that is essential to one's life force. Here Zamyatin adds about the child's life beyond the safety of the womb, growing up into a person who is at the mercy of

[54] Zamyatin,"Theme and Plot," p. 165.
[55] Zamyatin, "The Psychology of Creative Work," p. 161.

the world. The comparison extends beyond the personal and internal creative process to a parent-like concern for the child's fate at the hands of others.

Much later in the 1920's, Zamyatin reiterated his view of his completed works as living beings, exploring how he balanced his protective love for them with his conviction in their literary purpose. At this point, the official persecution of his writing had intensified, and he found the hostility towards his books painful to endure: "When street urchins throw stones at them from behind a corner, I suffer."[56] His description indicates a lowly opinion of those who abuse his books, painting them as "street urchins" lacking in education or culture, whose act of throwing stones "from behind a corner" indicates cowardice and the absence of open-minded empathy. Despite his concern for his books, Zamyatin's writing on the subject also develops a sense of urgency for their purpose. He brings in his characteristic scientific perspective, noting that "there are books of the same chemical composition as dynamite," but adds the literary twist that "the only difference is that a piece of dynamite explodes once, while a book explodes a thousand times." Zamyatin's grief at seeing his children mistreated is intermingled with a sense of confidence in their duty to change the world. His description that "a book explodes a thousand times" recalls his definition of revolution as an explosion, indicating that his books are a part of the cycle of creative revolution. His mixed feelings suggest that he's experiencing the self-sacrifice a true heretic must accept -- in order for them to fulfill what he considers their potential and contribute to the dynamic advancement of human thought, he must allow them to be exposed to the very narrow-mindedness he seeks to challenge.

[56] Zamyatin, "A Piece for an Anthology on Books," p. 131.

Imagination and Irrationality

Zamyatin was certainly a man of science and logic, which influenced his writing, but he considered imagination and irrationality to be the heart of writing. He distinguished between "creative work" and "craft," explaining once to his students that "only Beethoven could have written the *Moonlight Sonata*," though many can perform it well. He warned at the beginning of his lecture series on writing that he could not truly teach his students to write, because writing should be both organic and original, but he could teach them the *craft* of writing, the techniques which were necessary for creative work. Continuing with his example, he noted that "in order to compose his *Moonlight Sonata*, Beethoven first had to learn the laws of melody, harmony, counterpoint."[57] Rationality, logic, and craft have their place in refining great art, but they cannot be the source of creativity.

Zamyatin considered the driving factor of creative work to be the imagination, one of the mind's irrational functions. He explained that "the creative process takes place chiefly in the mysterious realm of the subconscious," while conscious and "logical thought" could only be attributed a "secondary, subordinate role." He considered this to be the reason most writers don't discuss the creative process -- because it's not logical and therefore easily explained.[58] The difficulty of rationally explaining writing is apparent in Zamyatin's own explanation. His lecture is full of comparisons (such as the difference between Beethoven's composition and performances of Beethoven's work), analogies, and imagery. These literary devices serve to illustrate ideas through imaginative description.

Zamyatin explained the writing process through the description of hypnotism. He explained how someone who is hypnotized engages in the creative process by experiencing

[57] Zamyatin, "The Psychology of Creative Work," pp. 159-160.
[58] Ibid, p. 161

sensations which the world is not actually inflicting on him. For example, if a hypnotist gives his subject water and tells him it is champagne, "the subject will immediately experience all the associations, the taste, and the emotions connected with champagne."[59] Zamyatin identified a hypnotized subject's mental experience with a writer's creative process, except that "the writer must combine within himself both the hypnotist and the subject. He must hypnotize himself, put his own consciousness to sleep; and this, of course, requires very strong will power and a very lively imagination."[60] Zamyatin's comparison depicts the duality of rationality and imagination within the writer. Interestingly enough, imagination isn't used just to express original ideas -- writers must also use it in order to allow themselves to delve into writing by overcoming their rationality. The writing process requires a suspension of disbelief similar to what readers experience when reading a work of literature. Writers need to believe in their ability to create, rather than examining their process, since attempts to analyze oneself during the creative process brings "the conscious mind to the fore" and halts the process, as Zamyatin points out. Writers who cannot perform this self-hypnosis become stuck as "the conscious mind analyzes every word, revises it, reorders it."[61]

Imaginative irrationality can become, figuratively speaking, madness. Even before he began writing seriously, Zamyatin associated creatively-inclined thinking with madness. Just after his release in 1906 from a St. Petersburg prison, he wrote to Lyudmila (whom he had met through Party activity shortly before his imprisonment) about how he was spending his days back in Lebedyan':

> I sit alone with my books, and with my… fantasies. My fantasies? Do you think they will pass? But how will they pass if I don't wish them to pass…? How is a

[59] Zamyatin, "The Psychology of Creative Work," p. 161.
[60] Ibid, p. 162.
[61] Ibid, p. 163.

man who is ill to be cured, if he doesn't wish to be treated, to take any medicine?

Is it necessary to be treated?[62]

Curtis points out that Zamyatin's musings are no doubt influenced by his anxious desire "to impress" Lyudmila "with the nobility of his feelings,"[63] but his letter still demonstrates a budding understanding of fantasy and imagination as forms of madness. He references madness in a figurative sense, rather than a medical understanding, although he still used medicine as part of his literary interpretation of imaginative thinking. His fantasies, like illness, contradict standards of health and normalcy. They are internal conditions which separate him from the rest of the world. Yet Zamyatin finds this distance alluring, especially in the sleepy monotony surrounding him in Lebedyan'. His question about whether his fantasies will pass is rhetorical, allowing him to introduce his analogy of illness. His protagonist D-503 asks similar questions as he develops into a writer, though unlike Zamyatin, he's genuinely conflicted.

Madness, as an extreme version of imagination, can contribute to the creation of true literature by inspiring writers to think of possibilities beyond the status quo. In fact, Zamyatin ultimately viewed madness as essential for writing, reflecting that "true literature can exist only where it is created, not by diligent and trustworthy officials, but by madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels and skeptics."[64] Zamyatin's description of the "diligent and trustworthy officials" refers to both the government authorities who were trying to control literature and to the writers who produced texts in support of the regime.[65] Both groups are trying to push an agenda, and as such, cannot create "true literature." True literature can only be created by people who fight not to maintain what already exists, but to find what else is possible. The "madmen,

[62] Zamyatin, qtd. in Curtis p. 6.
[63] Curtis, p. 6.
[64] Zamyatin, "I Am Afraid," p. 57.
[65] Curtis, p. 106.

hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels and skeptics" that Zamyatin describes are all viewed by society as outsiders because of their ability to imagine alternative situations to the way things are. In the specific context of Zamyatin's essay, they all challenge the Bolsheviks' ideals, motivating the Bolsheviks to condemn their literary contributions. The "madmen" Zamyatin references aren't suffering a clinical condition, but society calls them "mad" for creating something unprecedented. Yet this very quality is necessary to spark the revolutions which keep literature moving forward and thus "true."

Art of Literary Craft

Zamyatin valued writing as a form of communication in which *how* writers express themselves enhances *what* they say, and he expected literary craft to lend itself to the creation of original works. His opinions on literary elements such as theme and character convey that though he considered innovation essential, there were still eternal rules of logic in literature to obey. For example, he considered "unity of the dramatis personae" as essential to the modern novel as it had been in ancient drama.[66] The story has to be centered around a hero or group of characters, who must appear throughout the entire novel. Secondary characters can come and go as needed. In Zamyatin's view, this "law of unity" stems from "psychological, rather than technical, considerations," which is why it remains a constant necessity. Literature is tied to the human condition, and there are elements of the human experience that remain consistent throughout history. Literature must recognize the essential qualities of the human condition before seeking to build on this unifying foundation in creative new ways, and writers must understand the universality of such essential qualities in order to best communicate themselves to their readers.

[66] Zamyatin, "Theme and Plot," p. 170.

Zamyatin's reasoning that human psychology makes it necessary to observe the "law of unity" encourages writers to imagine how their audience will read their work.

Zamyatin considered plot to be an element essential to combating the production of stagnant, dogmatic literature. Zamyatin thought plot had been neglected during his time, and lamented that the descendents of writers such as Tolstoy, Dosoyevsky, and Leskov sacrificed plot for form and psychology. He found the resulting stories rather lifeless and evoked "the incontrovertible aphorism which states that 'every kind of literature is good except dull literature.'"[67] A novel's lack of a dynamic plot could cause it to become too reliant on its message, turning it into something more like a dogmatic essay than a work of true literature. Despite his perception of its decline, Zamyatin argued that the role of plot was even more relevant in light of the many changes Russian society had faced during his lifetime:

> ....life has become so rich in events, so unexpected and fantastic, that the reader has inevitably developed a different scale of emotions and different demands on literature. Literary works must not be inferior to life; they must not be poorer than life itself.[68]

Once again, Zamyatin distinguishes between rebellion and creative revolution. Eliminating plot in order to oppose literary tradition is pointless if it doesn't produce new life or reinvigorate old ideas. In order for literature to contribute to the cycle of creative revolution, it must be sensitive to the richness of life, both reflecting and replenishing it.

Zamyatin encouraged the employment of literary techniques which would foster the writer's respect for the reader. During his lecture on plot, he gives an unexpected reason for writing interesting plots -- to appeal to a new reading public. He explains that the reading public

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[67] Zamyatin, "Theme and Plot," p. 173.
[68] Ibid.

no longer strictly consists of intellectuals "capable of enjoying the esthetic forms of a work," but has expanded to new, "more primitive" audience members who will need to be hooked by an interesting plot.[69] Efforts to appeal to an audience comes as a surprise from Zamyatin the non-conformist. It's possible that he was only making this point for the benefit of his students, since the House of Arts also had material considerations and was founded in part to help artists live off their creative work.[70] However, Zamyatin clearly remained faithful to his beliefs throughout his career, as is demonstrated by his refusal to yield to the Communist authorities who hounded him. He wouldn't encourage his students to make decisions as writers unless he truly believed these decisions would cultivate true literature. It's possible Zamyatin viewed consideration of the audience not as a creative limitation betraying his principles, but as a means of respecting and connecting with the reader. He encouraged respect of the reader in other lectures, such as when he taught his pupils to prefer artistic economy to wordiness: "The sketching in of road signs puts the reader, as it were, in your power, does not allow him to deviate; at the same time, the unfilled spaces between them leave him free for partial creative activity. In short, you make the reader a participant in the creative process."[71] His collaborative vision of writing demonstrates that artists' commitment to their principles can coexist with faith in their audience. Respect for readers does not compromise an artist's creative integrity, but *strengthens* it. As discussed in this chapter's section "Sacrifice and Love in Revolution," Zamyatin did not view the artist's originality and freedom as separate from a love for mankind. Writers who try to truly connect with their readers by considering their perspectives are more

[69] Zamyatin, "Theme and Plot," *A Soviet Heretic*, p. 173.
[70] Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal. "Literature and the Russian Revolution." *Dictionary of the Russian Revolution*, edited by George Jackson and Robert Devlin, Greenwood Press, 1989, p. 359.
[71] Yevgeny Zamyatin."On Language." *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 187.

likely to create literature based on love for humanity, rather than self-importance and contempt for their fellow humans.

Chapter Two: The Influence of Zamyatin's Writing Philosophy on His Dystopia

This chapter argues that Zamyatin's views about writing, as described in Chapter One, shaped the dystopian society in *We*. It answers two questions: Why did he choose to construct a fictitious repressive society? And what kind of structure did he devise for it? Examining how Zamyatin's writing philosophy, as expressed through his critical essays, influenced the organization of the novel's dystopian society illustrates the relationship between Zamyatin's writing philosophy and his choice of genre. Before we can discuss Zamyatin's conception of dystopian literature, we will consider how he was inspired by the utopian genre. Utopian works of literature depict "imagined or hypothetical" places that have "(impossibly) ideal conditions in respect of social structure, laws, politics," making them "perfect."[72] The quality of being an imaginary, perfect place is inherent in the Greek etymology of the word "utopia" itself, which marks "utopia" as a "non-place" while also suggesting "eu-topia," the "good place."[73] The genre values qualities such as perfection and stasis, but Zamyatin believed the role of "true literature"[74] was to resist such conditions by advocating for constant revolution. His perspective on writing explains his motivation to respond to the genre's shortcomings. In his eyes, utopia was *dystopia* -- the hell to match the heaven of utopia, a fictional place where "evil, or negative social and political developments" control the functions of society.[75] This chapter argues that he viewed utopia as a dystopia because he interpreted the aims of literary utopian societies to be fatal to the creation of what he considered "true literature."

[72] "utopian, adj. and n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/220785. Accessed February 2022.
[73] Fátima Vieira. "The Concept of Utopia." *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, edited by Gregory Claeys, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 4-5.
[74] Zamyatin, "I Am Afraid," p. 57.
[75] Gregory Claeys. "The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell." *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, edited by Gregory Claeys, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.107.

Zamyatin's novel arguably features the first science-fiction dystopia,[76] planting the seeds for a genre now familiar to today's pop culture audiences, but as a pioneer of the genre he would have approached it differently from present-day readers. Zamyatin would have instead been influenced by the dystopian genre's precedents, utopian and anti-utopian literature. This chapter will examine the utopian genre as he might have understood it. Exploring Zamyatin's definition of utopia, in the context of his theory of writing, illuminates how he came to create a science-fiction dystopia, and how his dystopia differed from the precedence of anti-utopian works. Finally, this chapter will describe how Zamyatin's dystopian society in *We* is designed to suppress the creation of "true literature."

Stasis in Utopia

In 1922, shortly following the completion of *We*, Zamyatin wrote a critical essay on the English writer H.G. Wells which demonstrates his knowledge of the utopian genre's history. Zamyatin had studied Wells' works while editing and writing introductions to them for the World Literature Publishing House.[77] In his essay, Zamyatin rejects the popular categorization of Wells' novels as "social utopias" and instead designates them as "social fantasies and science fiction."[78] In arguing that Wells' writing is distinct from the utopian tradition, he reflects on the works that define the genre, "beginning with Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, through Campanella's *The City of the Sun*, Cabet's *A Voyage to Icaria*, and all the way up to William Morris's *News from Nowhere*."[79] He does not describe these novels in detail, but his familiarity with their impact on the genre over the course of centuries is evident in his analysis of how Wells deviates from their

[76] Bruce Sterling. Foreword. *We*, by Yevgeny Zamyatin, translated by Natasha Randall, Modern Library, 2006, p. v.
[77] Shane, p. 31.
[78] Yevgeny Zamyatin. "H.G. Wells."*A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 286.
[79] Ibid.

example. Zamyatin considers most of Wells' science fiction works to be "social tracts in the form of fantastic novels," and concludes that Wells' works are more closely (but not directly) related to "such literary landmarks as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*" than to traditional utopian works.[80]

Many critical essays on utopian literature associate the genre with social commentary, meaning that Wells' "social tracts in the form of fantastic novels" certainly resemble utopian works, but Zamyatin distinguishes him on account of *how* social questions are explored in his writing. His argument rests on his conception of utopian literature, a genre which he defines by two principal features:

> One is content: the authors of utopias paint what they consider to be ideal societies; translating this into the language of mathematics, we might say that utopias bear a + sign. The other feature, organically growing out of the content, is to be found in the form: a utopia is always static; it is always descriptive, and has no, or almost no, plot dynamics.[81]

Nothing needs to change in a perfected world, so utopian works are static, and consequently plotless. For Zamyatin, this meant that utopian works couldn't really be "true literature," which needed to constantly evolve while also exercising literary craftsmanship. Wells, on the other hand, utilized "the form of fantastic novels," which required dynamic plotlines. Zamyatin designated Wells' novels as bearing "the - sign," because they were "instruments for exposing the defects of the existing social order, rather than building a picture of future paradise."[82] While critics such as Fátima Vieira might disagree[83] with his impression that literary utopias don't

[80] Zamyatin, "H.G. Wells," p. 287.
[81] Ibid, p. 286.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Vieira writes that literary utopias "note down the aspects that need to be solved [in real societies] and imagine a place where those problems have been solved" (8). In her interpretation, literary utopias do explore contemporary issues. Zamyatin's response to this might be that since these aspects "have been solved," literary utopias have abandoned "the existing social order" as it is.

engage with "the existing social order," the takeaway here is how Zamyatin interpreted utopia, since that's the only factor relevant to what influenced *We*. His description of the "+ sign" and "- sign" of literary works will jump out to readers of *We*, familiar with D-503's tendency to arrange his world into mathematical positive and negative values. Zamyatin's instinct to describe utopia in mathematical language suggests that his analysis of Wells' novel as an alternative to utopian literature stems from the understanding of the genre he had in mind while writing his dystopian novel.

The "petrified paradisiac social equilibrium" Zamyatin associates with utopian literature has been a key quality of the genre since its inception.[84] Thomas More, whom Zamyatin cites in his analysis, is credited with inventing this genre. More coined the word "utopia" in 1516 as the name of the imaginary island in his book, which came to be known by the same name. However, it's important to note that More did not establish utopian thinking, which is essentially "the desire for a better life,"[85] and specifically describes the faith that humans can improve their societies.[86] More's contribution to utopian thinking was redefining how it could be expressed through literary form.[87] More earns his claim to founder of the genre not just through creating its name, but also through the creation of the elements which came to define the genre. The etymology of the word "utopia" reveals one such element: More formed it from Greek roots to indicate "a place that is a non-place,"[88] capturing utopia's status as hypothetical and thus different from actual society. More elaborates on the characteristics of utopian societies by introducing the word "eutopia" (the good place), which is pronounced exactly the same as

[84] Zamyatin, "H.G. Wells," p. 288.
[85] Vieira, p. 6.
[86] Ibid, p. 9.
[87] Ibid, p. 7.
[88] Ibid, p. 4.

"utopia," and suggesting that utopia is so wonderful it should be called "eutopia."[89] More thus cements the idyllic nature of utopia as one of its defining characteristics.

In writing *We*, Zamyatin explores the characterization of utopia as a paradisiacal society, but unlike More, he criticizes the quality, demonstrating his distrust of the static condition born from the bliss of "the good place." His criticism is partially demonstrated by his exploration of the Adam and Eve myth. The myth finds Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, living peacefully in the "garden paradise" of Eden until they disobey God's orders and eat fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, leading him to expel them from paradise.[90] The myth is mentioned several times in *We*, most frequently by the poet R-13, who says that Adam and Eve chose "'freedom without happiness,'" only for their descendents to long "'for fetters'" until the One State restored humankind to the paradisiacal state of "'happiness without freedom.'"[91] R-13's interpretation of the myth frames both D-503's choices and the novel's themes. R. Mark Preslar speaks to the myth's significance when he notes that "Zamyatin elaborates the story, as Dostoevsky did forty years earlier, with an ironic twist: Humans (personified in the character of D-503 - the Adam in *We*) long to return to Eden, whether consciously or not."[92] Eden is a place of static simplicity, contentment, security. To put it in terms of *We*, Eden would be the final revolution. Yet as I-330 points out, there is no final revolution, just as there is no final number. The number of numbers and revolutions is infinite.[93] The final revolution of Eden is a lie, but humans still yearn to recreate a paradisiacal utopian society where it is not necessary to change anything, thus idealizing conditions in which writing as a revolutionary action is condemned.

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[89] Vieira, p. 5.
[90] Jon Radwan. "Adam and Eve." *Salem Press Encyclopedia*, 2020. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ers&AN=89403251&site=eds-live&scope=site.
[91] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 55.
[92] R. Mark Preslar. "Yevgeny Zamyatin's 'We': Forbidden Knowledge and Coercion in Utopia." *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 91, no. 1/2, 2008, p. 35.
[93] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 153.

Zamyatin's contempt for paradise stems from its incompatibility with revolution. He finds both the ideal of utopia and the means by which society attempts to achieve it to be dystopian.

Creating Dystopia

Zamyatin was not the first author to express skepticism about the utopian worlds in literature. The extremely flexible utopian genre has generated several subgenres that express a more cynical view of humankind's potential for improvement. Vieira dates the emergence of utopia's "'dark side'"[94] to the eighteenth century. Like most traditional utopian literature, pessimistic works also responded to an increase of confidence in mankind's abilities, but they found this confidence to be a cause for concern. Pohl describes how satirical works such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) parody Enlightenment philosophy and religion, and how Swift's influential work in particular "raises questions about the fault lines that developed during the eighteenth century on ideas of language, history, perfectibility and, indeed, utopianism itself."[95] Swift's concern with human "perfectibility" directly addresses one of the questions inherent in the utopian genre since More's work: how good can humans get through improvement? Swift concludes that "human nature itself… thwarts the realization of any utopian society."[96] Swift's satire is part of an anti-utopian trend in which literary works criticize the "utopian spirit" itself.[97]

The anti-utopian trend was a precedent for the genre Zamyatin pioneered: utopia's true antithesis, dystopia. The first recorded use of the word "dystopia" is in a parliamentary speech

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[94] Vieira, p. 15.
[95] Nicole Pohl. "Utopianism after More: The Renaissance and Enlightenment." *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, edited by Gregory Claeys, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 67.
[96] Pohl, p. 67.
[97] Vieira, p. 16. Vieira seems to distinguish between the aim of Swift's work as a satire and the aim of other anti-utopian works, but Pohl disagrees and identifies Swift's satire as anti-utopian.

from 1868, in which John Stuart Mill uses it to describe utopia's opposite.[98] The term came to describe the literary genre exploring the same concept. As stated in this chapter's introduction, the dystopian genre depicts a fictional society "in which evil, or negative social and political developments, have the upper hand."[99] If utopian societies are better than real ones, dystopian societies are worse.[100] Gregory Claeys notes that in practice the term "'[d]ystopia' is often used interchangeably with 'anti-utopia' or 'negative utopia,'" but the present thesis distinguishes between the terms. Anti-utopian literature is a broader category, and "dystopia" describes one of its several subgenres (for example, *Gulliver's Travels* is an anti-utopian satire, but it's not dystopian). As already noted, Zamyatin was familiar with the anti-utopian works of Swift and Wells, which included some of the features that would come to define the dystopian genre. However, dystopian fiction wasn't yet a formal genre when Zamyatin began to write *We*. In fact, Zamyatin himself formulated many of the qualities that now define the dystopian genre, such as the connection between totalitarian states and advanced technology.[101]

Comparing Zamyatin to Swift illustrates what precisely makes Zamyatin's novel a dystopian work, rather than an anti-utopian. Where Swift believed that humans were simply incapable of achieving utopia, Zamyatin thought pursuing this state was detrimental to human nature and the ability to write "true literature." The longing for static perfection is equivalent to the desire to drain the life out of humans and their art:

> What is truly alive stops before nothing and ceaselessly seeks answers to absurd, "childish" questions. Let the answers be wrong, let the philosophy be mistaken - errors are more valuable than truths: truth is of the machine, error is alive; truth

[98] Vieira, p. 16.
[99] Claeys, p. 107.
[100] Vieira, p. 17.
[101] Ibid, p. 18.

> reassures, error disturbs. And if answers be impossible of attainment, all the better! Dealing with answered questions is the privilege of brains constructed like a cow's stomach, which, as we know, is built to digest cud.[102]

Zamyatin implicitly distinguishes between being alive in the biological sense and "truly alive" in the sense that one is living with humanity. He protests against reaching a point of certainty at which people cease to ask the questions "'Why?' and "What next?'"[103] For him, to seek, wonder, err, and fail are the human qualities which keep us spiritually and intellectually alive. They are the qualities which propel literature forward through creative revolution. The perfection and certainty of "truth" -- the hallmarks of utopia -- are not simply unattainable, as Swift would hold, but they are *dehumanizing*. Great literature, too, "denies verities" as it "departs from the canonical tracks, from the broad highway."[104] Thus, utopia is both dehumanizing and fatal to the creation of great literature. The threat of these dangers drove Zamyatin to create a distinctly dystopian novel in which utopia itself is dystopian.

It's possible that Zamyatin viewed utopian works as expressing a sort of contempt for humankind and its fallacies, which he would also consider dystopian and an obstacle to the creation of "true literature." Utopian literature conveys that humankind's mistakes need to be corrected. Zamyatin's philosophy of creative revolution clearly indicates that he advocates human growth and development, but he distrusted utopian literature for asserting definitive conclusions on what makes people good and how they should live. Zamyatin's writing was not moralistic, it was exploratory. He didn't write stories such as *A Provincial Tale* in order to preach about the evils of the characters Baryba and Chebotarikha. As Chapter One states, Zamyatin was

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[102] Zamyatin, "On Literature," p. 110.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid, p. 111.

"in love" with these characters and the ugly behavior that made them complex.[105] Zamyatin doesn't create corrupt characters only to correct them. He didn't display the effect of provincial Russia's "philistine environment" on Barbya's deterioration into "bestial, ignorant, and senseless existence" in order to develop a blueprint for improving that sector of society.[106] The behaviors he would have had a low tolerance for in everyday life captivated him in writing; for example, he never looked back fondly upon the rural village where he grew up,[107] but very similar rural villages and their townsfolk absorbed his literary imagination for the first part of his literary career. He loved examining human nature at its best, worst, and everywhere in between. Utopian societies in literature aim to perfect human behavior, but this goal is at odds with Zamyatin's personal interests and his theory of "true literature," which favors constant revolution over a linear path to a fixed goal. Seeking only perfection would narrow authors' vision from a wider range of possibilities and hinder their creativity, thus stifling the production of "true literature."

To again reference the content of Chapter One, Zamyatin believed that "genuine literature will come only when we replace hatred for man with love for man."[108] "Love for man" must mean loving humans in all their complexity, not their progress toward perfection. Zamyatin likely would have thought that by excluding this love, utopian societies in novels stifled both humanity and the creation of "genuine literature." D-503 describes how the One State recognized love as one of the "masters of the world," and then "conquered, i.e. organized and mathematicized" love in order "to take control.[109] The word "mathematicize" not only indicates that love is now being understood in "reasonable" terms, but the word also means "to reduce to

[105] Zamyatin, "The Psychology of Creative Work," p. 161.
[106] Shane, p. 100.
[107] Ibid, p. 8.
[108] Zamyatin, "The Goal," p. 127.
[109] Zamyatin, *We*, pp. 20-21.

mathematical terms."[110] The One State has not only reevaluated the approach toward love, but it has done so with the intention of *reducing* love and its power. The One State -- the dystopia Zamyatin found hidden within utopia -- fashions itself as the enemy of love, and by attempting to eliminate love from society, it creates an environment in which neither humanity nor genuine literature is meant to survive. The stakes of *We*, then, are whether there is any hope that these qualities can survive in a society actively repressing them. By designing a dystopia out of utopia, Zamyatin expresses his beliefs about what makes us truly alive, and how "true literature," as he conceives of it, mirrors and cultivates our humanity.

The Structure of the One State

Given that Zamyatin's dystopian novel rejects the stifling conditions of so-called utopias in literature, this section will examine the defining characteristics of the One State and identify why Zamyatin might have developed such a structure in order to make a point about writing. We will begin with a more general introduction to the One State, before examining a few key characteristics in depth.

The first thing to identify about the One State is that though Zamyatin crafts it as dystopian, the state views itself as a utopia. The role of the One State is to secure "mathematically infallible happiness" for its citizens, through eradicating "the savage state of freedom, and subjecting them to the beneficial yoke of reason."[111] This "mathematically infallible happiness" is utopian language -- not only is happiness the goal, but the One State aims to achieve it through perfected systems of order. The One State is supposed to be a perfect state capable of organizing society into its most perfect form. But in what image of perfection is the

[110] "mathematize, v." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/114977. Accessed February 2022.
[111] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 3. Original quote was in all capital letters, as part of an official written statement released by the One State.

One State attempting to freeze society? Perfection in the One State means *mechanization* of its population. People are treated like machines, referred to collectively as "ciphers," rather than as humans. Ciphers have names made up of letters and numbers, like the protagonist D-503. They're required to behave like machines, with everyone following a synchronized daily schedule prescribed by the Table of Hours. Everyone wakes up, eats, works, relaxes, and sleeps at the exact same time. D-503 describes how the Table, like a railroad schedule, "transforms each of us into the real-life, six-wheeled, steel heroes of a great epic;"[112] by following the same strict schedule as a train might, ciphers are "transform[ed]" from humans to machines. Mechanization both guides and results from predictably infallible human activity, a lack of personal identity or desires, and a lack of imagination. Of course, the mechanization and homogeneity of people eliminates the existence of heretics who can dream up new possibilities. For the One State, new possibilities are unnecessary because they are supposed to have already reached perfection. Society is designed to stifle original and rebellious thinking, both essential to the creation of "true literature." The repression of individuality, human qualities, and "true literature" is what makes the One State a dystopia in Zamyatin's eyes.

The One State also happens to be ruthless in protecting its utopian structure. Though the One State is, ostensibly, perfect and omnipotent, there is still dissent in society. Criminals are punished by extermination in the Gas Bell Jar, a gruesome procedure which ensures "the security of the One State, in other words, the happiness of millions."[113] The One State's capacity for violence tips readers off to the dystopian nature of Zamyatin's text, but it also serves as a criticism of the utopian genre. For Zamyatin, the principles of utopia quickly become dogma, because they are not intended to change, and the One State's use of the Bell Jar demonstrates the

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[112] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 12.
[113] Ibid, p. 72.

dehumanizing effects of adhering to dogma. He suggests that maintaining the status quo in utopia is more important than protecting human life. He didn't need to look as far as fictional societies in order to see such inhumane proceedings -- as mentioned in Chapter 1, he was appalled by the violent measures the Bolsheviks took during the Russian Civil War. In his essay "Tomorrow," he described the effects of the period's brutality: "Wars, imperialist and civil, have turned man into material for warfare, into a number, a cipher."[114] Violence is dehumanizing, denying humans their worth as individuals and instead reducing them to statistics in a system. Zamyatin would have written his essay around the same time as he was working on *We*, so we can assume that when he wrote of his countrymen being turned into "ciphers" through war, he was drawing parallels between his reality and the dystopian world of his text. He portrays violence, in all its destructive and dehumanizing qualities, as the antithesis of writing, which is creative and celebrates humanity. The One State's reliance on violence as a means of control is one of the reasons writing is difficult to conduct in the environment of this dystopian society. Conversely, writing's capacity for stoking humanity and creation is among the reasons it is a threat to the regime's policies of dehumanization and destruction.

Collectivism and adherence to dogma are pillars of the One State's organization of (and means of controlling) society, as the original Russian name of the regime demonstrates. Zamyatin called the government *Единое Государство*, meaning "The United State," or "The Indivisible State." "The One State" or "The Single State" are also accurate translations, but the different versions carry different connotations. "The United State" signifies the collectivist identity of the regime's citizens, while "The Indivisible State" takes collectivism a step further

[114] Zamyatin, "Tomorrow," p. 52. In Russian, he uses "номер" (number) and "цифра" (cipher - Zamyatin, *Лица*, 174). The word he uses for ciphers in the One State is "нумер." Ru.wiktionary.com defines "нумер" as "*устар* - то же, что номер," meaning "obsolete - the same as номер" ("нумер." Ru.wiktionary.com, Wikimedia Foundation, accessed April 2022. ru.wiktionary.org/wiki/нумер). His reference to the reduction of humankind to "numbers" thus seems intentionally connected to his work on *We*.

by emphasizing the inability to break the state down into individual units of ciphers. "The One State" or "The Single State" capture the exclusivity of the regime's worldview, negating the validity of other forms of government.[115]

Collectivist identity is a foundational principle in the One State's so-called utopic organization of society. Many scholars describe the One State as "collectivist," to describe the One State,[116] but that term must be redefined because its use in real-world applications (particularly in the field of social psychology) does not capture the nature of Zamyatin's novel.[117] Collectivism in *We* does not simply refer to prioritization of group values over personal values.[118] There are not supposed to be any personal values in One State society. Collectivism in the One State means that everyone is supposed to have the same identity, which is the group identity. As Borenstein eloquently puts it, "D-503 repeatedly asserts that his 'I' has value only when it is a synecdoche for 'we.'"[119] As "synecdoche," D-503's use of the pronoun "I" is not actually meant to refer to himself, but to ciphers collectively. D-503 is not supposed to have any sense of personal identity at all -- at the beginning of the novel, he lacks self-awareness, avoids the use of

[115] It's important to distinguish that the point of the name is to emphasize the importance of collectivist identity in the society and the government's alleged legitimacy; the Russian name does not bear any allusions to the United States of America. Russian speakers refer to the U.S.A. as *Соединённые Штаты Америки*, or США (*S-Sha*) for short. While Zamyatin's dystopia is partially inspired by his negative impressions of aspects of Western culture (Curtis, 100-101), he's not specifically targeting the U.S. in his criticisms.
[116] See Eliot Borenstein. "The Plural Self: Zamjatin's We and the Logic of Synecdoche." *The Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1996, p. 667. Also see Christopher Collins. "Zamyatin, Wells and the Utopian Literary Tradition." *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 44, no. 103, 1966, p. 351.
[117] My goal here is to distinguish the term "collectivism" from the real-world observation of individualist (prominent in the West) and collectivist cultures (prominent in the East). Zamyatin was not aiming his critique at collectivism in Eastern cultures. Scholars such as Curtis identify aspects of Western cultures as the main target of his critique (100-101), and Zamyatin was certainly much more familiar with Western thought than Eastern thought. He lived in England, spoke English, and translated works from the English language, including Wells, whose novels shaped Zamyatin's understanding of the utopian genre. Moreover, it is probably most precise to say that Zamyatin was not critiquing "Western culture," nor Russian culture, as monolithic institutions. As I hope to demonstrate in this thesis, Zamyatin was critiquing violence, adherence to dogma, and the destruction of imagination, compassion, and love -- brutal practices he perceived as characteristic of the Bolsheviks' rise to power.

Ultimately, I find myself dissatisfied with using the term "collectivism" here, but I hope that a specialized use of the term will convey Zamyatin's intentions more clearly than a new term of my own invention.
[118] Lillian J. Breckenridge. "Collectivism." *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health*, 2021. *EBSCOhost*, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ers&AN=93871850&site=eds-live&scope=site.
[119] Borenstein, p. 351.

the possessive pronoun “my” when referring to his partner,[120] and completely panics when someone argues that individuality still exists. His inability to perceive any individuality is extreme, but of course, the point of dystopia is to depict a society *worse* than real ones. Through D-503’s total rejection of selfhood, Zamyatin demonstrates the threat of collectivism and the value of individuality.

The One State enforces collectivist identity because the regime considers it essential for ciphers’ happiness. Within the One State’s ideology, collectivist identity is supposed to reduce envy. Distressed by I-330’s subversive comments that individuality still exists in the One State, D-503 yells, “‘If, after all, there is any good reason for enviousness… like the fact that I might have a nose like a button and some other cipher might have….’”[121] His thought is incomplete due to his anxiety, but he indicates that differences between ciphers might be causes for envy, and he notes later that “bliss and envy… are the numerator and the denominator of the fraction known as happiness.”[122] If individuality leads to envy, and envy can destabilize the happiness equation, then collectivist identity is necessary for the One State to accomplish its mission of happiness. The One State depicts the reduction of envy as equality, which I-330 indicates when she states that “‘to be original means to somehow stand out from others. Consequently, being original is to violate equality.’”[123] The term “equality” sounds positive, but in fact it’s a substitute for “homogeneity,” because it means *not* standing out from others. Whether it’s in terms of physical appearance or behavior, ciphers are supposed to be indistinguishable from each other.

Happiness and the absence of envy are utopian ideals which seem appealing, but Zamyatin was wary of the cost: the freedom of thought necessary for being a writer. He likely

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[120] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 7.
[121] Ibid, p. 9.
[122] Ibid, p. 21.
[123] Ibid, p. 27.

intended collectivist identity in *We* to convey "suppression of the individual in the name of the masses."[124] Suppression of the individual means suppression of free and original thought. In his essay "Scythians?" Zamyatin declares that the October Revolution in Russia had "turned philistine" after its victory, adding that "what every philistine hates most of all is the rebel who dares to think differently from him." Throughout Russia's history, the philistines seeking to maintain power aimed to "shave all heads down to the skin; dress everyone in the regulation uniform; convert all heretical lands to your own faith by artillery fire."[125] Shaved heads,[126] "unifs," and religious conversion of heretics perfectly capture society in the One State. A collectivist identity, in Zamyatin's eyes, can only mean that people are living by a single accepted perspective. In other words, collectivist identity forces people to adhere to the limits of ideology. Zamyatin considers true writers to be revolutionaries who deviate from the status quo and combat intellectual stagnation on both individual and societal levels. In this sense, because the One State represses revolutionaries and advocates stagnancy, it ultimately stands against "true literature."

D-503's writing experience causes him to unintentionally resist the One State's policy of collectivist identity, because writing connects him to his individuality. As scholars such as Eliot Borestein have pointed out,[127] the first word of the novel called *We* is "Я" - "I." This first word immediately introduces a tension, which D-503 quickly detects: "Я лишь попытаюсь записать то, что вижу, что думаю -- точнее, что мы думаем (именно так: мы, и пусть это "Мы" будет

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[124] Zamyatin, "Tomorrow," pp. 51-52.
[125] Zamyatin, "Scythians?" p. 23.
[126] It seems that D-503 never mentions a cipher having hair on his or her head. References to hair are limited to body hair, such as his "shaggy" hands, and eyelashes. Since hair can indicate individuality, it makes sense that ciphers would be bald. Brett Cooke compares life in the One State to life in a prison system, in which "the numbers all have shaved heads and wear identical unifs; they are differentiated only by body shape and physiognomy, if at all" (41).
[127] Borenstein, p. 667.

заглавием моих записей)."[128] D-503's blunder is even more striking in Russian than in English, because the singular first person verbs in Russian are conjugated differently from the plural first person verbs. In English, the difference between "I think" and "We think" lies solely in the pronoun used. In Russian, the verb conjugation reinforces the difference - "думаю" versus "думаем." D-503's inspiration for the records' title *We* comes only as he writes, and only after he slips into an apparently instinctive singular first person perspective. It's as though writing automatically triggers the emergence of individuality. The second he lays pen to paper, he assumes an individual, singular identity, which makes him a heretic.

Zamyatin undermines the One State's image of perfection by revealing flaws in the application of their collectivist identity philosophy, thus depicting a discrepancy between the appearance and the reality of life within the regime. D-503 loyally adheres to the One State's ideology, but his first encounter with I-330 subtly reveals incongruencies between his beliefs and his actions:

> "Well, yes, it's clear!" I cried (it was an astonishing intersection of thoughts: she was using almost exactly my words - the ones I had been writing just before this walk). "You see, even in our thoughts. No one is ever 'one," but always 'one of.' We are so identical…"
>
> Her words: "Are you sure?"[129]

D-503's incredulity that I-330 can use "almost exactly my words" is surprising, given the One State's insistence on the transparency of its citizens, and his own admission that "we are so identical." By One State logic, D-503's thoughts *should* be easily detected and intersected. As

[128] Yevgeny Zamyatin. *Мы* [*My*; *We*]. Prime Novels, Oregon, 2016, p. 11. Randall's English translation reads "I will just attempt to record what I see, what I think -- or more exactly, what we think. (Yes, that's right: we. And let that also be the title of these records: We.)" (4).

[129] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 8.

I-330 points out, his surprise is proof that the regime's agenda is not operating perfectly. However, it seems that he lacks enough self-awareness to detect this for himself. He believes in the One State's dogma so wholeheartedly that anything contrary is inconceivable to him -- even when he is the living embodiment of it. His exchange with I-330 reveals that the One State's control does not stem from its success in stripping its citizens of individuality -- its control stems from its success in making its citizens *believe* that they are not individuals. The distinction is important, and indicates that humanity and individuality are intrinsic qualities of humankind, which even the One State cannot stamp out. However, humans can be deceived into believing a different story about themselves. Because of this, tensions can arise for both individuals and for the state when the two different narratives -- the truth and the belief of what is true -- inevitably come into conflict.

Science and Machines

The utopian literary genre lent itself to a variety of visions for better societies, many of which explored the effects of science and technology on humankind.[130] Zamyatin identifies Francis Bacon's utopian work *The New Atlantis* (published posthumously in 1627) as "the virtually sole example of science fiction" in the centuries preceding Wells' "sociofantastic novels."[131] Pohl also identifies Bacon's work as "perhaps the first true scientific utopia," in which the guiding factors of science were used to promote "faith and social order," the goals of his utopia.[132] Scientific and technological advances consistently influenced the utopian genre, even when the resulting works couldn't be considered science fiction. Vieira notes that the

[130] This is not to say that science and technology are an intrinsic feature of utopian fiction. Many writers before Zamyatin's time did not explore the role of science in their utopian societies, Zamyatin would not have viewed it as a characteristic feature of the genre.
[131] Zamyatin, "H.G. Wells," p. 287.
[132] Pohl, p. 60.

scientific progress of the Enlightenment was intertwined with humankind's general progress, which was partially responsible for shaping a new understanding of history as a process of improvement and led to an interest in "euchronias" -- utopias set in the future, where humans have approached or even reached their full potential.[133] Of course, the scientific and technological advances of the industrial revolution inspired utopian writers to consider many new possibilities. Kenneth Roemer explains that "the basic goals of traditional utopias could be met" through such breakthroughs, yet at the same time the industrial revolution's destructive effects "undermined belief in the inevitability of progress."[134] Anti-utopian writers concerned with technology's negative outcomes began to explore societies in which technological advances do not result in progress. Zamyatin picked up on how the industrial revolution's possibilities affected literature, and in his essay on Wells he identifies the end of the nineteenth century as the first time "truly fantastic potentialities unfolded before science and technology,"[135] giving rise to genuine science fiction.

Zamyatin's main purpose in centralizing the roles of science and technology, as well as mathematics, in the One State society is to explore not how the fields could actually make utopia possible, but how the dystopian ideals of collectivist identity and rationalism dehumanize individuals. Through the utopian genre's history, many writers were deeply fascinated by the role of science in society while others were repulsed by the dangers of scientific progress. Science and technology have a significant presence in the futuristic society of *We*, but the novel is not a commentary on those subjects. By contrast, Christopher Collins holds that "Zamyatin's primary interest is not science, but the threat of collectivism and rationalism to man's humanity."[136] His

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[133] Vieira, p. 10.
[134] Kenneth Roemer. "Paradise Transformed: Varieties of Nineteenth-Century Utopias." *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, edited by Gregory Claeys, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 82.
[135] Zamyatin, "H.G. Wells," p. 287.
[136] Christopher Collins. "Zamyatin, Wells and the Utopian Literary Tradition." *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 44, no. 103, 1966, p. 353.

argument can lead to an even more specific conclusion: Zamyatin relates science and technology *to* collectivism and rationalism, because of their perceived capacity to mechanize humankind and thus make human action infallible, as the One State strives to do. His point isn't that the fields can be abused to dehumanize people in a dystopian society -- his point *is* dehumanization in a dystopian society, specifically how ideals such as collectivism and rationalism rob people of their humanity. The fact that technology itself is not dehumanizing, but can be used as a weapon for dehumanization, becomes clearer through its relationship to writing.

The One State reduces both technology and writing to the status of tools in order to subjugate its population. Julia Vaingurt emphasizes that the One State hinders "meaningful scientific exploration"[137] and only uses technology for purposes of "coercion"[138] in order to maintain the regime's power and achieve societal stasis. D-503's diary is born from a similar intent. As the One State anticipates the launch of the Integral rocket as part of the campaign to conquer unknown planets, it decides that "прежде оружия мы испытаем слово"[139] -- "before weapons we will try the word." Yet words *are* a weapon, a tool meant to subdue those who object to the One State's control. Literature is another tool of coercion, just like much of the One State's technology. In fact, literature is nothing more than propaganda, meant only to bend readers' minds to agree with the One State's ideology. The function of literature as a weapon is a corruption of Zamyatin's conviction that "the word" is "the only weapon worthy of man - of tomorrow's man," in comparison to the violence practiced during the Russian Civil War.[140] He means that literature as a so-called "weapon" pushes along human progress, but in *We*, it's used to force infidels to convert to the belief system of the One State. Technology undergoes a similar

[137] Julia Vaingurt. "Human Machines and the Pains of Penmanship in Yevgeny Zamyatin's We." *Cultural Critique*, vol. 80, 2012, p. 113.
[138] Ibid, p. 114.
[139] Zamyatin, *Мы* (*My*; *We*), p. 10.
[140] Zamyatin, "Tomorrow," p. 52.

perverted function. The Integral is the ultimate airplane, which is designed to reach completely unknown worlds. However, the Integral isn't meant to explore these new worlds, it's a tool to conquer them. The Integral is the perfect example of how technology and writing are intertwined: the rocket, which is the summit of the One State's technological prowess, serves to carry the load of written propaganda. In fact, not only are technology and writing intertwined, but in the One State, they serve an identical function. It's no wonder that, as Vaingurt notes, D-503 treats writing "as a form of technology."[141] The two are indistinguishable in the context of the One State.

Zamyatin demonstrates the abuse of technology in the One State, yet he also suggests positive possible approaches to technology which relate to his writing values. Julia Vaingurt argues that *We* resists the traditional Soviet perspective of technology as a tool, and instead presents technology as "a medium for contemplation rather than social change."[142] Zamyatin disassociates technology from its industrial uses and encourages a new approach to technological advances, one which seeks "not to exploit but to explore" advancement.[143] He suggests that approaching the relationship between humans and machines "with a sense of wonder" will lead to artistic and ethical growth.[144] Readers familiar with Zamyatin's insistence on infinite revolution would not be surprised by his inclination to avoid limiting technology's possibilities by reducing it to a means to meet a specific, finite need and allow it to become a source of infinite progress in the literary world. Technology is connected to writing because they share a capacity for revelation, and revelation leads to revolution. In his essay on Wells, Zamyatin associates "the restless aviator" with "the heretic who cannot tolerate any settled existence, any

[141] Vaingurt, p. 111.
[142] Ibid, p. 109.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid, p. 110.

catechism." He describes how an airplane in flight "speeds upward and kingdoms, kings, laws and creeds vanish from sight. Still higher, and the cupolas of some incredible tomorrow flash in the distance."[145] His vision includes no hints of the airplane's industrial functions. Rather, it is literally a vehicle for heretics to escape petty dogma and explore beyond the known. The heretical writer is also an aviator, and the aviator is also a heretic. Technology and writing are intertwined as they continue to push society forward, keeping the contemporary moment from ever settling into stagnation. But of course, this is not how technology, nor writing, is used in the One State. Zamyatin's hints that technology can be more than utilitarian contradict with its actual application in the One State, illustrating Collins' point that scientific knowledge isn't itself a threat; however, its deliberate misuse is.

The One State not only views technology as a tool, but as an ideal for human behavior because of its *dehumanizing* effect. The ideal serves two primary purposes: the first is that it feeds perfectly into the One State's ideology of eliminating freedom, and the second is that machines are unemotional and predictable. In his second record entry, at which point he still accepts the One State's ideological position, D-503 contemplates the beauty of the moving machines at the Integral hanger, a beauty which he credits to their precise and "non-free movement."[146] The One State presents freedom as the obstacle to the society's goal of Edenic happiness, so the "non-free" machines are a perfect model. Furthermore, machines have no ability to "behave" irrationally and allow their emotions to interrupt their precision. Thus, they not only operate at the height of efficacy, but they are completely predictable in their operations. Predictability lies within the realm of the known, and in the One State, there are not supposed to be any unknowns.

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[145] Zamyatin, "H.G. Wells," p. 284.
[146] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 6.

Yet the ideal of machine-like ciphers can never be fully realized. Vaingurt points out the One State's inability to purge itself of human error, which she partially attributes to the inability of imperfect humans to make perfect machines. Machines instead "reflect humanity" in their own capacity to err.[147] The robot Pliapa, which served as D-503's schoolteacher in his youth, stutters "just as if he were human," and his name -- inspired by the noise he makes when switched on -- evokes not "machinelike perfection," but human-like imperfection.[148] In fact, the robot is so human-like that the children are compelled to name him. Even more striking, the machine is ironically the only character whose name is not a mere sequence of numbers and letters.[149] His name sounds funny, but it sounds much more human to Zamyatin's contemporary audience than names such as D-503. His imperfection makes him more human than any cipher would admit to being.

The One State's attempts to dehumanize its population through the control of science and technology, which parallels its weaponization of writing, ultimately reap inexact results. The One State's application of science and technology (especially machinery) to repress human nature also represses the population's capacity to write "true literature" in two main ways. The first is that writing is viewed *as* a form of technology in the One State and thus serves a utilitarian function. The second is that technology contributes to the "mechanization" of One State ciphers, which dehumanizes them and thus reduces their capacity to create "true literature." Yet Zamyatin complicates the role of science and technology in *We* by demonstrating that the regime's attempts to use them to eliminate the population's humanity are not completely successful. The novel's stakes stem from the uncertainty of how successful the One State can become, and whether the

[147] Vaingurt, p. 112.
[148] Ibid, p. 122.
[149] "The Benefactor" is the only other character not referred to by such a sequence, but he's distinguished by a title, not a name, in order to make him seem godlike.

positive capacities within science and technology can counteract the regime's weaponization of the fields.

The One State's Control of Reproduction and Family Relations

Zamyatin certainly isn't the first writer to explore sexuality and the role of the family in utopian literature or its subgenres. State regulation of sexual expression is a long-time motif in utopian literature, and Collins cites Plato and Wells as examples: in *The Republic*, Plato "objects to uncontrolled sexual expression," and Wells expresses enthusiasm for utopian societies in which children are removed from parents and raised by the community.[150] Zamyatin's dystopian society follows their precedent, and in the One State, sexual expression is closely controlled by the distribution of pink tickets. The control of sexual relationships and reproduction prevents family units from officially forming, all for the sake of repressing individuality and reinforcing collectivist identity.

The state control of sexual intimacy serves to reduce ciphers' sense of self, supporting the One State's narrative of collectivist identity. The regime encourages its citizens to have sex with whomever they acquire a ticket for, operating under the official decree that "each cipher has the right to any other cipher as sexual product."[151] The approach is deliberately dehumanizing, prompting people to view each other as a "product" to be used and to understand their own bodies also as products. With equal rights to everyone, ciphers are never supposed to feel a special attachment to their partners. D-503 indicates this when he reflects on how he feels about his sexual partner O-90: "a thousand years ago, our hairy forebears probably would have written that funny word 'my' when referring to her just now."[152] Their sexual relations are not supposed

[150] Collins, p. 354.
[151] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 21.
[152] Ibid, p. 7.

to foster a *relationship*. D-503 isn't supposed to feel attached to O-90, because if there's a "my," then there's an "I." Relationships help people to form their sense of individual identity, which contradicts the One State's collectivist identity. The state policy regarding sexual intercourse intends to prevent attachments from developing, but despite this, D-503 still feels particularly close to O-90. He's unable to explicitly articulate their bond, however, instead describing it through a reference to his ancestors, making his feelings seem only hypothetical. Once again, an unacknowledged gap emerges between the image of life in the One State and the actual lived experience.

Despite the One State's attempts to erase attachments of all varieties, the instinct for family still exists. D-503's sexual partner O-90 is also the partner of his friend R-13. Because none of them have exclusive relationships, they are not supposed to feel particularly attached to each other. Yet D-503 describes their group as a "triangle," using the mathematical perspective that he is used to. When D-503 takes his "planetary readers" into consideration, he imagines a description that may be more familiar to them: "we are a family."[153] The three ciphers behave just as domestically as traditional families: D-503 kisses O-90 and shakes hands with R-13 before leaving the latter's apartment, and he finds comfort in being able to "relax for a short time in this simple strong triangle, to lock oneself away from all that…."[154] A boundary separates the three ciphers from broader society, defying standard One State philosophy even though they are operating within the state system of pink tickets. D-503's description of separation illustrates why the family unit has been erased in One State society -- it gives people a sense of self when they define themselves by their relationships to loved ones instead of to the collective. The idea of a family is not supposed to exist within the One State, but once D-503 adapts the language of

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[153] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 40.
[154] Ibid.

his 20th-century forebears, it becomes apparent that neither the traditional experience of family, nor the comfort it provides, have been quashed in the 30th century. Both are too intrinsic to the human experience to be suppressed by ideology.

A key part of the family experience which the One State aims to eliminate is the experience of parenthood. While the novel never details the specifics of child-rearing, it's evident that even when ciphers are allowed to reproduce, they don't raise their children themselves: child-rearing is a function of the state. D-503 also neglects to lay out the One State's rationale for separating children and their parents, but he mentions that before the One State was established, "children were private possessions," drawing a contrast to children in the present.[155] Parents would feel a special attachment to their "private possessions," which could lead to individuality, separation from the collectivist identity, and envy of others' possessions, which would all destabilize the equation for happiness. In addition, parenthood is a very emotional experience, which could cloud ciphers' ability to exercise perfect, mathematical reasoning. D-503 and O-90 both act on their emotions, as opposed to on their reason, when it comes to parenthood. Like D-503, O-90 also cherishes family relations, and she longs to bear a child, even though the One State has forbidden her from reproducing because her stature is too short to meet the "Maternal Norm."[156] Eventually, she rebels and begs D-503 to "'give me a baby,'" even though she's in "'complete knowledge'" that the punishment for breaking this law is execution.[157] Her impassioned plea defies "reason" because she's aware that she's endangering herself, and of course it's not "reasonable" to purposely put one's life in danger. D-503 also acts irrationally in the moment. While it's not clear whether he would also be punished for his role in illegal reproduction, he still knowingly participates in an illegal activity. His emotion is apparent

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[155] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 25.
[156] Ibid, p. 6.
[157] Ibid, pp. 99-100.

through the energetic verbs he uses to describe his actions after he agrees to O-90's plea: he "snatch[es]" a Pink ticket, "[runs]" to register it, and "roughly squeeze[s]" O's arm when he returns.[158]

The emotional connection to childbearing also reflects D-503's emotional connection to writing, which in turn reflects Zamyatin's experience of writing as parenthood. When D-503 composes his first record, he writes that "I feel my cheeks burn," betraying a passionate response to the act of composition, which he notes "resembles what a woman experiences when she first hears a new pulse within her - the pulse of a tiny, unseeing, mini-being."[159] D-503's intimate connection to writing triggers his empathy for O-90's desire for a child. The first time in the novel that he references her longing, he complains, "Again with her old refrain: a baby."[160] Evidently she's been asking him for a baby for a long time, but he reduces her earnest plea to a tedious, repetitive request that vaguely annoys him. Later in the novel, after D-503 has been deeply immersed in his writing, she asks him again, telling him she's willing to put herself in danger in order to "'get to feel - get to feel it inside me.'"[161] Her phrase echoes D-503's own description of how writing feels like "what a woman experiences when she first hears a new pulse within her,"[162] which seems to be what finally convinces him to have a child with her.

Childbearing and writing pose similar threats, in terms of the One State philosophy. The emotional connection to nurturing a creation which is an extension of oneself ("This text is me; and simultaneously not me")[163] drives "parents" to irrationally rebel. Just as O-90 rebels for the sake of becoming pregnant, so D-503 defies the One State for the sake of protecting his written work. When the Bureau of Guardians raids his building, looking for any rebellious materials, he

[158] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 100.
[159] Ibid, p. 4.
[160] Ibid, p. 19.
[161] Ibid, p. 99.
[162] Ibid, p. 4.
[163] Ibid.

hides his records, even though ciphers are not supposed to conceal anything from the state. He contemplates burning them before he can be discovered, but realizes that "I wouldn't have the strength to destroy this excruciating and possibly most precious piece of myself."[164] He irrationally endangers himself for the sake of protecting his writing, the same way O-90 risks her own life to become impregnated. In addition to motivating "parents" to resist the state, writing and childbearing are both ideological threats. Both involve a *self* to be extended, which accompanies the feelings of possessiveness and attachment. Zamyatin's dystopia is designed to eliminate individual consciousness, yet the longing for selfhood and attachment persists, as does the impulse to cultivate extensions of oneself, either through literal or metaphorical reproduction. The tension between the One State's dystopian ideology and the reality that it has not yet extinguished the critical components of the human condition positions D-503 to challenge the dogmatic state narrative that he believes at the beginning of the novel and reclaim who he truly is.

[164] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 145.

Chapter Three: A Writer in Dystopia

The tensions surrounding the writing process in *We* can be boiled down to the concept of the written word as a weapon, either for reinforcing the lies used by the One State to maintain its power or for uncovering the truth of D-503's human condition. As the One State anticipates the launch of the Integral rocket as part of the campaign to conquer unknown planets, it decides that "прежде оружия мы испытаем слово"[165] -- "before weapons we will try the word." It will send written works glorifying the One State to the inhabitants of new planets in order to convince them to embrace the regime's rule. Yet in this context words *are* a weapon, one meant to make people believe the One State's lies that it is the one true regime, with the one true and rational belief system which supposedly entitles it to its power. The function of literature -- or, more precisely, propaganda -- as a weapon is a corruption of Zamyatin's conviction that "the word" is "the only weapon worthy of man - of tomorrow's man," in comparison to the violence practiced during the Russian Civil War.[166] He means that literature as a so-called "weapon" pushes along human progress, but in *We*, it's used to force infidels to convert to the belief system of the One State. However, Zamyatin's original meaning prevails through D-503's experience. D-503 begins writing his records with the intention of representing and celebrating life in the One State. He firmly believes in the One State's ideology, and lacks the ability to question whether it might be deceptive. He doesn't realize that writing will unlock something genuine within him, beneath the cipher he's been shaped into, and this will lead him to the choice between maintaining lies or searching for the truth.

D-503 begins to write his records in order to persuade his audience that the One State truly is utopian. Yet in his attempts to convince his readers, D-503's approach to writing causes

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[165] Zamyatin, *Мы* [*My; We*], p. 10.
[166] Zamyatin, "Tomorrow," p. 52.

him to question the regime's legitimacy. Through trying to precisely convey his experiences, D-503 becomes more self-aware, which positions him to examine himself and discern a sense of self that is distinct from the collectivist identity that the One State has brainwashed him to embrace. He must employ imagination and creativity in order to most accurately communicate his thoughts, and he must also imagine his readers' possible life experiences in order to know how best to convince them. Yet opening his mind to creative new possibilities helps him to see that the One State lied about the finality and desirability of its limits. Ultimately, D-503's writing becomes confessional, allowing him to spiritually purify himself by resisting the temptation to accept the static "happiness" offered by the One State and instead engaging with constant creative revolution. D-503's writing allows him to discover his humanity, and he defies the One State's ideology by choosing humanity over happiness.

A Weapon of Deception

The One State attempts to use literature as a way of reinforcing and propagating its belief system, often succeeding in convincing the readers of its propaganda. D-503 describes poetry as a "state service," which is meant to increase ciphers' love of the One State and its model of life.[167] D-503's own records are written in service to the regime, which issued a demand that ciphers produce propaganda glorifying the regime to send to other planets, in order to convert them. The One State's propaganda seems to effectively sway its readers or listeners. D-503 tenderly describes the literary works which have fostered his own awe of the One State, including the "Daily Ode to the Benefactor," which prompts him to pose the rhetorical question, "Who, having read that, doesn't bow down piously before the selfless labor of this Cipher of Ciphers?"[168] The poem moves its readers with the vision of the "selfless" Benefactor, with the

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[167] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 60.
[168] Ibid, p. 61.

purpose of convincing them to hail him as a ruler, given that the "Cipher of Ciphers" is superior to them all. Ironically, poetry in the One State seems to appeal to ciphers through its pathos, rather than logos. D-503 mentions "the terrifying red of the Flowers of Judicial Verdicts," and "the immortal tragedy *He Who Was Late for Work*." The first affects ciphers through fear, the second through sorrow (and likely also fear of the unlucky cipher's tragic fate). The One State's legitimacy allegedly stems from ruling its ciphers through the only rational system, but poetry is intended to convince ciphers of its rationality through an emotional connection. The contradiction exposes the One State's falsity, yet through its emotional power, poetry seems to prevent ciphers from investigating the inconsistency. Poetry is a state service because not only does it convince ciphers of the One State's glory, but it limits their ability to critically question the regime's claims of its rationality.

D-503 means for his records to convince readers strictly through his text's rationality, which demonstrates the One State's reliance on "rationality" as a form of deception. D-503 considers himself to be a perfectly rational cipher, because he has been shaped by the expert hands of the One State, which operates through "a system of scientific ethics based on subtraction, addition, division, and multiplication."[169] Its ethical outlook is legitimized by the fact that it is mathematical -- mathematics is true, its truth can be proven, and thus it informs a rational, infallible ethical system. This system validates the government's iron-fisted regulation of the population, given its ability to organize their lives in the supposedly most logical and thus happiest manner. The regime presents their systems as incontestably perfect, because of the state's wisdom. D-503's records are an attempt to propagate the lie of the One State's rationality, by being itself evidently rational. By insisting that he is matter-of-factly recording the experience and thoughts of himself and his fellow ciphers, he separates his records from traditional One

[169] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 14.

State poetry, though he leaves open the possibility for his records to develop into "an epic poem." He views his records as not an ode to the One State, but as an accurate depiction of life within the regime -- which is *itself* the ode to the One State. He doesn't consider it necessary to glorify the One State -- the One State is already (allegedly) perfect, and D-503's task is to convey that perfection. He continues to insist on his honesty and accuracy, which establishes his reliability as a messenger of the One State's greatness.

The One State's propaganda is ultimately meant to establish social stasis by brainwashing ciphers into believing there are no desirable alternative ways of life, which is the lie that ensures the survival of their so-called "utopia." D-503's records are an example of propaganda meant to demonstrate the regime's self-evident rationality, which positions the regime's ideology as the only reasonable stance to take. The poetry that he describes serves to deepen ciphers' conviction in this ideology through a rather religious experience which connects them emotionally to the belief system, though being persuaded through sentiment actually contradicts the One State's dogma repudiating emotion as irrational. These two elements work together to ensure that ciphers' beliefs align with the regime's policies. In this way, propaganda is meant to limit ciphers' minds to what the regime promotes as the truth about how humans should live. Once ciphers adhere to this perspective, they are meant to find it difficult to think differently, and this allows the regime to remain unchallenged. Ciphers' acceptance of the One State's ideology as the ultimate and incontestable truth results in social stagnancy. The One State teaches its citizens that "'our revolution was the last,'"[170] asserting that society is not capable of changing again. The elimination of revolution allows the One State to pass itself off as utopia. Its citizens believe its claim, but ultimately not because the regime has actually organized society in the best way possible: ciphers only believe the One State is utopia because they see no other option. Literature

[170] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 153.

is designed to promote the lie that society cannot change. Though literature isn't the only means of establishing social stasis (for example, D-503's description of his schoolboy days reveals that education serves as indoctrination), its only role is to serve the state by preaching its lies as truth and restricting citizens' ability to question this official dogma.

However, though the written word is effective propaganda, the writing process seems unable to effectively reinforce the writer's belief in the One State's lies. D-503 writes less and less about the glory of the One State. As he begins to develop a sense of his own individuality, he grows attached to this self -- to his imagination and soul. He also falls in love with I-330, an experience both stimulated by and which stimulates his writing. His personal growth undermines the One State's hold on his mind. For example, in his twenty-fourth record, he reflects on how "painful" it is to desire I-330, but then insists that "I actually want this pain -- bring it on."[171] He immediately acknowledges the "absurdity" of wanting something "negative" like pain, which "decreases the sum that we call happiness."[172] He tries to revert to the One State mindset by writing about the Day of the One Vote, a critical holiday for reinforcing ciphers' loyalty for the regime, but then he states that "what I wrote just now about the One Vote is all irrelevant, not what I meant, and I want to cross it all out, tear it up, and throw it out. Because I know (call it blasphemy): the only holiday is when I am with her."[173] He tries to use writing to convince *himself* of the One State's legitimacy, but ultimately, he can't lie to himself through writing. He realizes that the passage that he wrote is "not what I meant," and once he realizes how deceptive it is, he rejects it.

Yet D-503 often experiences setbacks because of the difficulty of extricating himself from the One State's inviting lies, and his writing illustrates the struggle between the two

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171 Zamyatin, *We*, p. 120.
172 Ibid.
173 Ibid, p. 122.

possibilities of the word as a weapon. In the entry following his blasphemous twenty-fourth record, he relapses into an ode to the One State, swept away by the patriotism of the One Vote holiday. His relapse can be attributed not only to the persuasiveness of the annual ritual, but also to the pain of his love and the pain of no longer fitting into his old world. He feels unable to truly participate in the holiday, due to his recent betrayals of the One State's belief system. He sincerely wishes to confess his deviations, in the hopes of relieving his anguish: "Ah, if only I'd stand up right now and choke and scream out everything about myself. Then there would be an end to it - bring it on! Just for one second to feel clean and mindless…."[174] The "clean and mindless" feeling is the typical experience in the One State, where the simplicity of being a human-machine relieves ciphers from the unpleasantries of complex emotions such as those churning within D-503. His writing often forces him to face the suffering he wishes he could escape from, which sometimes drives him to desire to return to his simple existence before he began composing his records. The One State's lies are attractive *because* it offers a respite from the most torturous, complex, and emotional elements of the human existence, yet as D-503 continues to write, he finds it more difficult to reject the truth he discovers about himself, his humanity, and the human condition.

Writing as Self-Examination and Discovery

In *We*, the writing process is inherently inconsistent with the reinforcement of the regime's lies in the mind of the writer and offers salvation from the One State's conditioning. At the beginning of the novel, D-503 states that his pen is "more accustomed to mathematical figures" and therefore "not up to the task of creating the music of unison and rhyme."[175] He has no prior writing experience, and cannot even conceive of developing the skills necessary for

[174] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 123.
[175] Ibid, p. 4.

writing, which is in line with the One State's myth that he has already reached his full potential and cannot grow any further. He is in the clutches of the One State's influence and unable to believe anything other than what he's been previously educated. However, the writing process leads D-503 to self-examination, a form of discovery which causes him to become aware that the limits of the One State's worldview are undesirable. It's important to note that writing does not automatically save D-503 -- he frequently oscillates between embracing his new-found independence and attempting to reinsert himself into the comforting lies of the One State. But it offers him a new perspective beside that of the life he's always known, which positions him to make the choice between becoming involved in the active -- and often painful -- search for truth or bowing back down to the One State's authority.

The first step in D-503's journey to salvation begins with his efforts to accurately "record" his thoughts and experiences. D-503's first written sentence is, "I am merely copying, word for word, what was printed in the *State Gazette* today,"[176] and as promised, the next few paragraphs are a copy of the One State's demand for ciphers to create written material in praise of the regime to load into the Integral. His text begins by literally copying another text, signaling that his work is a *reproduction* of his environment, rather than a source of new thought. Even once he begins to write in his own words, he states his commitment to simply "record what I see, what I think,"[177] which is an extension of his first few paragraphs. He intends to copy experience in the same manner in which he copied text. By describing himself as "recording" rather than "writing," D-503 distinguishes himself from writers who literally create, and instead identifies himself as a scribe, merely copying what already exists.

[176] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 3.
[177] Ibid, p. 4.

D-503's determination to precisely record his experiences positions him to closely monitor himself, which fosters his self-awareness. He is committed to copying experiences *exactly*, in the same way that he copies the One State's text "word for word." He often assures his readers of his precision, using phrases such as "more exactly," "no, I'll be exact," or "that's the most suitable word"[178] throughout his records. In order to achieve his goal of precision, he has to pay close attention to himself. D-503 likely has never paid such close attention to himself before, because as Chapter Two of this thesis argues in its analysis of his first encounter with I-330, he lacks self-awareness at the start of the novel. Beginning to write is enough to draw his attention to himself, which his first record conveys when he notes that "as I write this: I feel my cheeks burn."[179] He unintentionally refines this nascent self-awareness through his determination to increase his precision. Later in the novel, while reflecting on a baffling exchange with R-13, he writes that "I am calmly and carefully considering each word. It is the equivalent of you sitting in a chair by your own personal bed, crossing one leg over the other, and, with curiosity, watching yourself, your own self, writhe around on that very bed."[180] He connects "calmly and carefully considering every word" -- that is, aiming to be exact with language -- to "watching yourself" from an outside perspective. The close observation necessary for using precise language is a form of self-awareness, and striving to convey his experiences accurately forces D-503 to study himself.

As D-503 develops his self-awareness, he's also compelled to examine himself. D-503 becomes self-aware through faithfully recording his experiences, and then he practices self-examination as he reflects on his observations in order to come to a more sophisticated, nuanced understanding of himself. As a writer, D-503 doesn't just write, but he *reads*, too. He

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[178] Zamyatin, *We*, pp. 4, 10, and 101.
[179] Ibid, p. 4.
[180] Ibid, p. 54.

often realizes new things when he rereads his works, which leads him to expand on previous notes or to go in a new direction. As he surprises himself with his unusual behavior, such as unwillingness to report I-330 to the Bureau of Guardians, he examines himself by evaluating his writing. He parallels his literary self-examination when he scrutinizes himself in the mirror, at which point he writes: "for the first time in my life -- yes, exactly -- for the first time in my life, I see myself clearly, definitely, consciously. I see myself, with astonishment, like some kind of 'him.' I am him…"[181] His self-examination is characterized by seeing himself from an outside position -- he sees himself with more clarity, "consciously," when he views himself as a "him" and not just an "I." Yet though he sees himself from a distance, he still affirms his self-identification with this "him." His language mimics his earlier definition of his text as "me; and simultaneously not me."[182] He thus demonstrates that since his writing is an intimate part of him, yet *separate* from him, he's able to examine himself with greater clarity through the writing and reading process.

It's possible that D-503's determination to convey his self-understanding precisely is actually what unlocks his imagination and his creative use of figurative language. Figurative language is, in its own way, a method for conveying ideas precisely, especially ideas that are difficult to capture in plain language. For example, when trying to convey how his usually "chronometrically regulated and gleaming" brain is disturbed by his experiences with I-330, D-503 describes how he feels "some sort of foreign body in there, in my brain, like a fine eyelash in the eye -- the rest of you doesn't feel it, but the eye with the eyelash in it can't forget about it for a second…."[183] He begins with a plain, straightforward description of how he feels with "some sort of foreign body" in his brain, but he finds that it's inadequate for truly capturing his

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[181] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 53.
[182] Ibid, p. 4.
[183] Ibid, p. 30.

experience. He can't simply copy his feelings the way he copies text, because lived experience eludes effortless reproduction. It cannot be copied, so in order to precisely convey experiences such as the feeling of the "foreign body" in his brain, he needs to resort to figurative language. The "fine eyelash in the eye" he describes is a more specific image which more precisely conveys his sentiments, but it requires a greater creative leap. D-503's expectation that accuracy in writing is as simple as copying is thwarted by the reality that creativity is necessary to express himself.

The necessity of creativity in accurately describing D-503's personal experiences highlights that writing is inherently an act of discovery. D-503 initially doesn't intend to discover anything through his writing, because he is only *recording* what he observes. However, he does view discovery as an inherent part of creative writing, a literary endeavor he separates from his own recording. When he reads a state-sanctioned poem by R-13, which celebrates "the wisdom and the eternal happiness of the multiplication table," he reflects that:

> Every genuine poet is necessarily a Columbus. America existed for centuries before Columbus but it was only Columbus who was able to track it down. The multiplication table existed for centuries before R-13 but it was only R-13 who managed to find a new El Dorado in the virgin thicket of digits.[184]

Although D-503 is working with the traditional myth of Columbus as the first to "track… down" America, rather than the complex historical reality of Columbus's arrival in America, his comparison indicates that it is necessary for "genuine" poets to discover new territory, to push beyond the Known. As if the comparison to Columbus didn't already make this view clear, D-503's description of "the virgin thicket of digits" reinforces the idea that R-13 has stumbled upon something that has never been explored before. Of course, his musing is contradictory to

[184] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 59.

the One State's stance on the role of literature, which is not to provide opportunities for discovery, but to reinforce the regime's own beliefs. This contradiction, though, proves D-503's point, because he has now discovered something different from the One State's teachings. He may view his record-keeping as a practice separate from R-13's poetry, yet he is forced to consider new perspectives in order to accurately make sense of the world around him, which makes him just as much of a discoverer as R-13.

Discovery, of course, is unpredictable, so as an act of discovery, writing is also unpredictable, and recognizing the unpredictability of writing shakes D-503's faith in the One State's conviction that their model of life is reliably calculable. Even in his very first record, D-503 muses that though he will simply "attempt to record what I see, what I think - or, more exactly, what we think," he wonders whether his records may "become, inadvertently, regardless of my intentions, an epic poem?"[185] His musing seems to be in line with the One State's ideology, since he's referencing the glory of the One State, but in fact it deviates from that ideology. Even if his records are meant to celebrate the One State, they might take on a life of their own and become something D-503 did not intend them to become. This unpredictability is contrary to how both life and art are supposed to function in the One State, where "unwavering predictability" based on mathematical examples is the ideal.[186] In addition, D-503 is reluctant to suggest that his records could evolve into something unexpected, using the redundant phrases "inadvertently, regardless of my intentions," which he ultimately poses as a question to further emphasize his hesitancy. His uncertainty is also contrary to the One State's position that everything is known, since there will be no more revolutions. D-503 certainly doesn't mean to be heretical at this point in his records. He's simply trying to fulfill the One State's orders. D-503

[185] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 4.
[186] Ibid, p. 18.

finally accepts that writing is truly unpredictable when he perceives that his records didn't develop into the epic poem he tentatively suggested they might, but into something completely unexpected -- "some kind of fantastic adventure novel."[187] D-503's awareness that the writing process itself and the self-examination it facilitates are both unpredictable forces him to confront the reality that the One State's claim to have formularized life is a deception.

Self-examination and discovery help D-503 to learn one of the most important truths about himself -- the One State's formulas didn't teach him to know himself, but to *believe* that he did. His self-examination leads him to doubt himself, since he no longer recognizes himself as the loyal One State citizen he's always been. Once he realizes he's much more complex than an interchangeable cipher, he reflects that "knowledge that is absolutely certain it is infallible: it is belief. I had a firm belief in myself; I believed that I knew everything in myself."[188] D-503 captures the distinction between belief and true knowledge, a distinction the One State has attempted to erase. The One State claims to have a flawless knowledge of everything, but D-503 finally recognizes that its "knowledge" is only belief because his newfound sense of self -- a sense of self that contradicts everything he's been taught -- exposes that there is a difference between the two. The One State's "knowledge" is not the truth the regime claims it is. D-503's self-examination often leads to more confusion and uncertainty than answers, order, and relief, but his experience reveals that there is sometimes more truth in uncertainty than there is in so-called "knowledge." However, uncertainty isn't a resting place any more than the Known is. Uncertainty drives D-503 forward. Even in his tortured confusion, he writes that he considers it his duty "as the author of these records" to figure out "those unknown quantities"[189] which have emerged through his experiences. Yet he never reaches the end of "those unknown quantities" --

[187] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 91.
[188] Ibid, p. 53.
[189] Ibid, p. 104.

there is always something more to discover. The One State's lie is that everything is already known, but the truth is that life is a constant search for truth and knowledge. In order for D-503 to be able to engage in this search, he needs to see possibilities beyond his crumbled reality. Self-examination and discovery help him to unearth new layers, but in order to reach these layers and to build upon them, he has to exercise his imagination.

Imagination in Writing

Imagination in *We* can be described in three different ways. The first is by describing it as irrational, non-mathematical thought. The capacity for such thought is inherent in D-503, who describes being a young boy frightened when the "irrational root" of √-1 "happened" to him. The number "sunk" into him and "couldn't be comprehended or defused because it was beyond *ratio*."[190] The One State views irrational thought as undesirable because it is not useful and interferes with the machine-like behavior ciphers aspire to. Irrational thought often occurs unintentionally, as is the case with dreams. They just *happen*, rising up in D-503's mind without his conscious effort to evoke them. Imagination can also be described as the effort of mentally recreating one's experiences, frequently in order to better understand them. The imagination necessary for even a seemingly straightforward reproduction is evident in D-503's frequent use of figurative language (such as metaphors and similes), or through unusual descriptions such as O-90 laughing "pinkly, roundly."[191] This type of imagination is likely considered taboo in the One State because it demonstrates the subjectivity of experience (which can also be said of the first categorization) and thus illuminates the human individuality that the regime repudiates. Finally, imagination can also refer to the act of envisioning the presence of someone or

[190] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 36.
[191] Ibid, p. 37.

something that is absent (or not even in existence), as well as considering an action one is meant to understand without personally experiencing.

D-503 is forced to engage in this last category of imagination through his role as a writer who is meant to persuade his unknown readers, inhabitants of an unknown civilization on an unknown planet, that they should accept the One State's perfect ideology. Record Three is the first time D-503 becomes cognizant of the necessity of considering his audience's perspective. He opens the record by reflecting:

> I looked through all that I wrote yesterday and I see: I was not writing clearly enough. I mean, all of this is of course completely clear to any one of us [in the One State]. But how do I know: it may be that you, unknown reader, to whom the Integral will be carrying these records, have only read the great Book of Civilization up to the page that describes the life of our ancestors nine hundred years ago?[192]

D-503 realizes that his audience members may be completely unfamiliar with life in the One State, and in order for them to "clearly" understand what he is talking about, he has to take their possible experiences into account. His imagination is limited, since he's assuming that his readers are similar to his ancestors instead of being a people with a unique history, but he still recognizes that his audience members have had different life experiences from himself. D-503 has to *imagine* the world from his readers' perspective in order to achieve his goal of persuasion. By imagining their perspectives, he's forced to open up his mind.

The One State labels the imagination as a sickness, which supports their greatest lie: that happiness is more important than humanity. The One State censures imagination because it prevents ciphers from being perfect machines, constant and predictable in their rhythms. Near

[192] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 11.

the end of the novel, the One State introduces a surgery called the Great Operation to remove imagination, which they present as the path to being "perfect" and "machine-equal," which will lead to "one-hundred-percent happiness."[193] D-503 is initially relieved. His imagination *does* interfere with his happiness, because it introduces him to the painful complexities of the world. However, the regime's claim that imagination, due to its accompanying discomfort, is undesirable is a lie. The One State's approach to eliminating imagination fulfills its promise of happiness, but it's a corrupted "happiness." After the One State forcibly excises D-503's imagination, he says he "can't not smile" because his "head is light, empty."[194] The worth of this happiness is a lie. D-503 watches as I-330 -- his former great love and heartbreak -- is tortured repeatedly in the Bell Jar, and he's completely indifferent to her suffering, emotionlessly recording the scene in matter-of-fact language. The absence of love and compassion signals D-503's nauseating lack of humanity. Before his involuntary surgery, at a point in his development when he typically shuns the One State's beliefs, he himself is horrified by the "person-looking tractors"[195] who had been subjected to the Great Operation. Other ciphers are also terrified of the Operation, and the regime's attempt to perform the surgery on all ciphers provokes a mass uprising. During the violent chaos, D-503 longs for a mother to recognize him as "simply a fragment of humanity,"[196] rather than as Builder of the Integral or cipher D-503. His deep, existential yearning demonstrates the inherent value of humanity -- it doesn't matter who D-503 is or what he does, so much as the fact that he's "simply a fragment of humanity." Imagination is part of what makes people *human*, not machines, and a person's humanity is far more precious than mindless, easy happiness.

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[193] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 158.
[194] Ibid, p. 202.
[195] Ibid, p. 166.
[196] Ibid, p. 186.

SPIRITUAL PURIFICATION

D-503 spiritually purifies himself through his writing. For him, spiritual purity is constant creative revolution. Through examining himself and imagining new possibilities, he's able to cast off the One State's deceit that he is a static, perfected cipher. Rejecting this lie allows him to embrace his humanity. His humanity is his deep sense of being human, of caring for other humans, of creating new life in the form of his written work, of being fallible and incomplete. Essentially, his humanity can be defined by the qualities Zamyatin hoped to see literature foster. D-503's spiritual purification is a perpetual process which manifests through his constant need to confess as he writes.

D-503's writing becomes a form of personal confession. D-503 possibly feels driven to confess because of his determination to write honestly, as per the One State's policy of ciphers' transparency. Transparency is an important tenet of the One State, where the buildings are all literally transparent glass so that ciphers can be surveilled by each other and by the authorities almost constantly (the only state-sanctioned exception is that they are allowed to have sex in private). Such transparency reflects the regime's ideology of collectivist identity, because ciphers should have nothing to hide if there are no differences between them, but it also facilitates the regime's ability to police its citizens and monitor transgressive behavior. D-503 initially charges himself "to write [his records] without hiding a thing"[197] to fulfill both purposes, but his honesty to the authorities flags as he continues to write. He doesn't report I-330 to the Bureau of Guardians, even though every "'honest cipher'" is required to report illegal activities such as hers.[198] When D-503 is on the train to work, he spots the Guardian S-4711, and though he claims that he is "prepared right then to peel open the pages of my brain before him," he doesn't offer

[197] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 23.
[198] Ibid, p. 28.

himself up once it's clear that S-4711 doesn't intend to confront him. It's dishonesty by omission. D-503 reflects that, since he doesn't talk to S-4711, the only thing "left to me to do" is to "tell everything to you, my unknown readers."[199] He chooses to confess to his readers the self-realizations, doubts, and discoveries he hesitates to reveal to the authorities. His writing shifts the motivation for his honesty; instead of conforming to the State's expectations, he begins to confess to himself.

D-503's confessions are initially tied to his desire to rejoin the One State's mindless, stagnant bliss, but throughout the book, it becomes clear that true spiritual purification is a perpetual process. The One State promises that ciphers who are completely transparent, machine-like, and imagination-less will enjoy a permanent state of peace and happiness. The One State, then, views perfection as purity, but D-503 experiences change as *purification* -- purification being a constant, searching process rather than a completed accomplishment, like so-called "purity." D-503 may want to confess in order to relieve himself of his pain and feel peace, but his confessions seem to only agitate him more and thus create the need for more confessions. For example, once he goes to the Bureau of Medicine and confesses to a doctor what he's admitted in his records, he initially feels relieved by the doctor's diagnosis -- he has a soul as a result of his imagination. The doctor's explanation helps him to understand his own experiences, but the next day, he reflects that "at the very moment when I was thinking that everything had been untangled, that I had found all the X's, a new unknown quantity arose in my equation."[200] His confession serves as a breakthrough in his self-understanding, yet the newfound knowledge isn't the end of his uncertainty. It seems that there is no bottom to his spiral. Yet the

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[199] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 60.
[200] Ibid, p. 82.

endless nature of his confessions isn't negative, because continuing to struggle with "all the X's" in his life saves him from becoming stagnant.

Spiritual purification is necessarily a constant process because humans are a constant work-in-progress, and purification allows them to continue evolving, which keeps them in touch with their humanity. I-330 points out that a person never stops evolving when she tells D-503, "'Who knows who you are… A person is a novel: you don't know how it will end until the very last page. Otherwise, it wouldn't be worth reading to the very end.'"[201] No one can settle on who, exactly, D-503 really is, because he's constantly changing. Paradoxically, the elusive quality of his ever-evolving identity *is* his most real self, because the constant revolution keeps this self metaphorically alive. I-330's metaphor is particularly apt because D-503's records -- his "fantastic adventure novel"[202] -- unlock and nurture this true self. He calls his text "this excruciating and possibly most precious piece of myself,"[203] because it helps him tap into what is most essential about himself, beneath all the One State conditioning. As he points out, it's a painful process, but this complexity keeps him alive, because he continues to care about this eternal search and about his humanity.

As is the case with Zamyatin's theory of creative revolution, D-503's spiritual revolutions must be guided by love in order to be purifying. Compassion is one of the key human qualities which the One State indirectly targets as an obstacle to mechanized behavior. The One State's disregard for compassion is demonstrated when a group of ciphers is accidentally incinerated in a workplace accident at the Integral hangar, and D-503 records the incident "with pride because the rhythm of our labor did not falter for even a second because of this -- no one even

[201] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 141.
[202] Ibid, p. 53.
[203] Ibid, p. 145.

flinched."[204] The One State likely views compassion as useless because, as D-503 indicates, it doesn't contribute to ciphers' workplace efficacy. In fact, compassion can interfere with mechanized behavior, and D-503's pride stems from the fact that the ciphers who witnessed the accident did not allow it to reduce their productivity. Compassion is also highly inconvenient for a regime, because the desire to protect other humans can drive people to resist the regime's enforcement of their authority. For example, D-503 is moved by compassion to help O-90 become pregnant with the baby she desperately longs for but is forbidden by the state to have, and he is later moved to save her from being executed for her "crime." In both cases, he prioritizes O-90's well-being over the enforcement of the One State's laws, and his decision to protect her from the regime obviously interferes with the success of the state's operations.

Writing seems to contribute to D-503's compassion for others because it hones his ability to imagine their feelings and experiences. When the cipher S-4711 attempts to tear down a poster displaying the word MEPHI (the rebellious organization which arranged a show of dissent during the annual One Vote ceremony), all the ciphers in the area choose to ignore him, likely afraid to implicate themselves in the criminal activities of MEPHI. Though D-503 has the same reservations, he decides to help because of "how many times [S-4711] had been my real guardian angel."[205] D-503's choice can be read as simply the desire to return a favor in a mutual transaction, but he's actually identifying himself with S-4711. Unlike his interactions with his audience, he doesn't imagine S's differences from him, but his similarities. The term "guardian angel" suggests D-503's heartfelt appreciation for S's help -- D-503 has felt protected and relieved by his assistance. Remembering his appreciation drives him to help S-4711, but not because he feels obliged to return to a favor. It seems that he imagines S-4711 would also be

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[204] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 95

[205] Ibid, p. 132.

relieved to have a "guardian angel." His imagination allows him to identify with and connect with others, which makes him care about their fates and seek to help them.

In addition to feeling compassion for others, D-503 also yearns for others to have compassion for *him*, which demonstrates his desire to complete his human ties with his readers. D-503 frequently imagines who his audience must be for the purposes of more clearly explaining the aspects of his individual experience which may be less familiar to them, but sometimes he also asks his readers to use *their* imaginations in order to understand his explanations. For example, when explaining how it felt for him to see the world beyond the Green Wall, D-503 writes:

> Okay: if your world looks like the world of our distant ancestors, then imagine for yourself that one day you stumble upon a sixth or seventh part of the world -- some sort of Atlantis in the ocean -- and there you find far-fetched labyrinth cities, people swooping through the air without the help of wings or aeros, and rocks you can lift up with a mere glance… Basically, the sorts of things that wouldn't even enter your head, even if you were suffering from the dream-sickness. Well, that's how it was for me yesterday.[206]

D-503 uses his imagination to consider his audience's perspective, and then designs an experience which he thinks may be adjacent to his own. Yet unlike his earliest attempts in imagining his audience, he isn't just trying to convey his experience in order to persuade them to his ideological stance -- he simply wants to be understood. There is something inherently persuasive in his plea to be understood, but his motivation is different. He's not trying to reconstruct the monolithic "we" of the One State's ciphers, because their homogeneity reduces their humanity. He aims to connect, not convert.

[206] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 140.

Writing is both stimulated by and stimulates D-503's love for I-330. Writing is not singularly responsible for D-503's ability to love, as indicated by the fact that his familial relationships with O-90 and R-13 predate his literary endeavors. He feels safe within his family unit, whereas his love for I-330 throws him into confusion. This confusion is part of the reason that his desire breaks the One State's influence on his mind. He refrains from reporting I-330's illegal activities and continues to meet with her afterward out of his desire, which likely emerges separately from his writing, but his writing helps him to process the confusing nature of his desire for the type of person he's been conditioned to fear and hate. He notes that "I am afraid of I-330, I struggle with her," yet he's still attracted to her, and he asks "how can 'I don't want' and 'I want' coexist in me?"[207] His feelings are contradictory, but writing helps him to articulate the contradiction. However, making sense of the contradiction -- taming it -- isn't necessary for D-503's spiritual development, and would in fact likely be detrimental to it. As I-330 points out to him when she compares revolution to the scientific concept of entropy, "'it's the differences -- the differences -- between temperatures, it's in thermal contrast that life lies.'"[208] Simply being able to articulate the contradictions that puzzle him is enough, because it allows him to appreciate the energy within contrast.

The contradictory nature of his love for I-330 gives D-503 a sense for the scope of life as something that eludes his efforts to solve it, which saves him from stagnation. He's eventually brought to a point where he must admit that writing can't even fully capture his experiences: "Everything is new, new, new -- a sort of downpour of events -- and one of me is not enough to collect it all. I am stretching out the flaps of my unif and cupping my hands and yet whole bucketfuls still flow past me, and only drops end up on these pages…"[209] His ability to articulate

[207] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 119.
[208] Ibid, p. 154.
[209] Ibid, p. 140.

the inadequacy of language, while still striving to capture what he can, is one of the great indications of his spiritual growth. D-503's recognition of his inability to simplify life casts off the influence of the One State's inviting lies that "everything that is great is simple,"[210] and being willing to engage with life's insurmountable complexities demonstrates his commitment to eternal searching, the purifying process that keeps his spirit alive.

The capacity for truth within uncertainty rather than in knowledge connects to I-330's insistence that there is no final revolution, a perspective which helps D-503 to realize that knowledge is *not* limited. The One State claims that, in the words of D-503, "'revolutions aren't possible," because "'[the One State's] revolution was the last.'" Their assertion that there will be no more revolutions in society solidifies the One State's ideology as the ultimate truth, since there can be no other knowledge. I-330 challenges this assumption by asking D-503 what "'the final number'" is, to which he replies that "'the number of numbers is infinite.'" She uses this to argue that "'revolutions are infinite,'" too, and that "'there isn't a final one.'"[211] In other words, there is always another number, there is always another revolution, and there is always uncertainty, because knowledge isn't finite. I-330 insists that this constant evasion of finality is where "'life lies,'" in the "'thermal contrast'" of bringing ideas together to create new, unexpected ones.[212]

D-503's writing illustrates that One State's insistence on finality and limitations is not only a lie, because there can be no final revolution, but it's also an attempt at extinguishing the human spirit. The regime's insistence on an unchallenged worldview prevents the collision of ideas and the growth of new, living ones, which are necessary for keeping one's humanity metaphorically alive. D-503 initially resists I-330's perspective that there is no final revolution,

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210 Zamyatin, *We*, p. 102.
211 Ibid, p. 153.
212 Ibid, p. 154.

but he comes to agree with her. Just before the end of the novel, a cipher tells him that he has "'calculated that there is no infinity,'" which would be in accordance to the One State's ideology, but D-503 argues, "'where does your finite universe end? What is there -- and what is next?'"[213] His questions indicate that even at the limits of one's knowledge, there is always something "next." In a world that is truly infinite, there is always something next, and for D-503, this truth is more valuable than the comforting, false limits of the One State's ideology.

Through his writing, D-503 is able to reclaim his humanity within the dystopian society that seeks to suppress it, making him a heretic capable of writing "true literature." Unfortunately, like other heretics, D-503 is persecuted for his beliefs, and the novel ends tragically when his imagination is surgically removed, evidently extinguishing his humanity. Yet D-503's final record is still open-ended. His very last observations are that "I hope we will win. More than that: I know we will win. Because reason should win."[214] Despite the One State's efforts to make him perfect, D-503 is still uncertain about the regime's fate. He corrects the statement "I hope" with "I know," but the fact that he says "hope" first demonstrates that he still does not embody the One State's ideology. The ending is not a hopeful one, but if D-503 is uncertain about knowledge, there is still a possibility that he could continue to search for the truth and find his humanity again. After all, the regime is still struggling to subdue "a significant amount of ciphers betraying reason in the western quarters."[215] The One State still has not managed to impose stasis; there are no final revolutions. As long as there are revolutions, there will be "true literature" to nurture humanity.

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[213] Zamyatin, *We*, p. 201.
[214] Ibid, p. 203.
[215] Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Zamyatin's novel has long been celebrated as a prophetic novel, because there are eerie echoes of One State life and attitudes throughout Soviet history. This thesis has explored how Zamyatin himself was a victim of the Soviet censors and police, just like his protagonist. Readers have pointed out other similarities between *We* and life under the Soviet government: the Soviet campaign to expand its rule is reminiscent of the One State's efforts to conquer and convert new planets; Soviet culture also prized physical uniformity; and the Green Wall surrounding the One State's city functions to isolate citizens from a knowledge of the outside world, just as the Iron Curtain did in Soviet Russia.[216]

Unfortunately, Zamyatin's prophecy continues to be fulfilled in the modern day: Vladimir Putin's government has paralleled qualities of the One State since he took office, and his regime reached a new level of dystopian potential in its 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Many of his political decisions related to the war resemble how the One State maintains power. His regime is warping and limiting citizens' minds through propaganda. For example, Putin has been trying to use the Latin letter "Z" to inspire unquestioning, fanatical support in Russia for the war. The government cannot always control the use of the symbol, but they are successful in exploiting it as it evolves.[217] In addition to promoting its own propaganda, the Russian government has enforced a strict censorship intending to intellectually isolate the country's population from perspectives which challenge the official state narrative. The government shut down independent Russian media organizations such as TV Dozhd and blocked access to many foreign news outlets,[218]

[216] Masha Gessan. "The Russian Novel That Foresaw -- But Underestimated -- Totalitarianism." *The New Yorker*, 13 Dec. 2021.
https://www.newyorker.com/books/second-read/the-russian-novel-that-foresaw-but-underestimated-totalitarianism
[217] Coleman Lowndes. "How 'Z' Became Putin's New Propaganda Meme." *Vox*, Vox Media, 21 Apr. 2022.
https://www.vox.com/videos/2022/4/21/23036130/russia-propaganda-z-ukraine-putin.
[218] Pjotr Sauer and Ruth Michaelson. "'It Was Game Over': Russian Journalists Flee to Istanbul After Putin's Shutdown." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 18 March 2022.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/18/dozhd-tv-staff-russian-channel-in-exile-istanbul.

mimicking the censorship which D-503 experiences in the One State, and which Zamyatin himself experienced during the early Soviet period. In the fashion of the One State, Putin has been suppressing Russia's heretics. His most famous victim is opposition leader Alexei Navalny: the Russian government banned his anti-corruption organization, likely attempted to poison him, and arrested him in a "fabricated" case meant "to silence him."[219] Since the war began, the Russian police have also arrested thousands of citizens for peaceful protest against the war.[220]

Of course, Zamyatin's novel should not simply be used as a lens for understanding the history of the modern Russian government. The horrors of Vladimir Putin's regime are clear without Zamyatin's guidance, and viewing *We* as an allegory for Putin's government would be a reductive approach to both the novel and real-world politics.

Zamyatin's novel itself gives us an idea of how to make the connections between real life and fiction. Reading and writing in a searching, attentive way opens D-503's mind, allowing him to consider his society more critically. Getting in touch with his humanity through his private records liberates him to deeply care for his fellow ciphers. His love of literature ignites his love of life, and the two become intertwined, each strengthening the other. Yet Zamyatin's novel also invites us to continue to ask questions about the relationship between life and fiction -- after all, it's the constant search, imperfect but guided by love and open-mindedness, that keeps us metaphorically alive.

[219] "Alexei Navalny: Russia's Jailed Vociferous Putin Critic." *BBC*, 8 Oct 2022. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-16057045.
[220] "Russia: Brutal Arrests and Torture, Ill-Treatment of Anti-War Protestors." *Human Rights Watch*, 9 Mar 2022. https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/09/russia-brutal-arrests-and-torture-ill-treatment-anti-war-protesters.

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