Evgeny Zamiatin: Perspectives on Literature, Culture, and Human Nature

by

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Defense Date: April 5, 2024

Approved:

Edna Andrews, Advisor

Yana Lowry

JoAnne Van Tuyl

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Slavic and Eurasian Studies in The Graduate School of Duke University
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

In this thesis, I will analyze a selection of Evgeny Zamiatin's theoretical works, addressing prominent themes, including the historical and political context of his works, the future and purpose of literature, the role and responsibilities of writers in society, people's responsibilities toward each other as humans, who creates societal change, and how they accomplish change. I will consider Zamiatin's definitions of "revolutions", "heretics", and "heresy" to demonstrate how they apply to his understanding of the role of writers and the purpose of literature. I will apply the core ideas of these essays to an analysis of how ideas from Zamiatin's theoretical works manifest themselves in his novel *We*, with an especial focus on how Zamiatin adhered to his own vision for a brave, "heretical" writer. Through a semiotic perspective, I will explore some of the possible meanings and interpretations of *We* to reveal the relevance of this work to a twenty-first century audience.

All English translations of original Russian text are my own.

Contents

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Andrews for helping me throughout the process of writing my thesis. I so appreciate all of your time and insight about Zamiatin and Russian literature. I would also like to thank Dr. Lowry, Professor Maksimova, and Dr. Van Tuyl for everything they have done for me in my time at Duke.

1. Introduction

> "Мои дети — мои книги; других у меня нет."/ "My children—my books; I have no others." -E.I. Zamiatin, "Для сборника с книге"

Twentieth-century Russian author Evgeny Zamiatin achieved global recognition for his novel *Мы* (*We*)—after his death. Zamiatin wrote *We* in 1920, but the work was not published in Russia until 1989 due to Soviet censorship (Andrews et al. 99). Born in 1884, Zamiatin wrote during the late tsarist period, Russian revolutions and Civil War, and early Soviet period. Peers and friends included Anna Akhmatova, Alexander Blok, and Andrei Bely. Unlike many of his fellow writers, Zamiatin was not afraid of the ramifications of writing his true opinions. Because the intelligentsia was not fulfilling their moral obligation as writers, Zamiatin wrote encouraging them to disregard concern for themselves and their safety and to prioritize writing according to their beliefs. In his writings, Zamiatin advocates for a new standard among writers (and other artists), a standard of bravery and truth: "Правды—вот чего в первую голову не хватает сегодняшней литературе" / "Truth—this is what is lacking most of all in today's literature" ("О сегодняшнем и современном" 270). In calling Soviet writers to write the truth, he calls all writers of the world to follow these same principles.

Zamiatin has a rich, but less well-known collection of theoretical works that include his reflections on global events, wars, and politics. These writings draw from his own experiences with censorship, arrest, and forced migration. Zamiatin offers detailed analyses of cataclysmic world events he lived through, including the Russian revolutions,

Russian Civil War, establishment of the Soviet Union, and other wars of the early twentieth century. He reflects on censorship, oppression, financial difficulties, and other challenges to writers, including the serious threats to writers' lives within totalitarian regimes. In the context of Russian history and Zamiatin's literary works, in particular his novel *We*, an analysis of Zamiatin's theoretical works provides insights into the purpose of literature and art for humanity, concepts of courage and character, what responsibilities people have toward each other, and what (or who) is necessary to create societal change.

Zamiatin defines what makes a true writer and what makes true literature. He understands the hardships of writing true literature in restrictive societies with harsh consequences for speaking one's mind, but he still forcefully promotes honesty and truth in writing. He condemns the passive writer and argues that writers should be active in the building of their societies and creation of cultural mores. He criticizes writers who write with particular agendas for profit or governmental favor. Drawing upon the great legacy of Russian literature as inspiration, Zamiatin addresses the Russian intelligentsia to encourage them to write on behalf of humanity and freedom. He explores the roles and responsibilities of writers and readers; his definitions of "revolutions", "heretics", and "heresy"; who shapes the ideas and values of a society; and what is necessary to effect change.

Through his theoretical works, Zamiatin provides a model for his ideal writer and a vision for the future of Russian and world literature. His ideal writer behaves with bravery to the point of fearlessness. Zamiatin argues that a true writer ignores the status

quo to pursue the truth by writing according to one's conscience. Zamiatin defines the purpose of art and literature as the defense of humanity. Through his conviction that writers have a serious responsibility toward the public, he implores his fellow members of the Russian intelligentsia to defend humanity at any cost. Any threat, even that of death, will not intimidate a true writer. Zamiatin holds himself to these high standards of the true writer, fighting for the truth in the face of severe potential consequences during the tsarist and Soviet regimes.

A key theme in these writings is Zamiatin's faith in the ability of literature to create sweeping societal change. In lieu of dwelling on an idealized past or lamenting the problems of the present, his writings share a constant focus on the potential of the future, referring frequently to "tomorrow". Zamiatin applies his hopes for Russian literature, politics, and society in a broader context to literature, philosophy, and ethics through reflections applicable to any time and place. An analysis of these theoretical writings, in the context of Zamiatin's life and works, yields insights into world history, culture, and literature. His ideas extend beyond his environment to encompass all governments, places, and societies, making them relevant in any context.

Zamiatin's unique definitions of "revolutions", "heretics", and "heresy" comprise a vision for societal change and demonstrate the possible impact of literature on world events. Zamiatin sees the world as a constant cycle of inevitable revolutions. New ideologies, governments, and societies without fail replace older ones in time. Zamiatin praises revolutions, heretics, and heresy for what he sees as their necessary challenges to

the principles and ideas of the present time. These definitions illustrate his lofty expectations for writers to be brave, fearless individuals in spite of any challenges: true heretics.

An application of ideas from Zamiatin's theoretical works, including these crucial definitions, to his novel *We*, reveals how he truly lived the principles he preached, writing the truth no matter the consequences. His definitions of "heretics", "heresy", and "revolutions" apply to the totalitarian regime of the One State. Character I-330 demonstrates fearlessness and therefore adheres to Zamiatin's definition of a heretic, as she accepts torture and ultimately death for her steadfast belief in the revolution against the One State. Zamiatin promotes his definition of revolutions through conversations between I-330 and D-503 about the nature of revolutions and the possibility of a final revolution. He argues that, as there is no final number, there can be no final revolution. In the context of this totalitarian One State, he reflects on faith, dreams, and individuality and makes unique conclusions on these oft debated subjects.

Zamiatin's *We* generates a range of meanings and interpretations that keep this work relevant to any society and time period. A semiotic analysis of *We* helps to discover some of these meanings and understand the significance of the work for its possible meanings and interpretations. In his theoretical works, Zamiatin outlines his high expectations for readers. He defines reading as an active experience and expects readers to analyze the different layers of his works. These ideas connect to Yuri Lotman and Umberto Eco's semiotic principles of the "text within the text" and the "role of the reader".

From his book *Culture and Explosion* (1992), Lotman's concept of texts within a text, or multiple texts coalesced in one text to create deeper layers of meaning, applies perfectly to Zamiatin's *We*. *We* involves a series of complex texts within the larger text. When analyzed together, these texts within the text produce the most profound meanings of the work. These texts include texts devised by Zamiatin himself, such as the color text, verbal text, numerical text, and mathematical text. They also include references and allusions to other, previously written texts. For example, *We* contains myriad biblical allusions that relate to key themes of the work, including the utter destruction totalitarian regimes causes to society and to people's minds, the natural human inclination toward individuality against all odds, and the necessity of freedom for the human mind and heart. Zamiatin develops the biblical text through characters, events, and holidays within the larger text.

In his 1979 book *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Eco's understanding of the "role of the reader" states that every text generates infinite meanings. Meanings are generated by the constant new interpretations of new readers who have distinct backgrounds, educations, and cultural references. *We* provides a strong example of Eco's theories, as Zamiatin's words proved prophetic, and he predicted global events and phenomena well into the future. Lotman and Eco's theories add to Zamiatin's notion of the exploding text and his understanding of "revolutions" and "heretics".

An analysis of core themes of Zamiatin's theoretical works; an examination of the connections between his theoretical works and novel *We*, with particular attention to his

definitions of “revolutions”, “heretics”, and “heresy”; and an application of the semiotic concepts of Yuri Lotman’s “texts within a text” and Umberto Eco’s “role of the reader” contribute to a nuanced view of Zamiatin and his role in the Russian and global literary canons.

2. Chapter One: Role of the Writer According to Zamiatin (Theoretical Works)

2.1 Introduction

Zamiatin survived three distinct epochs of Russian history: the tsarist regime, the bloody years of the revolutions and Civil War, and the founding years of the Soviet Union. These experiences shaped his views as a writer and person. Zamiatin has a rich range of theoretical works that explore complex topics, including the role of writers and literature in society. He views literature as a means for social, cultural, and political change. In his theoretical works, Zamiatin reflects on how his visions for writers and for literature apply even during times of political instability, in the context of the years during and after the Russian Civil War. While he specifically addresses Soviet writers and fellow members of the Russian intelligentsia, he broadens the scope of these reflections to include all writers in all societies and time periods.

These universal writings address challenges to writers and their freedom and what obligations writers have despite or because of these challenges. They contemplate censorship, which Zamiatin experienced under both the tsarist and Soviet regimes. Zamiatin discusses the precariousness of a writer's life within a totalitarian regime and choices a writer has within such an environment. These struggles notwithstanding, he promotes a deep sense of civic responsibility of the writer to himself, his country, and his art. He denounces writers who cater to a regime in power through their writings for personal profit, benefits, or even to save their own lives. He provides strong arguments

for the need to follow one's conscience in the face of the utmost danger, which tie in with the themes of bravery, heresy, and heretics in his works.

In this chapter, I will conduct a close reading of four of Zamiatin's theoretical works: "Завтра" ("Tomorrow"), "Цель" ("Purpose"), "Я боюсь" ("I Fear"), and "О Литературе, революций и энтропии" ("About Literature, Revolution, and Entropy"). I will explore Zamiatin's ideas about the role of the writer and responsibilities of a writer toward himself, society, and the world and set the foundation for an analysis of major elements of *We*, specifically the topics of revolutions, heretics, heresy, dreams, faith, and freedom. Other goals of this chapter are to establish the historical and cultural context of Zamiatin's writings in his own words, unpack Zamiatin's reflections on the purpose and future of art and literature, and outline his definition of "revolutions" in preparation for a discussion of *We*.

2.2 "Завтра" (1919-1920)

In a 1919-1920 essay "Завтра", Zamiatin reacts to the tumultuous political and literary climate of the early twentieth century with a call to arms of the Russian intelligentsia. He inspires his audience to react to global events—the bloodshed and confusion of the recent revolutions and of the tumultuous Civil War period and the many global wars of the early twentieth century—by creating literature that will change the world for the better: "In his 1919 essay 'Tomorrow', Zamyatin surveys the genealogical violence infecting his Mother Russia: the Great War begetting the February and October Revolutions which begat the Red Terror, which begat the Russian Civil War" (Eichholz

269). Zamiatin begins in broad historical terms, philosophizing about the relationship between the past, present, and today and demonstrating individuality of thought. He narrows his subject to contemporary Russia through an intense discussion of its politics and literature: both a realistic evaluation of the situation and an idealistic vision for improvement. Zamiatin addresses the Russian intelligentsia in particular. With an insistence on their civic responsibility toward the Russian people and ability to influence the future of their country and the world through their writing, Zamiatin compels other members of the Russian intelligentsia to write against the death, totalitarianism, and war in the world around them in defense of humanity and the individual.

Through a discussion of the concept of "today", Zamiatin begins to establish potential for positive action and change during a fraught time in Russian history: "Всякое сегодня—одновременно и колыбель, и саван: саван—для вчера, колыбель—для завтра"/ "All of today—is at once a cradle and a shroud: a shroud- for yesterday, a cradle—for tomorrow" ("Завтра" 246). This sentence establishes Zamiatin's forward-thinking mindset: "Zamyatin insists that the future rather than the present provides criteria for the evaluation of experience, because the present is important only in so far as it is a generating force of the future" (Rooney 680). He always has his eye on the future: the next regime, the next revolution, the next society. Zamiatin evaluates the historical epochs during which he lived with a similar focus on the future:

> Мы пережили эпоху подавления масс; мы переживаем эпоху подавления личности во имя масс; завтра—принесет освобождение личности—во имя человека / We have survived an epoch of suppression of the masses, we are surviving an epoch of

> the suppression of the individual in the name of the masses; tomorrow—will bring liberation of the individual—in the name of man (246).

This quote encompasses the extremes of autocracy and communism. In the aftermath of the October Revolution, Zamiatin neither aligns with the Soviet Union nor wishes for a return to the days of tsardom: "[*We*] has been widely admired in the West both as a devastating critique of the political system which was emerging in the early years of Bolshevik rule and as an outstanding example of literary modernism" (Barratt 344). Zamiatin indicts both the tsarist regime and communist regime- the former for "suppression of the masses" and the latter for "suppression of the individual in the name of the masses": "Zamyatin therefore does not object to Marxist ideology in itself but rebels against the dogmatic form it took after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia" (Rooney 678). Zamiatin sustains his constant focus on the future, viewing today through the lens of tomorrow. Despite his own harrowing experiences with totalitarianism and the atmosphere of great violence and political and social instability in which he wrote, Zamiatin has a positive prediction for what future revolutions and world orders will achieve: "liberation of the individual—in the name of man" ("Завтра" 246). With a sense of determined optimism, this bold statement conveys certainty in a positive future. Zamiatin rises above the environment of death and destruction around him to envision future worlds and demonstrate how they can be shaped by good literature: "Zamyatin himself in his 1918 lecture on contemporary Russian literature suggests that every artist

should also be an active participant in the social and historical life of his country and in the creation of new values" (Rooney 675).

The constant wars of the early twentieth century added chaos to the world in which Zamiatin lived and wrote. Critiquing both the former Russian Empire and contemporary revolutionaries, Zamiatin identifies how frequent wars led to a devaluing of human life: "Война империалистическая и война гражданская -- обратили человека в материал для войны, в нумер, цифру"/ "The imperialist war and civil war—have turned man into material for war, into a number, a figure" ("Завтра" 246). Zamiatin applies this observation to the totalitarian "Единое государство" ("One State") in *Мы* (*We*). Citizens of the One State do not have names, but refer to one another with ciphers; for example, *We*'s protagonist is named D-503. Zamiatin opposes war as a solution to world problems. As an alternative, in his theoretical works, he implores writers to improve the world around them with their writing: "Единственное оружие, достойное человека—завтрашнего человека—это слово."/ "The only weapon, worthy of a man—tomorrow's man—is the word" ("Завтра" 246). Zamiatin untangles this idea of "tomorrow's man" by outlining distinct expectations for contemporary writers in the context of the sociopolitical climate. He connects these expectations to writers in general, making this work relevant far beyond the Soviet period.

In outlining his expectations for writers, Zamiatin addresses the Russian intelligentsia with allusions to the impressive history of Russian literature: "Словом русская интеллигенция, русская литература—десятилетия подряд боролась за

великое человеческое завтра”/ “The word of the Russian intelligentsia, Russian literature- which for decades in a row has struggled for a great human tomorrow” (247). He pays tribute to the past Russian literary canon and aligns it with a moral struggle, “за великое человеческое завтра”/ “for a great human tomorrow” to inspire contemporary writers to continue this legacy. Zamiatin has a specific vision for how Soviet writers should uphold the legacy of Russian literature: writing the truth, no matter the consequences. Zamiatin conveys a sense of duty of writers and intellectuals to the Russian people (and all of humanity): “На защиту человека и человечности зовем мы русскую интеллигенцию”/ “We call the Russian intelligentsia to defend man and humanity” (“Завтра” 247). Zamiatin feels a profound sense of responsibility as a member of the intelligentsia, an educated person, and a writer. He applies the language of war, “defend”, to literature to emphasize its ability to evoke societal change. Zamiatin effectively argues against war and in favor of literature as a means for societal change by evoking such language in his discussion of writers and literature.

After calling upon the Russian intelligentsia, Zamiatin narrows his appeal to exclude two groups: those who wish for a return to the tsarist regime and those who lack the bravery to fight for human principles in an environment with societal turmoil and censorship of writers: “Наше обращение не к тем, кто не приемлет сегодня во имя возврата к вчерашнему; наше обращение не к тем, кто безнадежно оглушен и сегодняшним днем”/ “Our appeal is not to those, who do not accept today in the name of a return to yesterday; our appeal is not to those, who are hopelessly defeated by today”

(247). This quote points to Zamiatin's forward-thinking mindset, keeping thoughts of yesterday and today in check in favor of a focus on the vast possibilities of tomorrow. To fight for humanity requires bravery in the face of any outer challenges, a sense of the impermanency of today, and trust in the promise of tomorrow. Through this broader discussion of "man and humanity", Zamiatin connects his reflections on Soviet literature to the purpose of literature in a general sense that applies to all societies, rendering his works relevant to any society.

Zamiatin maintains a distanced perspective mindful of the transience of human institutions. He recognizes the impermanency of all governments, ever mindful of future revolutions and world orders: "завтра—принесет освобождение личности—во имя человека"/ "tomorrow—will bring liberation of the individual—in the name of man (246). Zamiatin faced countless challenges under tsarist and Soviet leadership, including multiple arrests and restrictions upon freedom of speech. In February of 1919, Zamiatin, Ivanov-Razumnik, and Blok were arrested for their political beliefs (Andrews et al. 99-100). In 1905 and 1911, Zamiatin endured exile for political activities (Bristol 451). Obligatory migration played an important role in Zamiatin's life and works. For his personal safety, Zamiatin emigrated to France with his wife in 1931 (Andrews et al. 99). They never had the chance to return to the Soviet Union before Zamiatin's death in 1937 (Rooney 675). Zamiatin develops forced migration as a prominent theme in *We.* By having a child despite her legal ineligibility, O-90 breaks the laws of the One State. She flees the One State to avoid separation from her child and immediate execution. Despite

the vast array of challenges he endured in his life, Zamiatin advocates for forward-thinking literature.

Through his discussion of forward-thinking literature, Zamiatin stresses how the future is dependent upon the bravery and integrity of writers and artists. Zamiatin reminds his fellow writers that all people share a common humanity. He compels them to fight for this principle through their writing: “Время крикнуть: человек человеку—брат!”/ “Time to cry out: man to man—brother!” (“Завтра” 247). He believes that writers have power to shape societal mores, so they should use their platforms to fight for humanity. These concepts of a shared humanity and moral obligation to other people make Zamiatin’s works timeless and accessible to new audiences. These ideas go beyond writers and literature to lead all people to ponder their responsibilities toward others.

2.3 “Цель” (1920)

In this profound essay, Zamiatin discusses the purpose of literature and art. This includes a discussion of his ideas of the responsibilities of writers and artists to themselves, to their countries, and to society: “he saw himself not only as an artist but also as an active ideologue, whose system of ideas constitutes a contribution to the advancement of civilization” (Rooney 675). Zamiatin argues that wars lead to the moral degradation of different elements of society, including literature. He identifies how war cheapened the quality of twentieth century literature, because it spread hatred throughout the world: “У нас пока вся литература еще заражена ядами войны. Она строится на ненависти”/ “Our literature is still infected with poisons of war. It is built on hatred”

(“Цель” 248). Comparing war to a disease that infects every aspect of a society, Zamiatin opposes the weapons of war. He promotes art and literature as a means to change and improve the world without war. Zamiatin argues that writers have a moral obligation toward their societies and countries: “Цель искусства и литературы в том числе -- не отражать жизнь, а организовывать ее, строить ее”/ “The purpose of art and literature-among others—is not to reflect life, but to organize it, to build it” (“Цель” 250). The writer to Zamiatin cannot be passive, sitting back and reflecting life, but must play an active role in society. Zamiatin contends that writers should participate in the political and social atmosphere of their countries, “[organizing]” and “[building]” life, no matter the personal dangers this could involve. Zamiatin’s demand that writers and those who hope to change their society for the better must have bravery in all circumstances and play an active role to achieve what they believe in is emphasized throughout his works, especially in *We*: “A stinging critique of Soviet rule can be formulated by reading *We* in dialogue with the author’s own contentious relationship with his government” (Eichholz 282).

Zamiatin held himself to the high standards of bravery and character that he expected from all writers: “Впрочем, каково будет это грядущее -- зависит от нас.”/ “However, what the future will be—depends on us” (“Цель” 248). Zamiatin does not stop at preaching to others, but includes himself in his audience, “us”. In line with this sense of moral responsibility, Zamiatin condemns the tendency of artists to compromise their values for the sake of personal profit:

> Это правда: художники -- всех родов оружия -- в большинстве всегда скептически развращены, беспринципны в большинстве -- они всегда были ландскнехтами, продавали себя тем, кто им хорошо платит"/ "It is true: artists— of all kinds of weapons—in the majority have always been lansquenets, selling themselves, to who pays them well (248–9).

Zamiatin makes this statement in the context of writers who betrayed their personal values to write according to the values of the Soviet state, but applies this idea to all writers by reflecting on the nature of artists throughout history. This is a prime example of how Zamiatin's works are constantly relevant beyond their context.

Despite Zamiatin's personal experiences with the brutal consequences of contradicting the government in power, he remains a staunch advocate for writing true to one's values. Zamiatin's solution for the future of literature is love: "Только тогда, когда мы вместо ненависти к человеку поставим любовь к человеку—придет настоящая литература"/ "Only when we replace hatred for man with love for man—then real literature will come" (248). Zamiatin's evaluation of the world is hopeful. As the wars of the early twentieth century filled the world with hatred, like a disease, real literature can awaken the world to a consciousness of the common humanity of all people. Any negative situation, even one as dark as a totalitarian regime, will eventually, inevitably be replaced with a new one: "Reality is inseparable from its epoch and artists are required to be in tune with the 'reality of the times.' In this perspective, historical change represents a constant shifting from one reality to the next" (Byford 143).

Through his life struggles, Zamiatin retains faith in humanity. This faith in humanity provides the foundation for Zamiatin's understanding of the ultimate purpose

of literature and art, the core idea of this essay: “Художник должен говорить не о средствах, а о цели—о великой цели, к которой идет человечество” / “The artist must talk not about the means, but about the goal—about the great goal, to which humanity is moving” (“Цель” 251). Zamiatin’s perspective goes beyond the means—petty motivations and smaller political goals—to highlight the goal of societal improvement. Zamiatin sees all people, despite ostensible and outer differences, as one, and inspires other artists to create art with the future of all humanity in mind.

2.4 “Я боюсь” (1921)

In the Soviet Union, writers faced intense scrutiny and often great personal dangers, ranging from arrest to execution. Censorship ebbed and flowed over time, according to political and social trends, as well as changes in leadership. Throughout the 1920s, the Soviet Union “[tightened] the cultural reins” (Bristol 458). Zamiatin wrote *We* in 1920. Letters to his wife, Ludmila Nikolaevna, reveal Zamiatin’s high hopes for having *We* published in Soviet Russia (Andrews et al. 99). Despite Zamiatin’s efforts and appeals to editors, *We* was not published in Russia until 1989 due to censorship (Andrews et al. 99). The stringency of Soviet censorship left writers with important moral choices to make.

In his 1921 essay “Я боюсь”, Zamiatin offers a clear outline of the choices a Soviet writer had during this period: to remain silent and not produce work; to continue writing, but conform to Soviet ideology in the writing; or to behave with true bravery and write according to one’s conscience and beliefs. This last option resulted in some of the

most acclaimed Russian literature of today, for Bulgakov "turned to writing words for the drawer which would not see publication for many years" (Bristol 458). Zamiatin presents the third choice as the only moral one: "Для писателя, для поэта настоящего -- выбор ясен" / "For a writer, for a real poet—the choice is clear" ("Я боюсь" 255). Zamiatin holds that "the choice is clear," revealing a sense of honor as a writer. Although this essay is (ironically) titled "I Fear", Zamiatin demonstrates a lack of fear and steady devotion to his conscience as a writer despite impending dangers. Alluding to the great history of Russian literature, Zamiatin provides an ironic incentive for members of the intelligentsia to write with courage: "Я боюсь, что у русской литературы одно только будущее: ее прошлое"/ "I fear, that Russian literature has just one future: its past" ("Я боюсь" 255). Zamiatin says "I fear" with deep irony to inspire his fellow intellectuals to behave with bravery in their writing and work toward the literature of the future, despite the dangers of writing freely during this period.

This high expectation for bravery in writers does not mean that Zamiatin ignores the plight of Soviet writers. Zamiatin understands this experience, because he lived it. He goes into detail about more struggles of Soviet writers, in addition to the obvious challenge of censorship. Financial challenges posed another problem for Soviet artists during the years after the Civil War:

> Да, это одна из причин молчания подлинной литературы. Писатель, который не может стать юрким, должен ходить на службу с портфелем, если он хочет жить. В наши дни -- в театральный отдел с портфелем бегал бы Гоголь; Тургенев во "Всемирной Литературе", несомненно, переводил бы Бальзака и Флобера…/ Yes, this is one of the reasons for the silence of true literature. A writer, who cannot become nimble, must go to work with a briefcase, if he wants to live. In our day—Gogol would

> run to the theater department with a briefcase; Turgenev in 'World Literature', undoubtably, would translate Balzac and Flaubert… ("Я боюсь" 254).

Zamiatin examines yet another cause of how he found early Soviet literature lacking. The economic hardships of the 1920s meant that a writer could not support himself with writing alone. Zamiatin lists celebrated Russian authors and gives them hypothetical office jobs to demonstrate the added challenge of economic insecurity that impacted writers. Although he understands this predicament, Zamiatin does not consider financial challenges to be a reason for not writing according to one's conscience in pursuit of the truth. He does not allow himself or other writers to use this as an excuse. According to Zamiatin, this set of challenges should not intimidate writers, but inspire them:

> Главное в том, что настоящая литература может быть только там, где ее делают не исполнительные и благонадежные чиновники, а безумцы, отшельники, еретики, мечтатели, бунтари, скептики/ The main thing is, that real literature can only be where it is not made by executive and trustworthy officials, but by madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels, skeptics ("Я боюсь" 255).

"Madmen", "hermits", "heretics", "dreamers", "rebels", and "skeptics" exist on the fringes of or in opposition to society: "For Zamyatin only Heretics represent the strong, the artistic, the nonconformist part of mankind endowed with energy and above all with the spirit of eternal rebellion" (Rooney 682). Zamiatin argues that real writers stand in opposition to society, because they look beyond the present: forward toward potential futures. This understanding of the role of the writer connects to the role of revolutionaries and treasonous characters in the totalitarian One State in *We*. Zamiatin creates a revolutionary group of characters who do not play it safe. These figures risk and

ultimately lose their lives to public execution for the sake of principles in which they strongly believe. Characters who stand in opposition to society in fact ironically hold the best interest of society in their hearts, but this requires going against the draconian One State and all established social norms within the One State. In “Цель”, Zamiatin rejects worldly concerns, namely money, and encourages writers to exist in a loftier, abstract plane, with higher hopes for society than other people around them can even believe possible.

2.5 “О Литературе, революций и энтропии” (1923)

In this essay, Zamiatin discusses his vision for the future of literature, then segues into a discussion of his definition of “revolutions” and the concept of entropy. This essay reveals a core influence on Zamiatin’s mind and works: his background as an engineer and mathematician: “Zamiatin’s preoccupation with the scientific method of reasoning, his sympathy with relativism, and his denunciation of absolutism are also fundamental to his understanding of truth” (Rooney 677). Zamiatin’s definition of “revolutions” connects to his definitions of “heresy” and “heretics”. These three definitions in tandem comprise an important theme in his works, including *We*. These concepts influence the major characters in *We* as they work to topple the authoritarian society in the work. In the novel, I-330 portrays Zamiatin’s definition of “revolutions”: “Many of the views expressed by I-in the novel bear an unquestionable resemblance to opinions set forth elsewhere by Zamyatin himself. Most significant in this respect is her argument about Energy and Entropy, which virtually repeats the opening sections of the author’s most famous article,

‘O literature, revolyutsii I entropii”” (Barratt 353). This essay reveals other intriguing elements of Zamiatin’s vision for writers and literature. Zamiatin’s focus on the supremacy of tomorrow over past and present persists. He extends this argument to the subject of literature itself in this essay by advocating for forward-thinking literature for an ever-changing world.

Zamiatin argues on behalf of forward-thinking literature, adhering to the aforementioned idea of the constant, ever changing, cycle of regimes, nations, and empires that makes up the world: “Живая литература живет не по вчерашним часам, и не по сегодняшним, а по завтрашним”/ “Alive literature does not live by yesterday’s clock, and not by today’s, but by tomorrow’s” (“О Литературе, революций и энтропии” 292). This focus on tomorrow is a unique vision for literature. It rejects sentimentality and inspires writers to look toward the future, not dwell on the past, no matter how positive a past might seem in hindsight. Zamiatin has a specific vision for how writers should create such “alive literature”. According to Zamiatin, to devote oneself to the truth in literature requires bravery to the degree of fearlessness. To be brave means to act counter to the status quo in order to make a major impact on society, so therefore necessitates the utmost challenge to established tradition: “revolutions”.

Informed by his background as an engineer, Zamiatin defines “revolutions” in a unique way:

> Революция—всюду, во всем; она бесконечна, последней революций нет, нет последнего числа. Революция социальная—только одно из бесчисленных чисел: закон революций не социальный, а неизмеримо больше—космический, универсальный закон—такой же, как закон сохранения энергии, вырождение

> энергии (энтропии)/ Revolution—is everywhere, in everything; it is infinite, there is no final revolution, no final number. The social revolution—is just one of an infinite number: the law of revolution is not social, but immensely more—a cosmic, universal law—like those laws of the conservation of energy, of the distribution of energy (entropy). (291).

In keeping with his educational background, Zamiatin's theory of revolutions derives from the mathematical reality of infinity in nature and universal scientific laws of energy and entropy: "A clear indication of the importance of science to Zamyatin is his assertion that 'science and art—both project the world along the same coordinates'" (Rooney 678). Zamiatin bases his idea of "no final revolution" in the argument that there is "no final number" in mathematics. He considers the world and humanity from a comprehensive perspective, removing himself from his particular time, place, and system of government ("everywhere, in everything"). He refers to the Russian revolutions ("the social revolution"), yet extends his reflections to the entire world, defining "revolutions" as a "cosmic, universal law." As a "law", this understanding of revolutions is set in stone and will never change. Zamiatin views world history as a constant, endless cycle of revolutions: "For Zamjatin revolution is a process of revitalization which occurs over and over. It means the birth of new life and, like any birth, involves a struggle. It is dynamic and indicates the fluidity of nature" (Hoisington and Imbery 167). Zamiatin's concept of "no final revolution" contributes to the universality of his writings. No matter how permanent a government or ideology seems, a new system will always replace the current one:

> Это уже путь эволюции. Пока новая ересь не взорвет кору догмы и все возведенные на ней прочнейшие, каменнейшие постройки/ This is already the path of evolution. Until a new heresy explodes the crust of dogma and all the strongest, stoniest buildings built upon it. ("О Литературе, революций и энтропии" 292).

This sense of the inevitability of revolutions adds an uncertainty, yet also a comfort, to Zamiatin's writings. Any system will eventually, without fail, be replaced by another. Even societies steeped in tradition will change. Zamiatin chooses powerful words, including "dogma" and "strongest", to demonstrate how the most established of traditions will inevitably be replaced with another. Zamiatin's definition of "revolutions" is further unique in the scope of what it encompasses. The word "revolution" has connotations of violent political coups and bloody struggles for power, but Zamiatin's definition incorporates other societal movements, including intellectual and cultural movements.

Zamiatin does not restrict his definition of "revolutions" to political revolutions: "Zamyatin escapes such aporia by extending the revolutionary beyond the political plane" (Eichholz 280). Zamiatin's definition of "revolutions" includes intellectual and cultural events and movements; he "envisages revolutions as colossal universal explosions, as pinnacles of the increasing creative vitality of mankind" (Rooney 679). Zamiatin considers such events and movements to be "revolutions" if they break down boundaries and defy established traditions in order to facilitate widespread societal change. Zamiatin gives an example of an intellectual revolution through Lobachevsky's discovery of non-Euclidean geometry, subsequent publishing of his findings, and effects of his work on the future world of mathematics:

> Лобачевский одной книгой раскалывает стены тысячелетнего Эвклидова мира, чтобы открыть путь в бесчисленные неэвклидовы пространства—это революция/ Lobachevsky through one book breaks down the walls of the thousands year old Euclidean world, in order to open the path to countless non-Euclidean spaces—this is a revolution ("О Литературе, революций и энтропии" 291).

Zamiatin demonstrates how intellectuals, not solely politicians, can create revolutions through this example of Lobachevsky: "The heretic, in this description, is the archetypal outsider, a person whose thoughts or creations are so innovative as to represent a radical challenge to the *status quo*" (Barratt 353). Publishing a book in Lobachevsky's case constitutes a "revolution" according to Zamiatin's definition, because Lobachevsky broke down metaphorical walls ("раскалывает стены"), defied thousands of years of tradition ("тысячелетнего Эвклидова мира"), and facilitated widespread societal change through his profound influence on the future of mathematics in discovering non-Euclidean geometry ("открыть путь в бесчисленные неэвклидовы пространства"). This understanding of "revolutions" connects to elements of Zamiatin's vision for the ideal writer, through bravery, disregard for accepted social norms, and a focus on the future.

3. Chapter Two: Zamiatin's Novel *We*: Heresy, Revolutions, and Other Themes

3.1 Introduction

Zamiatin's definitions of "revolutions", "heretics", and "heresy", as explicated in his theoretical works, become core themes in *We*. To determine who in society generates revolutions, Zamiatin examines the difference between bravery, behaving with courage through fear, and heresy, a total lack of fear. Zamiatin defines "heretics" in a unique way that sheds light on his definition of "revolutions". He describes how heretics initiate revolutions and emphasizes how heretics are willing to suffer any consequence for their beliefs. Zamiatin offers examples of heretics and how they changed the world, including Jesus Christ, Copernicus, Lobachevsky, and Tolstoy. An analysis of Zamiatin's definitions of "heretic" and "heresy and how he applies them to *We* allows for a more complete view of his argument with many examples to ponder. This contributes to a discussion on revolutions and dreams in *We* and allows for a deep analysis of the One State, the totalitarian regime in *We*, and what enduring insights *We* has to offer about totalitarianism, revolutions, and humanity.

In this chapter, I will outline Zamiatin's definitions of "heretics" and "heresy" with attention to their connections to his aforementioned definition of "revolutions". I will connect Zamiatin's definitions of "heretics" and "heresy" to his ideas for the future and purpose of literature. I will address Zamiatin's real life examples of heretics and why they fit his definition. I will explore the consequences of being a heretic according to Zamiatin, with real life and fictional examples. I will demonstrate how Zamiatin holds

himself to the high standard he demands from all writers: a fearless heretic. Next, I will examine Zamiatin's fictional example of a heretic through the character I-330 from *We*. I will explore how Zamiatin contrasts I-330 and D-503 to argue that this contrast provides the foundation of his discussion of heretics and critique of totalitarianism. Next, I will examine the role of revolutions in *We* through this contrast between I-330 and D-503. This will contribute to my discussion of heretics and heresy by demonstrating how revolutions necessitate true heretics in Zamiatin's view. Next, I will discuss dreams in *We*, specifically their relationship to the totalitarian One State's absolute control over citizens and attempt to control their minds. I will examine this motif to consider Zamiatin's themes of the importance of freedom and individual thinking to the human mind and soul. My goal in this chapter is to explicate on Zamiatin's inextricably connected ideas of revolutions, heretics, and heresy in order to examine his critique of totalitarianism and promotion of individuality and freedom for the sake of the future of humanity.

3.2 Heretics and Heresy in *We*

3.2.1 Zamiatin's Definitions of "Heretics" and "Heresy"

Zamiatin's definition of "revolutions" is inextricably linked with his definitions of "heretics" and "heresy". Who in society instigates these revolutions? Zamiatin answers that revolutions are started by people who behave in complete opposition to socially accepted norms, beliefs, and values. Revolutions cannot be quiet or tentative, but have to be a force that changes society in a sweeping way. To incite revolutions requires more

than bravery in its generally accepted sense, the sense of undergoing certain actions by pushing through existing fears, or bravery through fear. Zamiatin argues that true bravery constitutes bravery to the point of heresy: a total lack of fear in the first place.

The border between bravery and fearlessness is where Zamiatin finds his definition of "heretics", separating brave people from true heretics. He expands the definition of "heretics" to include, but also go beyond its commonly accepted religious sense. By "heretics", Zamiatin signifies figures who behave with total lack of fear to fight for what they believe in, counter to established norms. This fearlessness is what sets heretics apart from the crowd, apart from even the bravest of individuals. Fearlessness makes people true heretics according to Zamiatin. Being "heretics" differentiates people from entire generations and makes them extremely rare in society: "Such individuals are encountered only very rarely" (Barratt 353). They are rare, but not obsolete. Zamiatin provides a list of examples of heretics in his theoretical writings: "Zamyatin's list includes Galileo, Darwin, Babeuf, Schopenhauer, Dostoyevsky, Einstein, and Nietzsche" (Barratt 353). Zamiatin creates a fictional example of a heretic through the character I-330 in *We*. Revolutions according to Zamiatin demand true "heretics" and nothing less. Infinite revolutions initiated by heretics facilitate Zamiatin's version of an ever-changing world and his focus on tomorrow.

Zamiatin maintains that the "мир жив только еретиками"/ "world is alive through heretics alone" ("Завтра" 246). He takes a commonly negative word, "heretics", and shows how "heretics" keep the world alive by effecting change and keeping the

world in its natural progression always toward the next revolution. Each revolution instigated by a heretic fundamentally reshapes the world and keeps it alive. As forward-thinking literature keeps literature alive, forward-thinking people keep the world alive, through literature and more. Heretics can change the world in a variety of ways: intellectually, morally, politically, and many more. They usually change many of these categories at once, because their ideas are so radically different from the accepted ideas and values of their environment. Zamiatin gives examples of heretics who fundamentally reshaped the ethical, intellectual, and political worlds around them. Their actions were so revolutionary, that their revolutions have far-reaching results that extend to the current world today.

For examples of heretics, Zamiatin provides “еретик Христос” (“heretic Christ”), “Коперник” (Copernicus) and “Толстой” (Tolstoy) (“Завтра” 246). These disparate examples relate in that each of these individuals defied centuries of tradition to propagate their beliefs, which resulted in striking changes to their respective societies and the world as a whole. Jesus Christ changed the cultural mores of his world by promoting a new philosophy: forgiveness through the ethos of “turn the other cheek” as opposed to the accepted norm of justice, “an eye for an eye”. This revolution completely changed the course of human events, as Christianity shaped Western civilization, and persists today. Christ’s new ethos was so sweeping that it went beyond his society to affect the entire world and the future, a true revolution. To illustrate the total fearlessness of heretics by

his definition, Zamiatin examines the lengths heretics will go to in order to fight for their beliefs through his discussion of revolutions and explosions, a prominent theme in *We*.

True heretics are willing to die for what they believe: "Взрывы—малоудобная вещь. И потому взрывателей, еретиков, справедливо истребляют огнем, топором, словом"/ "Explosions—are not very comfortable things. And so the exploders, the heretics, are justifiably destroyed by fire, axes, words" ("О Литературе, революций и энтропии" 292). Zamiatin perceives revolutions as such broad cultural resets that they constitute "explosions". Zamiatin challenges writers to be beyond brave, downright heretical. He demands cultural and intellectual movements to change and challenge society to the degree of explosions. These changes and challenges to society inevitably upset many people, rendering explosions "not very comfortable things." Heretics often die for their beliefs, "are justifiably destroyed by fire, axes", because they shock society by challenging centuries of established social norms.

Zamiatin adds another possibility: the fact that heretics can also be destroyed by "words". This alludes to his previous example of author Lev Tolstoy as a heretic. For challenging the established Orthodox theology in Russia through his writings, Tolstoy was publicly excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church, despite his still being a Christian in name (Bartlett 345). Tolstoy's willingness to accept public censure and exclusion from the Church associated with his own country demonstrates his heretical fearlessness by Zamiatin's definition. These examples show how heretics must accept drastic consequences for their actions, but stand firm in their belief that they are

promoting what is right for their society: “The heretic’s function is to inject into the historical process the iconoclastic element without which the dialectic of progress would fail to operate. For this he (or she) pay a heavy price” (Barratt 353-4). Heretics have such conviction in their beliefs that criticism from outside forces cannot deter them. Under Zamiatin’s definition, “heresy” becomes a positive force for the world and an ironic source of “faith”.

Zamiatin takes his definition of “heresy” a step further in stating that “наш символ веры—ересь”/ “our symbol of faith is heresy” (“Завтра” 246). The apparent paradox of “веры” (“faith) and “ересь” (“heresy”) would seem a shocking word choice to anybody with a Christian upbringing. Having grown up in Russia with an Orthodox priest for a father, Zamiatin would understand the irregularity of this comparison—and how a reader would take note of this line (Andrews et al.). This unusual association of “faith” with “heresy” implies faith in the future and faith in the improvement of society and the future of humanity. This turn of phrase suggests that those who speak out against established tradition can uproot ethical systems to create new moral foundations for society.

In the context of the tumultuous historical period in which he wrote, Zamiatin holds himself and his peers to the ideal of the fearless, heretical writer who upholds his beliefs at any cost:

> Нужны писатели, которые ничего не боятся -- так же, как ничего не боится революция; нужны писатели, которые не ищут сегодняшней выгоды -- так же, как не ищет этого революция (не даром же она учит нас жертвовать всем, даже жизнью -- ради счастья

> будущих поколений -- в этом ее этика); нужны писатели, в которых революция родит настоящее органическое эхо. Пусть это эхо в каждом писателе будет индивидуально, пусть писатели в работе не сообразуются с какими-то параграфами таких-то конференций: важно, чтобы это было искренно, важно, чтобы это вело читателей вперед, а не назад, важно, чтоб это их беспокоило, а не успокаивало./ We need writers who are not afraid of anything—just like how the revolution is not afraid of anything; we need writers who are not searching for today's benefits, just like how the revolution does not search for this (it is not for nothing that it teaches us to sacrifice everything, even life—for the happiness of future generations—to this is it's ethics); we need writers in whom the revolution will give birth to a real organic echo. Let this echo in each writer be individual, let writers in work not conform to some paragraphs of such and such conferences: it is important that to be sincere, it is important, that it leads readers forward, not backward, it is important, that this disturbs them, not calms them ("Цель" 249).

Zamiatin points out how the Russian revolution is a sweeping force that is "not afraid of anything." To combat such an all-consuming force, Zamiatin gives the blueprint for an ideal writer who fears nothing and promotes good values and ideas for his country's literature. Zamiatin's ideal writer would respond to tragedy and turmoil with action, a "real organic echo." Zamiatin neglects to specify how he envisions this "echo". He wants writers to be "individual" and decide for themselves. To be "real" and organic", this reaction has to be defined by each individual writer, not by Zamiatin or another figure or group.

Zamiatin contends that literature has the power to shape and change the future of the world, arguing that ideal literature "leads readers forward". Writers have a duty to facilitate this societal movement "forward" through their writings. This profound sense of a writer's responsibility to his readers, both present and future, gets to the heart of

Zamiatin's writings and provides grounds for contemplation on what responsibilities all humans, beyond writers, have toward one another. He notes the necessity of reader participation in contemplation and interpretation of literary works. He advocates for works that "disturb" readers and does not "calm" them. This reveals the faith and trust Zamiatin gives his readers, allowing them to become part of these intellectual revolutions. He recognizes how reader participation is necessary if a writer hopes to create revolutions. Zamiatin develops his ideas on revolutions, heretics, and heresy into a major theme in *We* through the character of I-330, the only true heretic in the One State.

3.2.2 Heretics in *We*

Through her fearless revolutionary spirit, I-330 represents a fictional manifestation of Zamiatin's theories on heretics, heresy, and revolutions. I-330 is a member of a revolutionary group that works counter to the One State's stringent totalitarian rule. From the beginning of the work, I-330 exhibits rebellious tendencies by the way she dresses, what she reads, how she spends her time, and where she goes. I-330 disregards any potential consequences of these rebellions. Other characters immediately notice her "необычайно белые и острые зубы" / "uncommonly white and sharp teeth", which make her resemble a vampire (Zamiatin 551). There is also something intangibly different about I-330 that sets her apart from other members of their generic society, most of whom accept the One State's rulings without question and embrace their cruel, barbaric traditions and punishments.

For example, D-503 initially views this society without freedom as an ideal and craves even less freedom than this society allows. The One State builds a machine called "The Integral" with which to conquer the rest of the world: "As the Integral nears completion, D-503 begins writing *We* with the intention of educating any 'barbaric' and ignorant aliens encountered by the crew of the Integral of the benefits of the One State" (Amey 24). When watching the sights and hearing the sounds of this machine being built, D-503 finds such this sight beautiful and even poetic: "Я вдруг увидел всю красоту этого грандиозного машинного балета, залитого легким голубым солнцем" / "I suddenly saw all the beauty of this grandiose machine ballet, flooded in light blue sun" (Zamiatin 550). This machine built with the intent to conquer and subjugate every society in the world seems beautiful to D-503, revealing how deep the indoctrination of the One State shapes his heart and mind: "From the very outset, [D-503] displays obvious deficiencies of understanding" (Barratt 346). D-503 ponders why this sight touches him: "И дальше — сам с собою: почему красиво? Почему танец — красив? Ответ: потому что это несвободное движение" / "And then- me to myself: why beautiful? Why is this dance- beautiful? Answer: because it is unfree movement" (Zamiatin 550). D-503 finds beauty because of, not despite, the lack of freedom in the One State. Even once D-503 begins to turn rebellious, he does not become like I-330. She stands apart even from other rebels as something different: "The external marks of D-503's transformation from loyal subject of the One State into Mephi's revolutionary are impressive, yet they remain, in the final reckoning, external marks only" (Barratt 348).

In contrast, I-330 does not conform to the society of the One State and does everything in her power to rebel against its rules, small and large. These actions in a totalitarian state prove I-330's bravery, but do not prove her total fearlessness, therefore establishing her as a heretic—yet. I-330 proves herself as a true heretic toward the end of *We*. Zamiatin states that heretics continue to promote the truth despite any outside deterrent or challenge. Heretics are not outspoken during good times, but during all times. Heretics can withstand anything, as extreme as physical torture and execution, while staying true to their beliefs. Heretics will not allow anyone or anything to make them doubt or question their beliefs and values.

After operating under the radar of the One State for much of the work, I-330 is finally captured for her anti-One State activities toward the end of *We*. Under torture and interrogation in front of a massive crowd, I-330 refuses to expose the plans of her revolutionary group, apologize for her crimes against the One State, or lie or make excuses for her behaviors; she "все-таки не сказала ни слова" / "still did not say a word" (Zamiatin 679). I-330 is unapologetic and fearless and fits Zamiatin's definition of a "heretic" perfectly. Although she is tested to the limits, I-330 will not let slip any information that will ruin the revolution, because, as a heretic, she sees the revolution as her purpose. I-330 will let nothing deter her from doing everything possible to allow it to continue. I-330 shows her true identity as a heretic when she fearlessly accepts torture, and then a subsequent death sentence, for her activity counter to the state: "Like a true

heretic, I-330 is quite prepared both for martyrdom, and for the fact that her heresy may be the fount of tomorrow's conservatism" (Barratt 354).

As a heretic, I-330 dies for the revolution, but never submits to the One State, changes her ideas, or confesses to any crimes. She accepts any consequences for the cause she believes in and the revolution she supports, epitomizing Zamiatin's idea of the ideal heretic's mission to change and challenge established society at any cost. Even among her fellow revolutionaries, I-330 stands out as a rare heretic: "Другие, приведенные вместе с этой женщиной, оказались честнее: многие из них стали говорить" / "Others, brought together with this woman, turned out more honest: many of them began to talk" (Zamiatin 679). This group of revolutionaries all committed treasonous activities fully knowing the risks of torture and death. I-330 still stands apart even from this radical, rebellious group. She exhibits fearlessness when it counts, under the moment of torture. This is what makes her a true heretic and sets her apart from even this group of brave, defiant individuals.

Zamiatin portrays the moment of I-330's interrogation in a particularly poignant way: through the eyes of D-503, after he has been lobotomized by the One State. Even though he was in love with her a short time prior to this moment, D-503 no longer recognizes I-330 during this scene of public torture. He notices her for her attractive appearance, but thinks he is observing a strange, unknown woman. D-503 has lost all feeling for I-330 and cannot access any memory of her (or the anti-One State ideas she taught him): "Я заметил, что у ней острые и очень белые зубы и что это красиво" / "I

noticed, that she had sharp and very white teeth, and that this was beautiful" (Zamiatin 679). D-503 thinks he is noticing I-330 for the first time, because his previous memories were stolen from him by the One State.

The juxtaposition of D-503's ignorance of his own memories and I-330's fearless acceptance of suffering and death provides a prime example of Zamiatin's theory of heretics. Heretics will sacrifice anything, even themselves, for the causes and beliefs that they support. I-330 sacrifices herself for the sake of the revolution against the One State. D-503's complete regression to his earlier self and the negation of all his growth during the novel emphasizes the utter danger of totalitarian regimes, revealing how valuable I-330's actions as a heretic are to the future of society. This advances Zamiatin's argument on the necessity of heretics for the future of the world and of humanity. As they are in his theoretical writings, Zamiatin's ideas of heretics and heresy are intertwined with his reflections on revolutions in *We*.

3.3 Revolutions in *We*

With myriad connections to his aforementioned theoretical writings, Zamiatin's definition of "revolutions" proves a crucial theme in *We*. In a discussion of revolutions, D-503 counters Zamiatin's theory of revolutions to allow I-330 the chance to argue on behalf of and prove Zamiatin's theory:

> Нелепо — потому что революции не может быть. Потому что наша — это не ты, а я говорю, — наша революция была последней. И больше никаких революций не может быть. / Ridiculous—because a revolution there cannot be. Because ours [our revolution]—it is not you, but I say—our revolution was the last. And more revolutions there cannot be (645).

When I-330 discloses to D-503 that she is part of a group planning a revolution, D-503, despite not knowing any details about this supposed revolution, does not believe this could ever be a possibility, calling this idea “ridiculous”. A revolution is so outside the realm of possibility to D-503, because the One State portrays itself as the permanent government with no future replacement. So great is his loyalty to the One State that D-503 even speaks of the last revolution as if he participated in it, though he had not been born when this occurred (“our revolution”). D-503 believes that there can be a final revolution, the revolution that put the One State into power. Zamiatin provides this counter argument through D-503 to create an opportunity to define his own theory on revolutions.

I-330 advances her argument for infinite revolutions in terms D-330, as a career mathematician, will feel comfortable working with by asking him to name the final number: “Once she has him in her power, she sets out to convert him intellectually as well. This second task is a matter not of coercion, but of *education*” (Barratt 348). Naïve about the purpose behind this questioning, D-330 quickly responds with the mathematically sound response by protesting that there is no final number: “Но, I, — это же нелепо. Раз число чисел — бесконечно, какое же ты хочешь последнее?”/ “But I—this is ridiculous. The number of numbers—is infinite, which last one do you want?” (Zamiatin 645). I-330 mimics his phrasing: “А какую же ты хочешь последнюю революцию? Последней — нет, революции — бесконечны”/ “And which last revolution do you want? Last—no, revolutions—are infinite” (645). I-330 condenses

Zamiatin's definition of "revolutions" into this passage: the lack of a final revolution and infinite nature of revolutions, the impermanency of every ideology and government. By establishing that numbers are infinite in nature, Zamiatin, through I-330, proves how revolutions are infinite in the world.

3.4 Dreams in *We*

In the One State, the state dominates people's minds and actions to the degree that it becomes people's religion. Freedom represents a feared, negative phenomenon to D-503, and he finds what he calls "beauty" in the lack of freedom in his world. God has become an antiquated concept attributed to the "Ancients", how citizens of the One State refer to those who lived before the existence of the One State. Other so-called antiquated concepts include love. In addition to limiting freedom of movement and choice, the One State forbids and tries to eliminate even freedom of thought and belief. With their intellectual and emotional freedom limited to such an extreme, people as a rule no longer dream in the One State. To his great shock, D-503 experiences his first dream in his entire life as he slowly begins to develop consciousness about the abuses of the One State:

> Ясно: болен. Раньше я никогда не видел снов. Говорят, у древних — это было самое обыкновенное и нормальное — видеть сны. / Clearly: ill. I never before had a dream. It is said, that the ancients had- it was very common and normal- the ability to dream (Zamiatin 567).

D-503's immediate conclusion after dreaming for the first time is that he is sick. He struggles to stop dreaming, but of course cannot control whether he dreams or not. When

this fails, D-503 tries to find a rational purpose for dreaming to adhere to the One State's ideas of perfect rationality:

> Удивительно: неужели нельзя придумать никакого средства, чтобы излечить эту сноболезнь или сделать ее разумной — может быть, даже полезной. / Surprisingly: it is really impossible to think up any remedy to cure this snobbery or to make it rational—maybe, even useful (617).

With his background growing up in a world where the One State always ruled during his lifetime, D-503 is in awe at discovering something that cannot be fixed with scientific means or forced into a rational line of thinking. He demeans his own dreams, reducing them to "snobbery". What exactly is the problem with dreams? D-503 cannot find a way in which they are "useful". In the One State, everything must have a logical purpose; nothing is done out of feeling or on a whim. To address his own dreams, D-503 resorts to the One State's stance on dreams.

Dreams signify illness and insanity in the One State: "Но мы-то знаем, что сны — это серьезная психическая болезнь"/ "But we know, that dreams—they are a serious mental illness" (567). D-503 does not question the validity of this idea that dreams represent mental illness, even when it brings with it the implication that he himself is mentally ill, because the One State teaches its citizens to never question anything. D-503 still refers to himself in the collective "we", as a citizen of the One State. He feels comfortable leaning on the One State's explanation for dreams, rather than challenging if there is something more to the concept of dreams. Ideas of the One State make up the extent of D-503's knowledge until recently in the work.

As the work progresses, D-503 continues to develop his individual thinking and moral principles- a mind and a soul: “Paradoxically, while Zamyatin’s novel suggests that surveillance in the hands of the state is a mechanism for regulating, and perhaps even for destroying the individual, the novel also depicts the self-conscious, reflexive gaze as fundamental to the identity of the protagonist” (Amey 22-3). D-503 has increasingly vivid dreams throughout the work that address core images and ideas of *We*:

> Всю ночь — какие-то крылья, и я хожу и закрываю голову руками от крыльев. А потом — стул. Но стул — не наш, теперешний, а древнего образца, из дерева/All night—some wings, and I go and cover my head from the wings with my hands. And then- a chair. But a chair- not ours or current, but an ancient model, from wood (Zamiatin 617).

His dreams have ambiguous meanings, but involve similar motifs. These include wings, “ancient” objects from the world prior to the establishment of the One State (“a chair- not ours or current, but an ancient model, from wood”), and paralyzing fear or emotion. These complex images point to D-503’s newfound emotions and their independence from the One State’s emotionless world and entrenched set of behaviors. These images in D-503’s abstract dreams parallel prominent images in his real life. Another major character’s ears resemble wings, an observation D-503 makes almost every time he sees him. D-503 visits the “Ancient House” frequently and sees many “ancient” objects there that connect him to a pre-One State world, including a statue of the Buddha. D-503 feels fear increasingly often as the novel progresses. He has conflicting emotions due to discoveries that prompt him to challenge his beloved One State, which gives him a deep sense of inner conflict. As D-503’s character develops, his inner conflict intensifies.

This slow, yet significant, evolution of D-503's character cannot save him in the end from a dire fate. The One State strives to eradicate individual minds and souls through "the Operation", a new surgery that they advertise as the means to permanent happiness. A key factor that leads to D-503's increasing consciousness about the horrors of the One State is his falling in love with the rebellious revolutionary, I-330. Before D-503 has to undergo this fateful Operation, I-330 remarks that the Operation will put an end to D-503's love for her: "А теперь Операция — и ты излечишься от меня. И это — прощай."/ "And now the Operation—and you will be cured of me. And that is—goodbye" (652). The Operation promises happiness ("стопроцентное счастье"/ "one-hundred percent happiness") by removing a person's imagination, emotions, love, and soul. Although the Operation is lauded in society, it becomes clear that this celebrated, mysterious Operation is in reality a lobotomy. The first group of people who underwent the operation appear at an assembly in the Auditorium meant to promote the Operation and inspire other people to sign up for their own Operations:

> Медленная, грузная колонна, человек пятьдесят. Впрочем, «человек» — это не то: не ноги — а какие-то тяжелые, скованные, ворочающиеся от невидимого привода колеса; не люди — а какие-то человекообразные тракторы. / A slow, heavy column, of fifty people. However, 'man"—this is not that: not legs—but some kind of heavy, shackled, turning from the invisible drive of wheels; not people—but some kind of humanoid tractors (654).

To eradicate all individuality and potential rebellion, the One State essentially kills its people by performing these forced lobotomies. The Operation renders them inhuman in D-503's eyes. The people resemble tractors, machines, a development in line with the

supposed perfect rationality of the One State. To promote the Operation to others, the already lobotomized citizens attend this assembly. Because they can no longer read or communicate, the advertisement for the Operation must be written by the One State on signs above their heads: "«Мы первые! Мы — уже оперированы! Все за нами!»/ "We are the first! We—already operated on! Everybody should follow us!" (654). The One State proves determined to stamp out mental freedom as well as physical freedom.

While the Operation is allegedly optional at first, the One State soon mandates Operations for all its citizens, printing a notice in the newspaper: "Завтра приостанавливаются работы — все нумера явятся для Операции"/ "Work is suspended tomorrow—all numbers will appear for the Operation" (657). In the last of the forty diary entries that compose *We*, D-503 awakens after his Operation. His previous passions, love, and emotions have disintegrated. D-503 reads from his diary his past thirty-nine entries. Although he wrote them fairly recently about the most emotional events of his life, D-503 reads these entries as if a stranger reading somebody else's diary. In regards to the entries, D-503 cannot believe or remember having such feelings: "Неужели я, Д-503, написал эти двести двадцать страниц? Неужели я когда-нибудь чувствовал — или воображал, что чувствую это?"/ "Did I, D-503, really write these two hundred and twenty pages? Did I really sometime feel this—or imagine that I felt this?" (679). D-503, again a model citizen of the One State after his lobotomy, cannot conceive feeling emotion, falling in love, dreaming, or anything individual or not

rational. The One State's stance against dreams, love, and any form of individual thinking connects to the warped perception of "faith" in the world of the One State.

D-503 provides his understanding of the word "faith": "Знание, абсолютно уверенное в том, что оно безошибочно, — это вера"/ "Knowledge, absolutely certain that something is unmistakable, that is faith" (582). The world of the One State leaves no room for the true meaning of "faith", believing in something without having proof for it. The One State says that people have no need for God, because they will achieve happiness for all people by removing freedom from society:

> Боги стали, как мы: эрго — мы стали, как боги. И к вам, неведомые мои планетные читатели, к вам мы придем, чтобы сделать вашу жизнь божественно-разумной и точной, как наша…/The gods have become, like us: ergo- we have become, like gods. And to you, my unfamiliar planetary readers, to you we will come to make your life divinely logical and exact, like ours (588).

D-503 thus expresses the goal of the One State: to conquer the entire world (here the planet) and to bring all people under its oppressive thumb. D-503 so believes in the rhetoric of the One State that he writes to future subjects of the One State with an assumption that being conquered will benefit them. In a world without faith and against faith, people become "gods". The word "divinely" applies to logic and exactness, the opposite of lofty ideals or anything heavenly or associated with the divine. The One State aspires to make faith and all individuality of spirit extinct and replace them with total deference to the One State, the Tablet of Hours, and all prescribed ideas.

Dreaming, individual thinking, and emotion have no place in the One State. After exhibiting signs of dreaming and having genuine human emotions, D-503 goes to the

doctor for a cure. The doctor gives his prognosis: “Плохо ваше дело! По-видимому, у вас образовалась душа”/ “Your case is bad! Apparently, you have formed a soul” (598). Despite the One State’s best efforts to restrict people from thinking and feeling, D-503 has developed a soul. His reaction is one of absolute confusion, because “the soul” is an obsolete concept in the One State: “Душа?”/ “A soul?” (598). The doctor begins to explain the meanings of “soul” as it pertained to the pre-One State world: “Это странное, древнее, давно забытое слово. Мы говорили иногда «душа в душу», «равнодушно», «душегуб», но душа—“/ “It is a strange, ancient, long ago forgotten word. We said sometimes ‘soul to soul’, ‘indifferently’, ‘murderer’, but the soul…” (598). Zamiatin lists words that derive from and include the root of the word “soul” (“душа”) in Russian, «душа в душу», «равнодушно», «душегуб»/ ‘soul to soul’, ‘indifferently’, ‘murderer’. This litany of words and their profound moral connotations emphasizes the strong cultural associations with the word “soul” and the terrifying nature of a society without souls. Primed to be an ideal citizen of the One State, D-503 reacts to this explanation with fear: “Это… очень опасно, — пролепетал я”/ “It is… very dangerous—I stammered” (598). The doctor explains to D-503 that, in the One State, “the Operation” cures people from having souls. This ultimate destruction of the soul reveals the utter destruction of the One State. Through “The Operation” and the ending of *We*, Zamiatin’s reflections on totalitarianism, freedom, revolution, and heresy come together to form a cohesive narrative full of many meanings and much potential for interpretations.

4. Chapter Three: Meanings and Interpretations of *We*: A Semiotic Perspective

4.1 Introduction

Zamiatin's reflections on the role of the writer reveal a high standard for the writer in society. Zamiatin outlines the moral and civic obligations of writers toward the public, their countries, and the world. He reveals an expectation for absolute fearlessness, called "heresy", and condemns writers who behaved with fear or greed. Challenges as severe as censorship, arrest, and execution should be ignored in favor of pursuing the truth through writing. This aligns with his theory of revolutions, which addresses the inevitability of societal change and transience of human institutions. Zamiatin's definitions of "revolutions", "heretics", and "heresy" prove major themes in *We* through the character of I-330 and her ultimate demise. In *We*, Zamiatin addresses totalitarian regimes and associated themes of faith, freedom, the soul, dreams, and individuality. These theories, themes, and definitions provide a complex array of concepts for readers to think about. These ideas require a deep level of thinking from the reader, making reading this novel an active experience as opposed to a passive one.

An analysis of the "role of the reader" in Zamiatin's *We* through the semiotic theories of Yuri Lotman and Umberto Eco coupled with an analysis of Zamiatin's own expectations for readers reveals (some of) the many possible meanings of *We* and allows for insight into the role of meanings and interpretations in literature in general. This aligns with the prophetic nature of *We*, in which Zamiatin predicted many future global events and phenomena with startling accuracy. An application of Lotman's theory of the

"texts within a text" to *We* helps to understand the many layers of text and meaning created by Zamiatin with the intention that his reader absorb insights from all of them. The biblical text of *We* provides a prime example of such a "text within a text" through its many details and clear images. This text within the text contributes to the irony of the text, its reflections on freedom and free will, its character development and rich imagery, and many other important functions of *We*. In *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Eco outlines his theories about the generative nature of texts, arguing that each text produces infinite meanings as new readers interpret and create new meanings within the text.

A semiotic analysis of *We* with attention to the role of the reader, meanings and interpretations, and the multi-layered text that is *We* provides insights into the novel itself, Zamiatin as a thinker, and meanings and interpretations of literature in general. In this chapter, I will draw on Lotman's argument identifying the active role of the reader in experiencing a text. Next, I will outline Eco's main ideas about the generative nature of texts and the "role of the reader" in interpreting texts and creating new meanings of texts. I will connect these ideas to Zamiatin's writings about the many meanings within one text and ability of literature to influence society in a major way. Next, I will provide a summary of Lotman's idea of the "text within a text" and demonstrate how it applies to Zamiatin's works. For an example of a text within a text written by Zamiatin, I will provide a discussion of the biblical text in *We*. My goal in this chapter is to define semiotic principles of the generative nature of texts, existence of infinite meanings and

interpretations of a single text, and ability of the reader to create such meanings and interpretations and therefore influence the text and culture itself. Another goal is to demonstrate today's relevance of *We* through this discussion of its many potential meanings and interpretations.

4.2 "Role of the Reader" in Zamiatin

As Zamiatin has high expectations for himself and other writers, he has accordingly high expectations for readers. Zamiatin argues that quality literature gives readers the opportunity to engage with the text and think for themselves ("Цель"). He considers this opportunity a responsibility and demands of readers an active process of interpretation and thought to parse out the many, complicated layers of his works. Semiotician Yuri Lotman explores the relationship between writer and reader, or, as he phrases them, addresser and addressee: "Every innovatory work of art is *sui generis* a work in a language that is unknown to the audience and which has to be reconstructed and mastered by its addressees" ("Three Functions of the Text" 16). Lotman identifies the addressee's, or reader's, active role in experiencing a text and the individuality of this role.

This idea implies that the millions of people who read Zamiatin's works experience them in a completely different way, and that each person's reading experience and individual interpretations hold distinct cultural importance. Zamiatin and Lotman's ideas here align, as Zamiatin argues that a text requires its readers to engage with it in an intentional, dynamic way. Zamiatin challenges writers to challenge their readers,

imploring them to produce literature that “их беспокоило”/ “disturbs [their readers] (“Цель” 249). Zamiatin’s encouragement for writers to disturb their readers reveals a great faith in the ability of literature to impact people’s minds and souls in a profound way.

In a short essay on books, Zamiatin likens texts to dynamite to illustrate the many meanings produced by one literary text and the ability of literature to change people’s lives, minds, and hearts:

> Есть книги такого же химического состава, как динамит. Разница только в том, что один кусок динамита взрывается один раз, а одна книга—тысячи раз”/ “There are books with the same chemical composition as dynamite. The sole difference between them is that one piece of dynamite explodes one time, but one book—thousands of times” (“Для сборника с книге”).

Zamiatin’s metaphor comparing books to dynamite parallels Eco’s ideas on the generative process of a text, readers’ interpretations, and meanings. Eco argues that “the reader as an active principal of interpretation is a part of the picture of the generative process of the text” (Eco 41). Each new reader’s interpretation of the same text generates new, infinite meanings of the text, as each reader brings different associations, backgrounds, and perspectives to their reading experience. No two minds are the same, so no two interpretations of a text are the same. After a writer publishes a novel, like dynamite that explodes thousands of times, the novel produces infinite meanings due to this variation in readership and reading experiences. Meanings of the text increase exponentially over time as future readership produces new meanings.

We is an exemplar of Eco's theories of meanings and interpretations. Zamiatin prophesized with eerie accuracy a range of global phenomena, including fascism, Nazism, and the Holocaust (Zamiatin 593). He evaluated the world and current events with keen insight into human nature, including the innate human desire for individuality and freedom, that applies to any time period and place. The prophetic, insightful nature of the novel keeps it highly relevant in the twenty-first century and into the future for readers to continue to create countless new meanings. Adding to its uniqueness as a work, controversy surrounds the genre of *We*. Theories abound as to whether *We* classifies as a utopian novel, anti-utopian novel, science fiction novel, or example of another literary genre. *We* takes an unusual format in a series of forty diary entries of varying length by D-503: "Каков жанр *Мы*? Строго говоря, это не роман, а "ряд записей". Это дневник по самой своей форме 'незаконченный'"/ "What genre is *We*? Strictly speaking, it is not a novel, but a series of entries. This diary is in its form 'unfinished' (Andrews et al. 7). This idea of an "unfinished" diary lends itself well to Eco's theories of meanings. Eco is a proponent of the unfinished nature of every text. As an unfinished set of diary entries, *We* provides grounds for endless new interpretations and creations of new meanings from past, current, and future readers.

4.3 "Texts Within the Text"

According to Lotman's theory of the "text within a text", a single literary text contains multiple texts. These texts create layers of meaning for each reader to parse and

learn from at the same time. These texts can take the form of references and excerpts from other texts in a new text:

> Простейшим случаем является включение в текст участка, закодированного тем же самым, но удвоенным кодом, что и все остальное пространство произведения. Это будут картина в картине, театр в театре, фильм в фильме или роман в романе. / The simplest case is the inclusion in the text of a section, encoded with the same, but doubled, code as all the remaining space of the work. This will be a painting in a painting, theater within a theater, movie within a movie, or a novel within a novel ("Текст в тексте" 112).

In *We,* this manifestation of "texts within a text" encompasses a range of literary (Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky) and biblical references. The idea of the "text within a text" can also involve multiple texts created by the same author within the same text. *We* contains a rich variety of such texts within a text created intentionally by Zamiatin to challenge his readers, "including mathematical, numerical, verbal, and color texts" (Andrews 353). For example, the color text associates specific characters with certain colors. Yellow "symbolizes vitality, the presence of the life force associated with the sun in the heroine I-330, in the world of the past, and in the world beyond the Wall" (Hoisington and Imbery 163). This text within the text points to the cultural influences of Zamiatin's works: "While Zamjatin's interest in color reveals his indebtedness to the Russian Symbolists, his use of color attests to his post-Symbolist tendencies and to his primitivism, linking him with post-Impressionist painters like Gauguin and Van Gosh and with the Fauves—most notably, Matisse" (160).

Lotman identifies the texts within a text, and more specifically the insights gleaned from movement between these various texts, as an important source of meaning

in a work: “The transfer from one system of semiotic realization of the text into another across some kind of internal structural boundary becomes, in this instance, the starting point for the generation of meaning” (*Culture and Explosion* 69). The comparison and contrast of these distinct, layered texts creates the most crucial meanings of a work. *We* “requires the reader to do the almost impossible- translate from one type of text to the other as a means of increasing the value of the information encoded among and between these seemingly ‘nontranslatable’ codes” (Andrews 352). It is the translation between these “seemingly ‘nontranslatable’ codes” that creates the most relevant and most complex meanings for readers. The texts within the text relate to one another, inspiring this translation between them. With its many layers of complex texts, *We* fulfills Zamiatin’s vision of the roles of the writer and the reader by providing a range of subjects for readers’ active contemplation.

4.4 Biblical Text in *We* (Example of a Text Within a Text)

The intricate biblical text in *We* provides one strong example of how Lotman’s theory of the “texts within a text” applies to Zamiatin’s works. *We* contains frequent images from the Old and New Testament in a chronological order that parallels the chronology of Zamiatin’s text. This chronology ends with a parallel between the Book of Revelations and the final diary entries of *We*, which share an ominous set of trumpets playing as the One State descends into further chaos (Zamiatin 670). Biblical images correspond with characters, events, holidays, and vocabulary of the diary entries of D-

503. The number of entries, forty, alludes to the forty days Jesus spent in the desert facing temptations in the Bible.

Zamiatin makes clear connections between characters in *We* and biblical figures. Zamiatin associates D-503 with Adam from the Book of Genesis (Andrews et al. 92). S-4711, a prominent member of the One State's secret police force who appears to threaten D-503 at the beginning of the work, has many connections with angels in the Bible, including uncommonly large ears that resemble angel wings:

> Слова 'ангел', 'архангел", 'ангел-хранитель', 'Хранитель", 'крылья-уши', 'розовые крылья-уши' многократно употребляются в тексте в связи с S-4711. Вспомним, что Бог, изгнав Адама и Еву из Эдемского рая, поставил ангела-херувима с мечом в Эдемском раю, чтобы они не могли вернуться/ The words 'angel', 'archangel', 'guardian angel', 'Guardian', 'wings-ears', 'pink wings-ears' are repeatedly used in the text in connection with S-4711. Let us remember that God, having exiled Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden, put a cherubic angel with a sword in the garden of Eden, so that they could not return (92).

Zamiatin puts an ironic twist on the term "Guardian Angel" by calling the secret police force of the One State "Guardian Angels" and the police station the "Bureau of Angels" ("Бюро хранителей").

The most important holiday of the One State, the Day of One Voice (День Единогласия), is an annual "re-election" of the same leader year after year:

> День ежегодных выборов Благодетеля. Завтра мы снова вручим Благодетелю ключи от незыблемой твердыни нашего счастья. / Day of the annual election of the Benefactor. Tomorrow we again will hand over to the Benefactor the keys to the unbreakable stronghold of our happiness (Zamiatin 625).

The people of the One State completely lack freedom of choice and vote for the same leader every time. Traditional and religious holidays have been eliminated in favor of only political holidays celebrating the government in power. D-503 juxtaposes the Day of One Voice with Easter: “Мне кажется, для нас — это нечто вроде того, что для древних была их «Пасха»/ “It seems to me, that for us—it is something sort of like what for the ancients was their ‘Easter’” (625). This comparison contributes to the biblical text by demonstrating what is lost in a totalitarian state.

> И самые выборы имеют значение скорее символическое: напомнить, что мы единый, могучий миллионноклеточный организм, что мы — говоря словами «Евангелия» древних — единая Церковь. /And the very elections have a rather symbolic meaning: to remind, that we are a single, powerful, million-cell organism, that we—in the words of the ancient ‘Gospel’—a single Church (625).

When a protest is staged at the Day of One Voice, one thousand people vote against the leader’s re-election in an unprecedented show of rebellion. The newspapers the next day acknowledge no such protest and instead laud the Benefactor for another win at the polls:

> В 48-й раз единогласно избран все тот же, многократно доказавший свою непоколебимую мудрость Благодетель. / For the 48th time, the same Benefactor was unanimously elected, who has repeatedly proven his steadfast wisdom (631).

The press in the One State caters to the state and neglects to give the people the truth. The biblical connections to the Day of One Voice make the portrayal of the totalitarian regime more poignant. Biblical references and, more specifically, translating between them and other layers of Zamiatin’s text, contribute to the irony and critique of the One State in

We, helping to make *We* an effective critique of all totalitarian regimes, beyond merely a critique of Zamiatin's native Soviet Union.

In the One State, the State mandates each citizen to have and follow a tablet (скрижаль). These tablets resemble the biblical Ten Commandments in shape and in format. By enforcing an obligatory, identical daily schedule on all citizens, the One State controls almost every hour of each citizen's life. Twice a day for one hour at a time, citizens have free hours, the only semblance of free choice in their schedules:

> Буду вполне откровенен: абсолютно точного решения задачи счастья нет еще и у нас два раза в день - от 16 до 17 и от 21 до 22 единый мощный организм рассыпается на отдельные клетки: это установленные Скрижалью - Личные Часы./ I am going to be completely honest with you: an absolutely accurate solution to the problem of happiness we still do not yet have: two times per day- from 16 to 17 and from 21 to 22, a single powerful organism divides into separate cells: this is established by the Tablet- Personal Hours (555).

Besides alluding to the Ten Commandments, these tablets resemble icons, a prominent style of religious art in Eastern Christianity and a fixture in Russian life. D-503 treats the Tablet like a sacred object, with awe and respect. These allusions to tangible representations of faith emphasize the deep irony behind Zamiatin's work. As justification for their stringent control over people's lives, the One State ostensibly seeks a mathematical "solution to the problem of happiness". Removing free choice from people's lives helps bring the One State closer to so-called "happiness". Citizens of the One State, as represented by D-503, begin to fear free choice and crave total governmental control of their lives.

D-503 views the One State as a single organism. People are not individuals, but merely "separate cells", parts of the state, and D-503 prefers it this way. D-503 laments the inclusion of any free hours into the daily schedules and expresses the wish for these hours to be eliminated in order to achieve total lack of individuality:

> Но я твёрдо верю - пусть назовут меня идеалистом и фантазёром - я верю: раньше или позже - но когда-нибудь и для этих часов мы найдем место в общей формуле, когда-нибудь все 86 400 секунд войдут в Часовую Скрижаль./ But I firmly believe- let them call me an idealist and a dreamer- I believe: sooner or later- but someday for all the hours we will find a place in the overall formula, someday all 86,400 seconds will enter the Tablet of Hours (555).

D-503's hopes and dreams are not individual, but align with those of the One State. He writes with the collective "we" ("we will find") in expressing his earnest hope that the One State abolishes the remaining free hours. D-503 idealizes a total lack of freedom, calling himself an "idealist" and a "dreamer" for wanting the One State to take further control of their people's lives. D-503 equates lack of freedom to happiness: "Потому что это охраняет нашу несвободу — то есть наше счастье"/ "Because it [the One State] protects our lack of freedom- that is our happiness" (584). The biblical text in *We* contributes to Zamiatin's reflections on freedom by emphasizing the One State's total control of every element of each citizen's life: from the sham day of voting for the same leader year after year to control of the press to the Tablet of Hours that defines each citizen's day. The many biblical references allow for more layers to the text and inspire new readers to bring their own backgrounds and associations to the text to generate new meanings.

5. Conclusion

Taken together, Zamiatin's theoretical works, novel *We*, and key semiotic concepts surrounding meanings and interpretations, including Yuri Lotman's theory of the "text within a text" and Umberto Eco's discussion of the "role of the reader", help to puzzle out the brilliant and often prophetic ideas of an important twentieth century Russian writer. Informed by a wide range of events, including the Russian revolutions and Civil War, and stringent censorship under both the tsarist and Soviet regimes, Zamiatin advocates in his theoretical works for writers who think in terms of the future, guiding their society to the next stage of civilization. Core themes overlap and build upon each other in these writings, including a writer and person's responsibility to fellow humans, the ability of literature to shape and change the values and ideas of a society, and the need to pursue the truth. Zamiatin refuses to dwell on the past or present but constantly jumps to tomorrow, the next world, the next government, the next work of art. This connects to Zamiatin's innovative theories on revolutions, heretics, heresy, and explosions.

Societal change to Zamiatin requires revolutions instigated by heretics. Zamiatin's theory of revolutions argues that the world is a constant, unavoidable cycle of revolutions, and nothing here is permanent. Revolutions can be political, intellectual, ethical, or exist in a combination of many spheres. Zamiatin identifies heretics as those who carry out revolutions, with total fearlessness for the often grave consequences in favor of fighting for their beliefs. Despite his understanding of the gravity of censorship

and speaking out against a regime in power, Zamiatin demands of writers total bravery to the degree of heresy, even if this means facing certain death. Zamiatin truly lived the life of the brave, heretical writer he idealizes in theory, fighting against Soviet censorship and living in exile for the end of his life. His theories apply in fiction to *We*, through the bold character of I-330, who represents Zamiatin's theories on revolutions, heretics, and heresy.

A semiotic reading of *We* lends itself well to this analysis of Zamiatin's life and works by examining a range of meanings and interpretations of *We*, the role of a writer in creating dynamic works, and the role of the reader in creating infinite new meanings of a work of literature. Eco argues on behalf of the generative process of a text. Each text generates infinite meanings as each new reader experiences the text. Eco's reflections on the role of readers in reconstructing and mastering a text, creating new interpretations of a work, reveal the infinite possible interpretations and meanings of *We*. Lotman's theory of the "text within a text" allows for a nuanced reading of *We* by pointing out the many complex layers of texts in the work and encouraging readers to find connections between them. *We* includes an array of texts designed by Zamiatin in order to inspire readers to move between them and reflect on them. The transition between these texts within a text creates the most powerful meanings of the work. For example, the biblical text provides many allusions to the Bible, which contribute to the core themes of the work, including the importance of freedom, the danger of totalitarian regimes, and the need for individual

thinking. The variety of texts, themes, and ideas in *We* prove this work to be a relevant one that will endure for centuries more.

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