

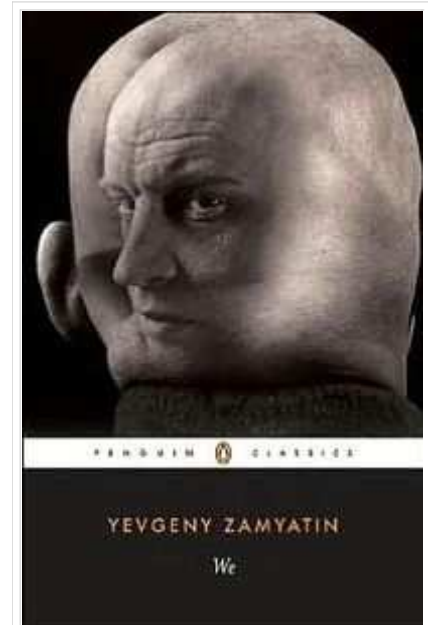
We (novel)

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We (*Мы*, 1920; *English translation 1924*) is a novel by Yevgeny Zamyatin. The title is the Russian first person plural pronoun, transliterated phonetically as "My". It was written in response to the author's personal experiences with the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, as well as his life in the Newcastle suburb of Jesmond, and work in the Tyne shipyards (1916-17), where he observed the rationalisation of labour on a large scale.

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The cover of the Penguin Classics translation of *We*.

History and Influence

The novel was the first work banned by Glavlit, the new Soviet censorship bureau, in 1921, though the initial draft dates to 1919. In fact, a good deal of the basis of the novel is present in Zamyatin's novella 'Islanders', begun in Newcastle in 1916. Zamyatin's literary position deteriorated throughout the 1920s, and he was eventually allowed to emigrate to Paris in 1931, probably after the intercession of Maxim Gorky. The novel was first published in English in 1924, but the first publication in Russia had to wait until 1988, when it appeared alongside George Orwell's *1984*.

Orwell was familiar with *We*, having read it in French and reviewed it in 1946; it influenced his *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as well as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Ayn Rand's *Anthem*.

Plot

The story is told by the protagonist, "D-503", in his diary, which details both his work as a mathematician and his misadventures with a resistance group called the Mephi, who take their name from Mephistopheles. He has started a diary as a testament to the happiness that the One State has discovered, and hopes to present it to the extraterrestrial civilizations which the spaceship he designed and oversaw the building of, "The Integral," will visit. However, as the novel progresses, his infatuation with I-330, a rebellious woman in league with Mephi, starts to take over his life. He starts to lose his initial dedication to the utopian One State, and his distinction between reality and dreams starts to fade. By the end of his story, he has almost been driven to madness by inner conflicts between himself and his society, or imagination and mathematic truths.

Utopian Society

The Utopian Society depicted in "We" is called the One State, a city led by the Benefactor (in some translations also known as The Well Doer) and surrounded by a giant Green Wall to separate the citizens from nature. The story takes

place after the Two Hundred Year's War, a war that wiped out all but 0.2% of Earth's population. All human activities are reduced to mathematical equations, or at least attempted to. For sexual intercourse, numbers (people) receive a booklet of pink coupons which they fill out with the other number they'd like to use on a certain day. Intercourse is the only time shades are allowed to be lowered. It's believed pink coupons eliminate envy.

There is also no value on the individual. Names are replaced by numbers. In one instance, ten numbers were incinerated while standing too close to the rockets of the Integral during tests. With pride, D-503 writes that this did not slow down the test in any way.

The Benefactor is the equivalent of Big Brother except he is confirmed to exist as D-503 has an encounter with him. An "election" is held every year on Unanimity Day, but the outcome is always known before hand, with the Benefactor unanimously being reelected each year.

Trivia

The numbers of the main characters - O-90, D-503 and I-330 - are almost certainly derived from the specification of the *Saint Alexander Nevsky*, Zamyatin's favourite icebreaker, whose drawings he claimed to have signed with his own special stamp. However, other interpretations have been put forward, including one suggestion that the numbers are a Bible code.

The names are also related to characters' genders. Males' names begin with consonants, females' with vowels.

Additionally, the letters corresponding with the numbers are directly related to various characteristics of that specific character. For example, the character O-90, D-503's most common sexual partner and female friend in the beginning portion of the novel, has very round and simple physical and mental characteristics. Such relationships between name letter and character exist throughout the entirety of the novel.

Analysis

We is a futuristic dystopic satire, generally considered to be the grandfather of the genre. It takes the totalitarian and conformative aspects of modern industrial society to an extreme conclusion, depicting a state that believes that free will is the cause of unhappiness, and that citizens' lives should be controlled with mathematical precision based on the system of industrial efficiency created by Frederick Winslow Taylor. Among many other literary innovations, Zamyatin's futuristic vision includes houses, and indeed everything else, made of glass or other transparent materials, so that everyone is constantly visible. Zamyatin was very critical of communism in Russia and his work was repeatedly banned.

See also

- George Orwell's *1984*
- List of dystopian literature

External links

- Prof David Womersley Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* - The most enduring of the twentieth-century dystopias (<http://www.socialaffairsunit.org.uk/blog/archives/000523.php>) Social Affairs Unit Web Review

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Categories: 1920 books | Dystopian novels | Science fiction novels | Russian novels

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