

Zamyatin and Rand

Peter Saint-Andre

Introduction

Chris Matthew Sciabarra opened up many new avenues of Rand scholarship with the publication of his 1995 study *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*. Specifically, he argued that Rand's thought was not ahistorical but instead deeply affected by the philosophy and culture of the Silver Age in Russia. Although Sciabarra adduced textual evidence for his claims and situated Rand within the context of Silver Age thinking generally, he traced a direct line of influence to Rand from only one Russian thinker: the philosopher N. O. Lossky (though see Sciabarra 1999, 9, 20). Yet, it is quite possible that further influences are waiting to be discovered in the culture Rand was immersed in during her formative years. In this essay, I argue that one such influence was quite likely the writer and theorist Yevgeny Zamyatin (1884-1937).¹

Context

Other than perhaps Gorky, Yevgeny Zamyatin was probably the most influential writer in Russia (and specifically in Petersburg, as he insisted on calling his adopted city) in the years immediately following the Russian Revolution. Today, Zamyatin is best-known for his dystopian novel *We*.² However, from 1917 until 1924 or so, Zamyatin's literary energies radiated in all directions: in those years he wrote not only *We* but also a large number of short stories and critical essays, worked as an editor and translator for several Petersburg publishing companies, lectured frequently in public forums, and served as literary father to the "Serapion Brethren," which consisted of many of the leading young writers of the day (including Zoshchenko, Slonimsky, Lunts, Kaverin, and Fedin). Even after he was

effectively silenced in the mid-1920s for his heretical views, he continued to inspire Russian writers of his day as well as long after, as witnessed by Solzhenitsyn's high opinion of Zamyatin (Kramer 1980).

As described by Sciabarra (1995, ch. 3), in 1918, the young Ayn Rand (then 13 years old) escaped with her family from the ravages of post-Revolutionary Petersburg and traveled to the Crimea to wait out the Revolution. When the White army was vanquished by the Reds and it became clear that the Revolution would survive, Rand's family returned to Petersburg sometime in mid-1921. That same year, Rand entered (at age 16) Petrograd University to complete a three-year course of study in the Department of Social Pedagogy, where she majored in history but also was exposed to material in literature, philosophy, and political economy (for details, see Sciabarra 1999). After completing her degree in mid-1924 (the same year that Zamyatin's *We* was published in English translation), Rand worked as a tour guide to help support her family; however, she recognized that no intellectual freedom was possible in Russia, obtained a visa, and in January 1926 left her native country for America, never to return.

Thus, Rand's formative college years coincided with the years of Zamyatin's greatest fame and influence in Petersburg. He was at that time a hero to writers young and old, admired for his fierce independence and literary individualism, for he was virtually the only literary figure in Russia to voice his resistance to collectivism and conformity. Zamyatin was in those years a highly public literary and philosophical presence in Petersburg. Indeed, it is quite possible that Rand read some of his stories and essays, attended one of his many public lectures at the House of Arts and the House of Writers,³ or even studied under him at the studios of the World Literature publishing house.⁴

Yet, despite Zamyatin's fame as a literary heretic, it must be noted that Rand never mentioned Zamyatin when talking about her years in Russia. Although this is not altogether surprising given her penchant for controlling inquiries into her past, it does mean that any argument for a direct influence of Zamyatin upon Rand must be

purely speculative. Therefore, the most we can do is to explore some striking similarities between the views and works of Zamyatin and those of Rand. These similarities may provide evidence that Rand was aware of and influenced by Zamyatin, or merely that both thinkers breathed the same intellectual air in post-Revolutionary Russia.

Fiction

Aside from the special case of *We*, it is unlikely that Zamyatin's fiction would have appealed to the young Rand.⁵ Zamyatin's short stories and novellas are in the main rather gloomy and deeply ironic. Rather than uphold an ideal (what Rand called representing things "as they might be and ought to be"), Zamyatin usually explored human frailty and even spiritual ugliness in his stories, seemingly for the purpose of causing the reader to reflect on where his characters (and the society in which they live) went astray. Although often there is an implied ideal lying buried beneath the wrecked lives of Zamyatin's characters, that vision can be discerned only as in a photographic negative.

The same is true of *We*, which is often considered to be something of the Ur-text for all twentieth-century dystopian novels. However, here the socio-political focus of the novel provides a way of externalizing, in large measure, the spiritual sickness experienced by the main characters. In addition, the fact that the world of *We* is a dystopia puts the novel in literary alignment with Zamyatin's usual themes and style. The result was a classic novel that withstands comparison with better-known dystopian novels such as Orwell's *1984* (which it influenced), Huxley's *Brave New World* (which it did not influence), and Rand's *Anthem*.

It is an open question whether Zamyatin's *We* influenced Rand's *Anthem*. In a seminal essay on the topic, Zina Gimpelevich argues that "there are too many coincidences in the philosophical approaches to literature" of Zamyatin and Rand to consider them as merely accidental" (Gimpelevich 1997, 13). Indeed, she claims that "Zamyatin's influence on Rand" is "evident in every chapter of

Anthem—evident not only in both writers’ “negative treatment of the realization of utopian ideals” but also in the “strong tie between their philosophical beliefs and presentation in literary works” (21). The core belief for both authors is “the need for human individuality and the word T as its representation” (21)—in *Anthem*, this is underlined by the lack of the word “T” in the lexicon of the future society. More specifically, Gimpelevich adduces many of the following similarities between *We* and *Anthem* (18–20):

- The protagonist is a male scientist/inventor.
- The story is narrated through a secret diary kept by the protagonist.
- The society portrayed is a future collectivist state located in the former United States of America.
- The society practices eugenics and separates children from their natural parents to be raised by the state.
- All characters are identified by numbers, not names.
- The individual soul is utterly submerged by the collective.
- The protagonist rediscovers his soul through, in large part, the intercession of a female character.
- The protagonist’s striving to rediscover his soul starts with a link to the past, which is hidden in a secret tunnel left over from pre-collectivist times.

One possible explanation for these similarities is, as Gimpelevich argues, an explicit influence of Zamyatin on Rand. Yet other explanations may be equally plausible. Both authors may have been influenced by a third source that pre-dates both *We* and *Anthem*.⁶ Or both authors may have made use of common literary devices (e.g., the narrative as diary) and themes (e.g., portraying a woman as the catalyst for a man’s spiritual awakening is a theme as ancient as the story of Adam and Eve).

In a rich exploration of Zamyatin’s *We* from the perspective of evolutionary psychology, Brett Cooke (2002, 3–4) provides a great deal of evidence that the common themes of twentieth-century dystopian novels derive not from one Ur-text such as *We*, but from a set of “human universals” that define human nature. A prime

example with evolutionary significance is family life: the choosing of a mate, the rearing of children by their natural parents, the sharing of meals among close relatives, etc. Most every dystopian novel violates these universal behavior patterns through the portrayal of eugenics programs, state rearing of children, communal eating arrangements, and so forth. Thus, it comes as no surprise that both *We* and *Anthem* (not to mention *1984*, *Brave New World*, et al.) feature similar violations of species-wide behavior patterns and preferences; for it is precisely such universals that humans find so natural in real life, and thus so deeply troubling when violated in so-called utopias.

Such reasoning leads to the conclusion that the similarities between *We* and *Anthem* cannot be reliably attributed to a direct influence of Zamyatin on Rand. And the differences between the two novels are just as striking. One difference often noted is that *Anthem* ends optimistically with the protagonist escaping from the collectivist society and vowing to bring about a Renaissance, whereas *We* ends with the spiritual death of the protagonist D-503 when he undergoes a forced “fantasiectomy” that removes his budding soul; with D-503’s lover, I-330, having been captured by the State and being threatened with imminent capital punishment for her subversive activities; and with the success of the revolt of I-330’s “Mephis” very much in doubt.

Yet, this difference is non-essential, since Zamyatin’s aesthetic purpose was not the portrayal of an ideal but the continual questioning of assumptions and the inculcation of such an attitude in his readers; the ambiguities present at the end of *We* are quite in line with this purpose, alien though they are to the more black-and-white fictional universe preferred by Rand.

Another surface difference between the two dystopias is that the society of Rand’s *Anthem* has lapsed into nearly complete primitivism (for example, fifty years of deliberations by the World Councils were required to approve the replacement of torches with candles), whereas the Single State of Zamyatin’s *We* possesses at least some advanced technologies, including robots and rocket ships.⁷ Yet, Cooke (2002, 68) points out that the Single State’s technological achievements are quite modest 1,000 years in the future and that its

mathematics is deeply flawed (75–77). Furthermore, even the Single State's supposedly perfect control over its citizens is only skin deep, since the Guardian class has been infiltrated by dissidents such as S-4711. The State has failed in removing such naturally individualistic behaviors as personal preference in sexual partners (as witness the love triangle between D-503, R-13, and O-90, which D-503 refers to as a family), an epidemic of "fantasy" is raging through the city as citizens rediscover their souls, and a wall is required to keep the desiccated citizens of the Single State separate from the full-blooded Mephis who live in the forests beyond the wall.

By contrast, the society portrayed in *Anthem* exercises much more complete control over its citizens. Only two or three individuals in the city—Equality 7-2521, Liberty 5-3000, and perhaps International 4-8818—possess individual souls. No wall is required to keep citizens in or rebels out—there are no rebels, and the forest outside the city is uninhabited. Control has been thoroughly internalized, for only a few exceptional individuals (really only Equality 7-2521) conceive of doing anything that is not permitted, and only once in a generation does someone leave the city for the Uncharted Forest.

In this environment of utter repression, the catalyst for change cannot come from outside. In *We*, D-503 begins to question the received wisdom and to discover his soul only after being confronted by the femme fatale I-330, who tempts him not only sexually but intellectually; as the leader of the rebellious Mephis (whose name is an abbreviation of Mephistopheles), she holds out to him the forbidden fruit not only of passion but of ideas that are unheard of in the Single State (especially challenging mathematical concepts that intrigue him since he is the State's greatest mathematician as well as the designer of its first rocket ship). In *Anthem*, no one among the citizenry or from outside can so challenge or tempt Equality 7-2521, with the result that the Faustian bargain he makes is with his own internal "devil," in the form of his thirst for knowledge.

The conflict in *We* is often seen as a kind of Hegelian dialectic between the thesis of Apollonian reason in the form of the Single State and the antithesis of Dionysian emotion in the form of the Mephis, with a synthesis in the offing at the end of the novel; while

this is too simplistic, it does capture the fact that there are two opposing societies present in the novel. In *Anthem*, there is only one society, and that society is opposed only by the questing and intransigent mind of Equality 7-2521.

These differences point to something more fundamental: each author's view of human nature. Only what Steven Pinker (2002) calls "blank slates" could be shaped and molded in so thoroughgoing a fashion as the people in *Anthem*; they no longer exemplify the "human universals" that Cooke describes; indeed, they are barely human at all, and everything they do and are is determined by their social environment. While the "numbers" in Zamyatin's Single State are just as regimented and suppressed, their basic human needs and drives—what D-503 call his "hairy arms"—continue to poke through a thousand years after modern society has been overthrown. For Zamyatin, history continues to bubble up from below, and the fighting (and mixing) of Mephis and "numbers" shows that, as I-330 says, "there is no last number" and no "last revolution" (Zamyatin 1952, 162–63).

The society of *Anthem* has, by contrast, reached a kind of absolute zero, a state of near-perfect entropy in which only the "atomic swerve" of Equality 7-2521's curiosity introduces a movement that is not in perfect alignment with that of the society as a whole. This contrast of visions is mirrored in the stylistic approaches of the authors: Zamyatin's novel is fast-paced, modernistic, full of jarring contrasts and a highly-integrated system of images,⁸ whereas Rand's is much more simple and serene, almost in the vein of a prose poem (which is how she referred to it).⁹ It also finds expression in how the novels end. *We* leaves the reader in a state of suspense and uncertainty, with battles still raging in the streets, I-330 and other Mephi leaders in captivity and awaiting execution, and D-503 spiritually lobotomized but still alive. *Anthem* ends far from the corruption of the city, high in the mountains where Equality 7-2521 and Liberty 5-3000 have discovered a house still standing from the Unmentionable Times, filled with books of ancient wisdom that Equality samples and then shares with Liberty, much as Eve sampled and shared the fruit of knowledge with Adam. The two of them essentially decide

to found a new race of men that will wipe the slate clean and begin the world over again based on a holy reverence for the individual soul, for "this god, this one word: T" (Rand 1946, 97).

Thus, whereas Zamyatin sees a continuing dialectic or spiral of historical progression that involves a mixing of alternatives (neither of which may be fully appealing), Rand sees a need for one alternative to overcome its opposite, thus cleansing the world of its sins in an almost apocalyptic fashion. This is not to say that Zamyatin held the admixture of freedom and control, of liberty and equality, to be the best social order; after all, it is Zamyatin (1970, 35) who once expressed the hope that "[t]he next stage of development, perhaps in the distant future, will be a social order under which there will be no need for the coercive power of the state." But he did recognize that the flow of history was never-ending, and that one phase of human development grows organically out of what preceded it.

Rand, by contrast, seems to have expressed a desire to start over historically and to fully vanquish the past, as evidenced by the endings of both *Anthem* and *Atlas Shrugged* (Rand 1957). This difference also manifests itself in a certain utopian tendency within Rand's writings (e.g., over 100 pages of *Atlas Shrugged* are devoted to a description of a utopian community founded by the "men of the mind"), which is absent from Zamyatin's works. Thus, we can see that there are manifold differences between *Anthem* and *We*. Given these differences, it is clear that Rand did not slavishly imitate Zamyatin, even if he may have influenced her. Indeed, it could be argued that Rand consciously reacted against certain features of Zamyatin's world in creating *Anthem*.

Zamyatin's Theory

Although there are striking parallels between *We* and *Anthem*, it is in the realm of theory, both literary and philosophical, that Zamyatin and Rand are most similar (though here again there exist some telling differences).

Whereas Zamyatin for the most part did not voice his own ideas in his fiction (the character of I-330 in *We* is a notable exception), in

his essays he emerges from behind the curtain of the narrative and expresses his own positive views about art, society, and life. In his student days and thereafter, Zamyatin was a Bolshevik when that was a dangerous thing to be. But he turned against Bolshevism once it settled into the exercise of power and it began to crush the heretical voices that Zamyatin believed all societies need to remain healthy (Zamyatin 1970, 51, 109). In this sense, Zamyatin was the very opposite of a "half-hearted dialectician" who leaves "little place for dialectic in the future" (a criticism leveled against Marx by Bahm 1970, 198–99, quoted in Sciabarra 2000, 92) or who believes in "the end of history," for Zamyatin thought that "there is no final revolution" (Zamyatin 1970, 107) and that the dialectic of entropy and energy, tradition and heresy, is never-ending.

In the arts and specifically literature, Zamyatin called his approach variously Neo-realism or Synthetism. This theory "combines a formalistic analysis of style with an historical application of Hegel's dialectical process" (Shane 1970, xiii).¹⁰ Zamyatin (1970) holds that the "dialectical path of development" works as follows:

Take a certain phenomenon: it develops to its utmost limits, makes use of all its potentialities, creates the highest thing it can, and stops. Then comes the antithetical, hostile force; it also unfolds to the very end, so that it can no longer go on, and stops. And now, out of these two hostile phenomena, a third one is born, making use of the results achieved by the first two, reconciling them. And society, or art, is given an opportunity to move forward, always forward, always toward the new.¹¹ (39)

And again:

+ , - -

These are the three schools in art, and there are no others. Affirmation, negation, and synthesis—the negation of negation. The syllogism is closed, the circle completed.

Over it arises a new circle—new and yet the same. And out of these circles the spiral of art, holding up the sky.

A spiral: a winding staircase in the Tower of Babel; the path of an airplane rising aloft in circles—such is the way of art. The equation of the movement of art is the equation of a spiral. (81)

Yet unlike too many so-called modernists, Zamyatin does not advocate change for the sake of change, revolution for the sake of revolution:

The development of art is subject to the dialectic method. Art functions pyramidally: all new achievements are based on the utilization of everything that has been accumulated below, at the foundations of the pyramid. Revolutions do not occur here; this field, more than any other, is governed by evolution. And we must know what has been done before us in the field of verbal art. This does not mean that you must follow in trodden paths: you must contribute something of your own. A work of art is of value only when it is original, both in content and in form. But in order to leap upward, it is necessary to take off from the ground. It is essential that there be a ground. (160)

For Zamyatin, the artist does not “reject today in the name of a return to yesterday,” nor is he “deafened by today” and thus a slave to ephemeral fashion. Instead, the function of the artist is to be an early-warning system, a heretic who heralds not just the future but the “distant tomorrow,” who “judge[s] today in the name of tomorrow, in the name of man” (52).

How does the artist come to have insight into, and then portray, the distant tomorrow? By creating his or her own imagined world, an image of life with which the artist falls in love. But such a world does not and cannot fit into the existing world; thus the necessity of heresy:

Every artist of importance creates his own world, with its own laws—creates and shapes it in his own shape and image, and no one else’s. This is why it is difficult to fit the artist into a world that has already been created, a seven-day, fixed and solidified world: he will inevitably slip out of the set of laws and paragraphs, he will be a heretic. (268)

Zamyatin argued that the creation of such an imagined world “with its own laws” is possible neither to symbolist “painting” nor to realist reportage, for the symbolist is drawn too far away from the world into the realm of fantasy, and the realist is too tied to current (or bygone) realities, to construct an imagined world. Thus, Zamyatin thought that his theory of Synthetism held the key to artistic creativity:

The literature of the immediate future will inevitably turn away from painting, whether respectably realistic or modern, and from daily life, whether old or the very latest and revolutionary, and turn to artistically realized philosophy. (76)

What we need in literature today are vast philosophic horizons. . . . we need the most ultimate, the most fearsome, the most fearless “Why?” and “What next?” (109–10)

Interestingly, Zamyatin held that the “old sickness” of Russian literature was “plot anemia” (105; see also 173), which might be cured through greater contact with the literature of Western Europe. However, he was equally wary of the “thoughtless game” of hyperplot to be found in novels of pure adventure. Befitting his dialectical sensibilities, he argued that adventure novels “reflect only one color in the contemporary spectrum,” and that “to reflect the entire spectrum, the dynamics of the adventure novel must be invested with a philosophic synthesis of one kind or another” (106)—advice that Rand certainly seemed to take to heart!

Yet, for Zamyatin, the artistic-philosophic synthesis is not

dogmatic or propagandistic.¹² He thought that the function of the writer is to "lead the reader to generalizations, to symbols, while depicting entirely realistic specific facts" (45), but that those generalizations are the artist's own—as he once said, "I prefer being wrong in my own way to being right in someone else's" (49). Thus, the artist does not conform to a pre-existing philosophy but rather develops his own philosophy by creatively re-organizing human experience and abstracting from "life, earth, rock, everything that has weight and dimensions" (45). "The purpose of art, including literature, is not to reflect life but to organize it, to build it" (130).

In his ascription of near god-like powers of world-creation to the artist, Zamyatin has much in common with the Nietzschean "god-builders" in Russia (Rosenthal 1986, 25–27) and seems to accept fully the Romantic notion of the great artist as a genius:

The glory of the aristocrat of the spirit is in having no ancestors—or having as few as possible. If an artist is his own ancestor, if he has only descendants, he enters history as a genius; if he has few ancestors, or is related to them distantly, he enters history as a talent.¹³ (Zamyatin 1970, 285)

Yet, because Zamyatin believed that revolution is a never-ending process, he recognized that even his own theories were not final truths:

Fortunately, all truths are erroneous. This is the very essence of the dialectical process: today's truths become errors tomorrow; there is no final number. This truth (the only one) is for the strong alone. Weak-nerved minds insist on a finite universe, a last number; they need, in Nietzsche's words, "the crutches of certainty." The weak-nerved lack the strength to include themselves in the dialectical syllogism. (110–11)

And leaning on the crutches of certainty leads to the sclerosis of established "truth," which is the very antithesis of artistic creation:

"dogma, static positions, consonance—all these are obstacles to catching the disease of art" (92–93). Thus, "true literature can exist only where it is created, not by diligent and trustworthy functionaries, but by madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels, and skeptics" (57), who fight for tomorrow and for "the liberation of the individual—in the name of man" (52).

Rand's Theory

Just as Zamyatin saw Synthetism or Neo-realism as a way to overcome the "struggle between two artistic methods—romanticism and realism" (155), Rand too saw her own aesthetic as a synthesis of romanticism and realism.¹⁴ This synthesis was asserted as early as 1962 in Nathaniel Branden's underappreciated study *Who Is Ayn Rand?*

The projection of "things as they might be and ought to be"¹⁵ names the essence of Ayn Rand's concept of literature. In the wave of Naturalism that has engulfed the literature of the twentieth century, her novels are an outstanding exception. They are at once a continuation of the Romantic tradition and a significant departure from the mainstream of that tradition: she is a *Romantic Realist*. "Romantic"—because her work is concerned with *values*, with the essential, the abstract, the universal in human life, and with the projection of man as a heroic being. "Realist"—because the values she selects pertain to this earth and to man's actual nature, and because the issues with which she deals are the crucial and fundamental ones of our age. Her novels do not represent a flight into mystical fantasy or the historical past or into concerns that have little if any bearing on man's actual existence. Her heroes are not knights, gladiators or adventurers in some impossible kingdom, but engineers, scientists, industrialists, men who belong on earth, men who function in modern society.¹⁶ (N. Branden 1962, 88)

It is tempting to view Rand's description of herself as a "Romantic Realist" through dialectical glasses; for while we must recognize that everything looks dialectical through such glasses, at the same time it is true that Rand places her literary theory in the context of an historical narrative that appears quite dialectical (Rand 1975, 103-17). Specifically, Rand's narrative asserts three relevant stages of literary history: (1) the triumph of Romanticism over Classicism, (2) the ascendancy of Naturalism (a.k.a. Realism) once Romanticism had degenerated into fantasy, and finally (3) the emergence of Rand's unique synthesis of romantic idealism with realistic settings, which purportedly would provide the foundation for a school of Romantic Realism.

However, it is not clear that Rand's sensibilities are entirely dialectical here. Despite the fact that she calls herself a "Romantic Realist," she lays much heavier emphasis on the Romantic aspect of her theory, consistently denigrates Realist (or Naturalist) writers and artists for their "journalistic" approach to art,¹⁷ and claims that "in regard to Romanticism, I have often thought that I am a bridge from the unidentified past to the future" (Rand 1975, vi).

Indeed, given that Rand thought Romantic fiction is "taken symbolically" (138), it is perhaps most accurate to describe Rand's aesthetic as Heroic Symbolism. Consider that Rand defines symbolism as "the presentation of a *metaphysical* view of man, as opposed to a journalistic or statistical view" (126), and that in the same passage she draws a sharp distinction between the symbolism of depravity (which presents "a *monster* [as] an appropriate projection of man's essence") and the symbolism of virtue (which presents "a *hero*" as the proper projection of "man's real, essential, metaphysical nature").¹⁸ From Rand's novels and her statements on art, it is quite clear where Rand measures herself along these dimensions: her novels are symbolic as opposed to journalistic, and heroic as opposed to debased.

Yet the evidence that Rand's dialectical proclivities were only "half-hearted" goes much deeper than literary theory. She was adamantly opposed to the view Zamyatin espouses that "all truths are erroneous," for she held that certainty, far from being what Nietzsche

called a "crutch," is a veritable necessity of human knowledge (Peikoff 1991, 171-81). Though Rand's disciple Leonard Peikoff provides the caveat that certainty always occurs within a certain context, in Randian circles that context can be as wide as the total sum of knowledge so far accumulated by humankind. And, in such a "context," Rand was not afraid to use the language of absolutism and to issue categorical statements about the good or evil of theories, practices, artworks, emotional responses, and the like.

It could be argued that there is more common ground here than meets the eye. In specifiable contexts, Zamyatin was quite comfortable talking about the value and importance of truth, and he thought that "truth is the first thing that present-day literature lacks; the writer has drowned himself in lies, he is too accustomed to speak prudently, with a careful look over his shoulder" (Zamyatin 1970, 113). What Zamyatin opposed is the view that any truth can be *final* and thereby enable the holder of that truth to step outside the stream of history and the living process of human inquiry. Yet Peikoff, following Rand, argues that the very notion of a final truth is left over from the days of belief in an omniscient god and that such a notion introduces a standard of knowledge that is literally inhuman (Peikoff 1991, 172). On this basis, Rand and some in the Randian tradition hold that a non-dogmatic, non-static certainty is possible to human beings.

Despite the qualifications, I doubt that Zamyatin would be comfortable with any such form of absolutism (however contextual), for he would argue that it is all too easy to slip from there into "dogma, static positions, consonance" (Zamyatin 1970, 92) and the creation of "trustworthy functionaries" (57) rather than rebels and heretics. And he would cite as evidence not only his experience with the half-hearted dialecticians of the Bolshevik Revolution, who saw themselves as bringing about the end of history, but also (I imagine) Rand's novels themselves. By the logic of Rand's aesthetic, she used her art to symbolize the heroic triumph of good over evil in ways that suggest the final removal of all obstacles to the continued success of the ideal, whether that triumph is personal (as at the end of *The Fountainhead*) or socio-philosophical (as at the end of *Atlas Shrugged*). Unfortunately, Rand's very success at writing her preferred kind of

novel can encourage her readers to see reality in novelistic terms,¹⁹ with the result that present-day conflicts (whether political, cultural, or philosophical) are often seen as instances of an apocalyptic struggle between pure good and pure evil. Combined with Rand's view that ideas move the world, this "novelization of reality" can lead some of her readers to see Rand's philosophy of Objectivism as the savior of humanity, with a consequent need for intellectual hygiene to ensure that the good does indeed remain pure.

In artistic practice, the results are all too often what I have elsewhere described as "Objectivist Realism" (Saint-Andre 1999): artworks that are explicitly philosophical in the same way that works of Socialist Realism are explicitly political.²⁰ In both cases, art is seen not as the independent expression of an individual's insights into human experience, but rather as necessarily dependent on a deeper "superstructure," whether politico-economic (in the case of Marxism) or philosophical (in the case of Randianism). To fend off a world in which the artist is constantly looking over his shoulder to ensure that his art is consonant with established truths, Zamyatin argues consistently that the artist is a fully independent individual, who creates and shapes his own world in his own shape and image. Thus, despite Rand's fervent individualism, it may be that Zamyatin was the more thoroughgoing individualist of the two.

Yet Rand's philosophy too is, at the core, a kind of humanistic individualism. While that core has been often obscured under a blizzard of doctrinaire exegesis, still it inheres, providing much of the inspiration for her continuing popularity. Indeed, we could say of Rand almost exactly what Zamyatin (1970, 228) once wrote of Chekhov:

This, then, is what we uncover when we remove the snow-drift piled up over Chekhov in recent years. We uncover a man profoundly agitated by social problems; a writer whose social ideals are the same as those we live by; a philosophy of the divinity of man, of fervent faith in man—the faith that moves mountains.

Notes

1. Zamyatin's name is usually Anglicized as Yevgeny Zamyatin, but sometimes also as Evgenij Zamiatin or even Eugene Zamiatin. In this paper, I follow the most common usage, but do not adjust the spelling in quotations from other authors.

2. Zamyatin wrote *We* at the height of his powers circa 1918–20. It was read at a meeting of the All-Russia Writer's Union in 1923, "widely discussed in Petrograd" (B. Branden 1986, 143), published in English translation in 1924, and used as inspiration by George Orwell in writing *1984* and by Vladimir Nabokov in writing *Invitation to a Beheading* (Johnson 2000, 50). It was also the first novel to be banned in the U.S.S.R., and was not published there until the regime began to crumble in 1988.

3. Shane (1968, 33–34) describes some of the activities in which Zamyatin was engaged:

Mondays at the House of Arts were devoted to literary evenings and lectures open to the public, while Friday evenings were for more intimate gatherings restricted to members and their friends. The House of Arts was officially opened December 19, 1919. . . . Throughout the next two years Zamyatin was a frequent contributor to the literary evenings and lectures.

On January 22, 1920, [the House of Writers] launched an ambitious cultural program of two hundred and seven evening gatherings in one year. Included in the program were thirty lectures on literature and twelve "life almanacs," where contemporary authors read their works. This intensive program was continued for two years.

4. Shane (1968, 31) notes:

Zamyatin's third and perhaps most important contribution was the many hours he spent in World Literature's studio for translators. Established in February 1919, the studio was conceived as a practical workshop for literary analysis and the composition of prose and verse translations. . . . Zamyatin and Chukovsky delivered lectures on various subjects. The results were so gratifying that by June it was decided to enlarge the scope of the studio and to grant admission to anyone interested in the study of literature and composition. Apparently the studio was still active four years later, during the spring of 1923. Although Zamyatin was engaged in editorial work for World Literature as late as 1924, it is not known how long he continued teaching at the studio.

5. There are some interesting parallels between Zamyatin's descriptions of Petersburg in his essays and Rand's descriptions in Chapter 1 of Part Two of *We the Living* (a passage, however, that Rand said was written not in her own style but in that of Victor Hugo; see Rand 1997, 63). For instance, echoing a line from Gogol, both Zamyatin and Rand stress that Petersburg is a "he" whereas Moscow is a "she" (Zamyatin 1970, 132; Rand [1936] 1959, 259). Zamyatin (1970, 69) says that "Petersburg is all straight lines, all geometry and logic" and Rand ([1936] 1959, 229) celebrated the fact that "its facets are cut clearly, sharply; they are deliberate, perfect with the straight-forward perfection of man's work." Yet, these are likely mere surface similarities derived from their perception of the common reality of the city.

6. One such possible source is the fictional essay "The New Utopia" by Jerome K. Jerome, who was quite popular in Russia around the turn of the twentieth century (Stenbock-Fernor 1988); Jerome's story, a parody of socialist thinking, portrays a society with a number of features familiar from *We* and *Anthem*: individuals have numbers rather than names, the family has been outlawed in favor of government-controlled breeding, and the like. Another possible influence is Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (Gregg 1988, 62).

7. For an explicit comparison between Rand and Orwell on this point, see N. Branden 1962, 113.

8. On this last point, see Collins 1973, 52–68.

9. Despite the stylistic differences between *We* and *Anthem*, there are intriguing similarities between statements made by Zamyatin and Rand on literary style and the creative process. As Cox (2000, 321) has noted, "in her comments about style, Rand is decidedly a modernist"; two examples are her exhortation to "show, not tell" (Rand 2000, 155) and her repeated emphasis on presenting only the essentials through an extreme economy of words and images (127, 133, 138, 143, 168–69). While Cox locates some of the modernist influence on Rand in the person of Isabel Paterson, it is quite possible that Rand was also influenced by the modernist ideas and practices current among writers active in her formative years, including Yevgeny Zamyatin. Zamyatin too put great emphasis on a compressed, essentialized style—"writing with 90-proof ink," as he once put it (Zamyatin 1970, 75; see also 88, 169). However, Zamyatin's recommended approach to writing, and especially plot-development, was much more intuitive and inductive than Rand's (for example, contrast Zamyatin 1970, 166–68 with Rand 2000, 20–25). Any full exploration of Rand's style will need to take account of the possible influence of Zamyatin (and also of Nietzsche, Hugo, Dostoyevsky, and many others).

10. Hegelian dialectic is well summarized by Sciabarra (2000, 63):

In Hegel's view, the mechanism through which ideas evolve is highly dialectical: as one perspective enunciates a certain aspect of a philosophic issue, another, competing perspective emerges as its negation. A reconciliation between these apparently conflicting perspectives is made possible by a third movement that destroys the partiality of each, maintaining their truth and transcending their limitations. This third perspective subsequently becomes a new primary, through which the process begins anew.

11. For Zamyatin (1970, 107), the dialectical process of never-ending revolutions is not limited to the arts or even society:

Revolution is everywhere, in everything. It is infinite. There is no final revolution, no final number. The social revolution is only one of an infinite number of numbers: the law of revolution is not a social law, but an immeasurably greater one. It is a cosmic, universal law—like the laws of the conservation of energy and of the dissipation of energy (entropy).

12. For example, just as Rand (1975, 86) criticized Hugo for the insertion of long historical essays into his novels, Zamyatin (1970, 185) criticized "writers who build their plots by the deductive method" since they often include, as Rand did, lengthy philosophical monologues:

In addition to gray, newspaper language, which reads like a bad translation,

we often find them guilty of still another fault—lengthy monologues. As you know, the monologue was in great vogue in old drama but is entirely out of fashion in the new. Nor has it any place in the new literary prose. A monologue is always best developed in action, interspersed with other material.

13. In her novel *The Fountainhead* can be found three fascinating, and likely autobiographical, sentences from the novel's protagonist Howard Roark on the same topic (Rand 1943, 25): "I inherit nothing. I stand at the end of no tradition. I may, perhaps, stand at the beginning of one."

14. Layton (1988) argues that "the most crucial heritage for Zamyatin was the 'Romantic Realism' of Gogol and Dostoevsky . . . in its fundamental aesthetic strategy and intention, Zamyatin's art finds a striking parallel, indeed a model, in Dostoevsky's 'fantastic Realism.'" Given that Rand read, appreciated, and liked Dostoevsky's novels (Rand 1975, 43, 86, 88, 107, 114–15), it is quite possible that his aesthetic influenced Rand as well. The topic is certainly worthy of further investigation.

15. Although Rand and disciples of hers such as Harry Binswanger consistently have represented this phrase as Aristotle's, it is not a direct quotation from the *Poetics*, and the Randian spin on it seriously misrepresents Aristotle's aesthetics. For details and citations, see Torres and Kamhi 2000, 63–64.

16. For similar analyses, see also: N. Branden 1962, 97–98; Rand 1975, 167; Peikoff 1991, 437; and Sciabarra 1995, 207.

17. Zamyatin (1970, 166) expressed a similar thought: "A writer who can only describe actual life, who can only photograph the people and events he had actually seen, is creatively impotent and will not go far."

18. Rand's main disciple has even gone so far as to claim that "all art works involve some moral content, at least implicitly" and therefore that, directly or indirectly, all art works either "project a hero" (Peikoff 1991, 421) or project man as a monster. I have criticized this "model-building" theory of art in Saint-Andre 1999.

19. On this point I am indebted to Roger Donway.

20. The relation of Rand's literary aesthetics to Socialist Realism has been touched on before, most recently in this journal by D. Barton Johnson (2000, 54–55) and Gene H. Bell-Villada (2001, 186). Johnson calls Rand's approach "Capitalist Realism," but I feel that this term does not do justice to the fundamentally philosophical (as opposed to political) nature of what she believes art must portray. A full exploration of this issue, including the historical roots of Rand's theory, would be a welcome addition to the literature on Rand's art and ideas.

References

- Bell-Villada, G. 2001. Nabokov and Rand: Kindred ideological spirits, divergent literary aims. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 3, no. 1 (Fall): 181–93.
- Branden, B. 1986. *The Passion of Ayn Rand*. New York: Doubleday.
- Branden, N. 1962. *Who Is Ayn Rand?* New York: Random House.
- Burns, T. 2000. Zamyatin's *We* and postmodernism. *Utopian Studies* 11, no. 1: 66–90.
- Collins, C. 1973. *Eugeniy Zamyatin: An Interpretive Study*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Cooke, B. 2002. *Human Nature in Utopia: Zamyatin's We*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Cox, S. 2000. The art of fiction. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 1, no. 2 (Spring): 313–31.
- Gimpelevich, Z. 1997. "We" and "I" in Zamyatin's *We* and Rand's *Anthem*.

- Germano-Slavica 10, no. 1: 13–23.
- Gregg, R. A. 1988. Dostoevsky, the Bible and *We*. In Kern 1988.
- Johnson, D. B. 2000. Strange bedfellows: Ayn Rand and Vladimir Nabokov. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 2, no. 1 (Fall): 47–67.
- Kern, G., ed. 1988. *Zamyatin's "We": A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ann Arbor: Ardis.
- Kramer, H. 1980. A talk with Solzhenitsyn. *The New York Times* (11 May). Available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/01/home/solz-interview.html>>.
- Layton, S. 1988. Zamyatin and literary modernism. In Kern 1988.
- Peikoff, L. 1991. *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*. New York: Dutton.
- Pinker, S. 2002. *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. New York: Viking.
- Rand, A. [1936] 1959. *We the Living*. New York: New American Library.
- _____. [1937] 1946. *Anthem*. New York: New American Library.
- _____. 1943. *The Fountainhead*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
- _____. 1957. *Atlas Shrugged*. New York: Random House.
- _____. 1975. *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*. Second revised edition. New York: New American Library.
- _____. 1997. *Journals of Ayn Rand*. New York: Dutton.
- Rosenthal, B. G. 1986. *Nietzsche in Russia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Saint-Andre, P. 1999. Artist shrugged. *Monadnock Review* (17 February). Available at <<http://www.monadnock.net/essays/shrugged.html>>.
- Sciabarra, C. M. 1995. *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- _____. 1999. The Rand transcript. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 1, no. 1 (Fall): 1–26.
- _____. 2000. *Total Freedom: Toward a Dialectical Libertarianism*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Shane, A. M. 1968. *Life and Works of Evgenij Zamiatin*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- _____. 1970. Zamyatin the critic. Introduction to Zamyatin 1970.
- Stenbock-Fermor, E. 1988. A neglected source of Zamyatin's *We*. In Kern 1988.
- Torres, L. and M. M. Kamhi. 2000. *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Zamyatin, Y. [1924] 1952. *We*. Translated by Gregory Zilboorg. Second edition. New York: Dutton Books.
- _____. 1966. *The Dragon: 15 Stories by Yevgeny Zamyatin*. Translated by Mirra Ginsburg. New York: Random House.
- _____. 1970. *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*. Translated by Mirra Ginsburg. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- _____. 1972. *We*. Translated by Mirra Ginsburg. New York: Avon Books.