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The Language of Dystopia

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The Language of Dystopia

Senior Project submitted to
the Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by

Sidney Peery

Annandale-on-Hudson, NY
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Introduction

Many remember the 1990s as the morning after the hairspray delirium of the 1980s: a depressed period full of moody music and bad political decisions. But most kids born in the 90s remember it as the Golden Age of cartoons. When I think of the 90s, I think of the cartoon called *Dragon Ball Z*. Goku, one of the main protagonists, was a simple man who, through the strength of his will alone, became as powerful as a god. Even the Lord of Death could not control Goku, or keep him trapped behind the veil; a single punch could leave Death himself drooling in the corner of the office where he judges souls. Of course, Goku would never do such a thing... but all the same, he *could*.

There were many cartoons like *Dragon Ball Z* back then, and many movies too: take *The Matrix*, for instance, where the protagonist Neo becomes all powerful merely through a strong belief in his own abilities. Each of these heroic tales brought home one essential message: "The individual person can be all that he desires to be, if he is determined enough. Human beings can overcome any obstacle, face any threat, and topple any oppressive social structure because the human will is indomitable." I took that to heart as a boy, and never thought about it too much. The idea simply made sense to me.

Then in my Freshman year of highschool I was required to read *1984* by George Orwell, and all of my faith in the strength of men's will came crashing down upon my head. For the first time I was confronted with the possibility that my own thought processes were instilled in me by my surroundings, and that by extension my will was not in fact my own: I could be forced to think anything, believe anything, even perceive anything. The idea was so repulsive, and so

terribly disappointing that I threw the book across the room. For weeks afterwards I could not get Orwell's nightmare out of my head.

Later I read *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, and realized that both books belong to a genre known as "anti-utopias," or "dystopias." A "utopia" is defined as "a place of ideal perfection especially in laws, government, and social conditions" (Merriam-Webster). It originates from the novel *Utopia*, written by Thomas More in 1516: in it, he envisioned a world that was too good to be true. The word's counterpart, "dystopia" (meaning a world or society where everything is perfectly bad as opposed to perfectly good) may have arisen in the 18th century ("The Curious Origin"), but its first consequential appearance was in a speech given by John Stuart Mill and Gregg Webber to the British Parliament in 1868 ("Dystopia"). Since then, novels featuring utopian and dystopian societies have emerged as a literary means of critiquing modern social systems. Authors often do this by imagining a theoretical future where present-day utopian ideals (meaning those ideals that pertain to utopian societies) have become law, usually to a decidedly negative effect. Such novels have come to represent a literary form of social critique and a genre all to themselves: hence we have the terms "utopian novel" and "dystopian novel."

Several years after my first encounter with *1984*, I observed a spike in the popularity of dystopian fiction (the movie adaptation of Lois Lowry's *The Giver* and the success of Susanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* series are the first examples that come to mind), and this renewed my interest in the topic. I began to wonder, "If my thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions are all interrelated, then what is the nature of their relationship? *How* are they connected, and how is this demonstrated throughout dystopian fiction?" This time with a sober eye, I poured over nearly a dozen works of dystopian fiction and found that many of the tropes of these modern

dystopian novels can be traced to a trifecta of early 20th century masterworks: Huxley's *Brave New World*, Orwell's *1984*, and Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*. Through my analysis of these three dystopian societies, I show that all dystopian societies share one particular attribute: namely, the use of language and the public discourse are regulated, thus resulting in the dehumanization of all those living under dystopian social conditions. Thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions are related through language, and that is why dystopian societies have a vested interest in controlling language.

The answers to both the question of why we are drawn to dystopian novels and why language control is a common factor lie in the questions themselves. Questions are what make us unique in the animal kingdom. As Aldous Huxley notes in his essay "Beliefs," "We have a hunger and thirst for explanation" (Huxley 335). We drive to know, to quantify the world in terms of our own making. Thus we are drawn to what unsettles us, to what begs further questioning and hence to an ever more comprehensible understanding of the world.

What ask questions using the language we know, and what we find influences our worldview; new words are crafted to suit that worldview, and in turn our new language informs what we find through the questions we can now frame. Modes of thought become traditional, and certain explanations for how the world is become ossified in the minds of the public. It is when that ossification of the mind is absolute that society begins to resemble a dystopia. The power of a singular ideology, most often represented as a perfect and permanent solution to all human problems, becomes so great that it effectively snuffs out our very hunger for explanation as individuals. In essence, the subject of a dystopian government loses his humanity through the loss of this crucial component of human individuality: the desire to know.

Before opening a discourse on the various forms that a dystopia can take and what they mean, it is necessary to establish a theory about what society is, and what it was first intended to do. The desire to know dates back to a time before there was anything resembling a social collective. Of course, before there was a society, there were individuals—perhaps some were solitary, while others lived in small family units. Thus, it logically follows that society was originally the invention of autonomous individuals and families; and, as these autonomous individuals were perfectly capable of surviving on their own, it would seem that they would only join a society if it suited their interests, which indeed it did. As the benefits of cooperation and communication became evident, larger social systems emerged to lead the bulk of humanity away from solitary anarchic lifestyles.

This idea even predates Charles Darwin and the theory of Evolution: according to the 18th century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, societies emerged because people agreed to an arrangement among their peers, for their mutual benefit. Rousseau says that society offered the individual “a form of association that defends and protects with all common forces the person and goods of each associate, and, by means of which, each one, while uniting with all, *nevertheless obeys only himself and remains as free as before*” (Rousseau 164, italics mine). Societies were formed so that people could be safe to seek out the answers to their questions, either by themselves or as members of a group, free from the dangers of their fellow men and natural threats. People and the civilizations that they inhabit evolve through what I call the public discourse—meaning *the activity of communication through language on a large scale*. The public discourse is important because it is the basic means by which an individual can learn and create the language necessary to ask his questions, and it is also his means of gauging how well his political organization is doing its job. Throughout this critical examination, readers will note

that dystopian societies deviate from the original purpose of society by restricting the public discourse.

In every case of a dystopian society, to achieve “perfect” control, the society must control the language that its people use. It must stop the public discourse short of expressing any idea that may run counter to its purposes. But the mere suppression of language is not enough to do this: rather, each government in question must harness the power of human passion in order to create “fanatics for the cause.” Hence we see that religious language (reverent words like capitalized pronouns, adjectives like “greatest,” “highest,” “most powerful,” etc.) and religious functions are centered within the government, usually in the form of a Cult of Personality. In *Brave New World* the people worship Henry Ford, credited with the invention of the assembly line, which is so important in that society; in *1984* the people of Oceania worship Big Brother, perceived as a bulwark against enemy powers and a sign of national strength; and in *We* there is The Benefactor, who is the godlike idol of the One State’s sacred Reason. Each society has different modes of language control and worship in line with their ideological pursuits, as will be discussed throughout this paper; but the end result is always the same. The individual is alienated, and people are dehumanized.

Below I have included two diagrams: *Figure 1* shows a few ways in which language control is similar and different throughout the books; *Figure 2* to demonstrates the how these dystopian societies are similar and different in general.

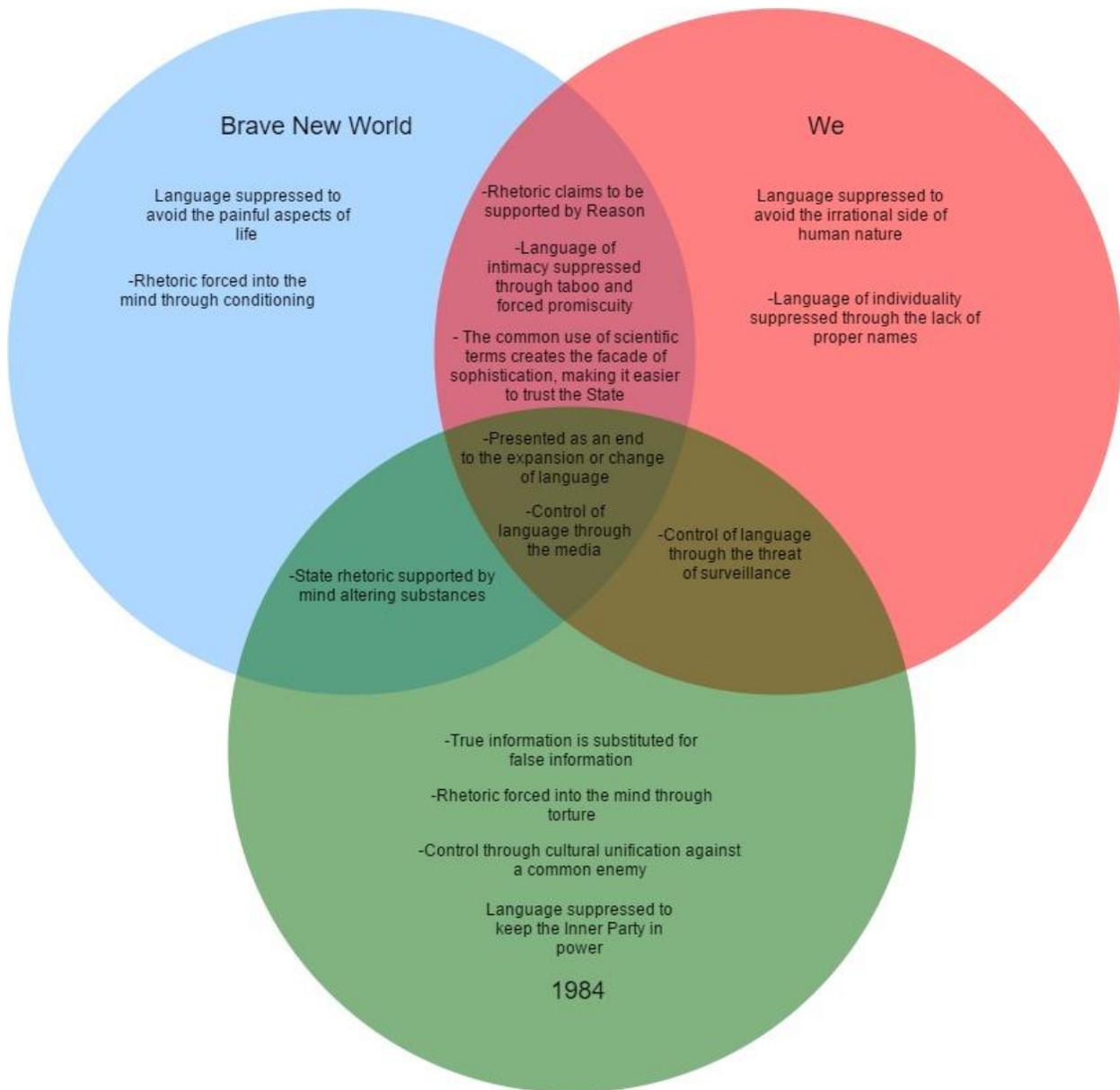


Figure 1. The Methods of Language Suppression.

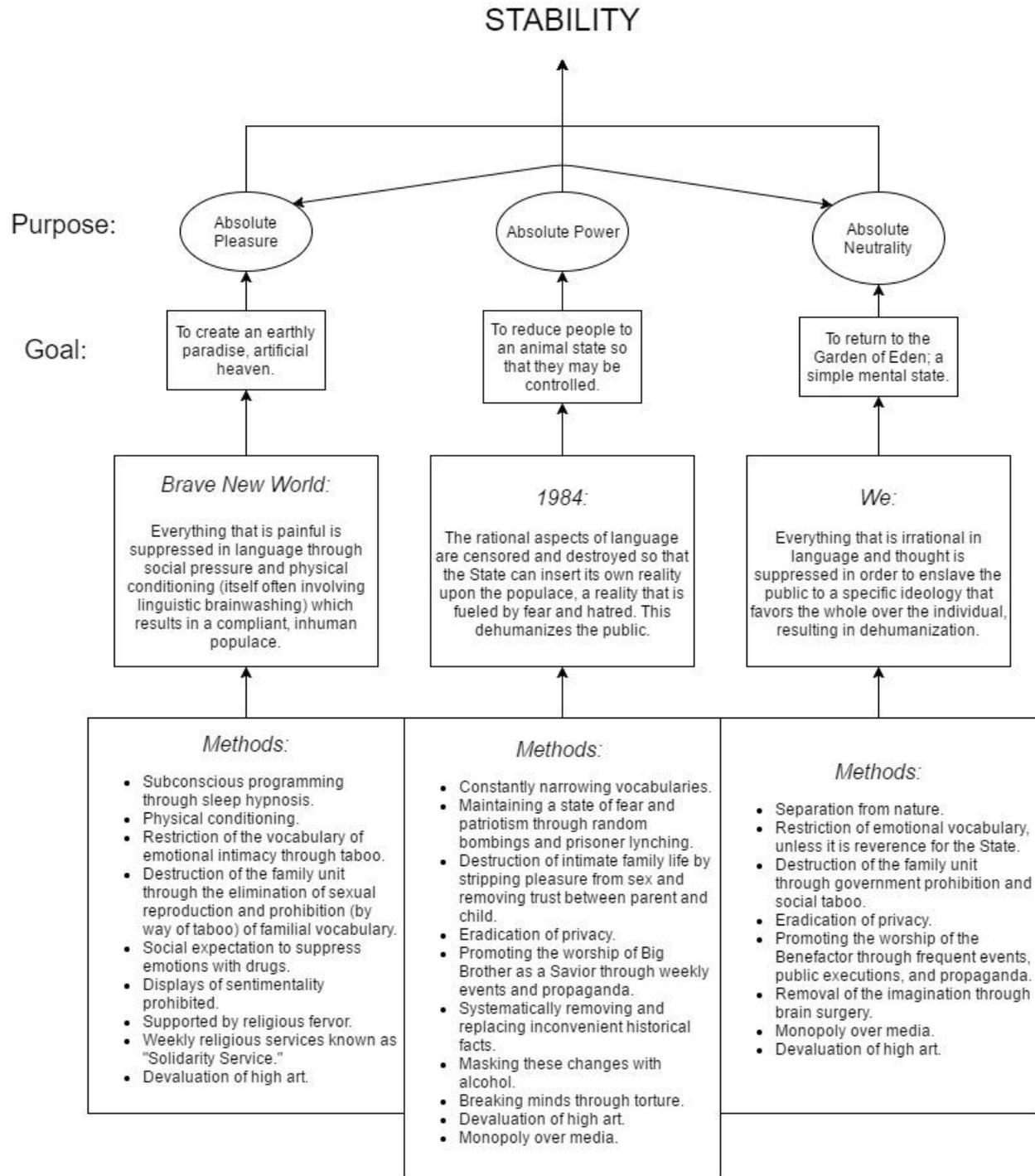


Figure 2. The flowchart of dystopian ideologies and the methods needed to attain them.

As you can see, these three novels are remarkably similar: for example, each dystopian society favors the destruction or disruption of the standard family unit; and each society is supported by fanatics who use language that we recognize as religious in nature, though we may not recognize their faith to be religious as we know it. Hence I have taken to calling these political organizations ‘cults,’ as befits the nature of the relationship between those governed and the State in question: as we shall see, the public discourse under these governments quite resembles what one might imagine the public discourse to be inside of a radical cult.

The societal goals of *Brave New World* and *We* have been connected because they are actually quite similar (if only phrased differently), as my analysis will show.¹ Stability is a common value in all three books: and the state of social stability is often conflated with happiness in general. If the suppression of the public discourse is the means, and the acquisition of a universally unthinking mental state is the goal, then stability is heralded as the reason, the *justification* for these actions. Unfortunately, the true result of producing such a stable society is that the original purpose for having a society is lost along with the individual, who is dehumanized under these oppressive conditions.

¹ See Chapter 3.

Chapter 1

Brave New World and The Cult of Pleasure:

Language and the Individual in a Hedonistic World

“A squat, grey building of only thirty-four stories. Over the main entrance the words, CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY AND CONDITIONING CENTRE, and in a shield, the World State’s motto, COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY” (Huxley 1). So begins one of the bleakest and most ideologically uncomfortable works of fiction written in the 20th century: Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. In the distant future where a thirty-four story building is considered “squat,” human beings are no longer born, but are grown in factories such as the Central London Hatchery. Inside the dismal grey building, “Wintriness responded to wintriness. The overalls of the workers were white, their hands gloved with a pale corpse-coloured rubber. The light was frozen, dead, a ghost” (Huxley 1). And yet, despite the morbidity of their factory’s color palette and the apparently lifeless quality of their daily toils, each and every one of those workers would proudly say, “Everybody’s happy now” (Huxley 75), as they were taught to say and conditioned to believe. They would insist that the World State was a utopia... and if they happened to imagine by an unhappy accident that something were amiss, happiness drugs would fix that misunderstanding. Who needs freedom? Welcome to the world of the plastic smile.

Brave New World is commonly read as a cautionary tale about the dangers of technology. However, a little knowledge of Huxley’s background shows that the true meaning of the novel is far more complex than that. Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) was an English novelist and critic best known for his biting satire (Encyclopaedia Britannica). The grandson of Thomas Henry Huxley (a notable zoologist and a proponent of agnosticism, who was instrumental in pushing for the

British public to support Darwin's Theory of Evolution) and grandnephew of the famous critic Matthew Arnold, Aldous was a member of the cultural elite. He took an early liking to science, particularly the medical sciences. However, a childhood illness left him nearly blind, and he could never fulfill his dream of becoming a doctor. Instead he turned to literary studies, but his love of science never diminished, nor did his deductive reasoning skills. As such, throughout his literary and philosophical careers, Huxley looked to science for both the reasons behind society's problems and the solutions for those problems. He wrote *Brave New World* in 1932, just as the world was in the grips of the Great Depression—or as it was known in England, the Great Slump. Many of Huxley's essays from around that time suggest that he felt there was a scientific reason behind the deterioration of society, and that several methods of social engineering as demonstrated in *Brave New World* might prove beneficial for "race betterment," meaning the improvement of the white races' genetic stock could improve their general intelligence and thus prevent crises like the Great Slump from happening again (for example, see "Are We Growing Stupider?"). Thus we cannot conclude that *Brave New World* was critical of the technologies that we find so abhorrent in the text today.

Still, at the time that Huxley was a proponent of eugenics, it would be premature to imagine that his ideal world would look like *Brave New World*: such a reading would be an oversimplification of Huxley's views, and it would overlook the mass of scholarship on the topic. As Congdon notes, "A close reading of *Brave New World* reveals too many sites of satire simply to claim that Aldous was endorsing the specific scientific society he depicted" (Congdon 84). Rather, knowing Huxley's background and intentions, we must rethink what exactly in *Brave New World* is satirical and what is not. This novel is still a masterpiece, but for different reasons than what one who was less informed might imagine.

So what is *Brave New World* a critique of? The critic Brad Congdon claims that “the religion of Aldous’s planned society, Fordism, is the specific site of critique in *Brave New World*... (it is) not a cautionary tale of technology, or even eugenics, but a preemptive critique of the type of belief systems which might be mobilized” to bring about such a society (Congdon 85). S. Philip Morgan, Suzanne Shanahan, and Whitney Welsh add in their paper titled “Brave New Worlds: Philosophy, Politics, and Science in Human Biotechnology,”

Huxley was most concerned with the subversion of the individual, regardless of cause or means, and took pains to draw from a variety of sources in order to illustrate the ubiquity of the threat. He perceived a tendency toward centralization that cut across political systems and ideologies, and the brilliance of the novel emanates from his ability to weave aspects from all of them into a terrifyingly cohesive whole. From nearly any starting point, a Brave New World is a potential end, and therein lies the strength of his warning. (Morgan et al. 133).

While I agree with Congdon and Morgan et al., I expand upon their readings by framing an interpretation of Huxley’s novel in terms of the relationship between language, society, and the individual. This reading demonstrates that it was the possibility of an irreparably stunted public discourse and the corresponding intellectually stunted individual that Huxley feared, not the concept of a genetically determined caste system.

There are many examples from the text that supplement this argument. Chief among them are the unexplained and improperly communicated emotions that Huxley’s characters feel, as well as the suppression of those expressions; the use of hypnopaedic messaging (repeated phrases muttered into the ears of sleeping children through speakers in their pillows, brainwashing the World State’s future citizens) and the content of those messages; the religious aspect of the State ideology, as witnessed through the Solidarity Service (pages 78-86); the censorship and gradual phasing-out of words and phrases that could be used to create alternative

fields of thought in opposition to the World State's ideology; and finally, the argument between John the Savage and Mustapha Mond, the World Controller (pages 217-240).

“The Programmed Mind”

We return to the human cloning facility. Immediately evident is a sense of sterility and mechanization, two things that will appear time and time again.² The director of the facility is giving a tour to a group of upperclass school children. He explains how children are mass-produced and physically conditioned on an assembly line of sorts, and how once they transition from the fetal stage into the baby stage, further Pavlovian training techniques (such as electric shocks following certain stimuli that the State wants a particular set of children to inherently dislike) allow the State to predetermine what future citizens will like and dislike.³

The indoctrination process does not end when the children fall asleep: rather, small speakers inside their pillows repeat official phrases at a volume just loud enough to hear, but not loud enough to wake them. In this way, the children are constantly told what they are and how to behave, until those behaviors are internalized and supported through waking experience. The Director admits that such a thing is necessary, for “wordless conditioning is crude and wholesale; cannot bring home the finer distinctions, cannot inculcate the more complex courses of behavior.

² That Huxley would choose to emphasize the sterility of these environments is significant: “sterile” means that something is perfectly lifeless; alternatively, it is a synonym for “infertile.” This word frames our reading of what follows with a feeling of lifelessness. Huxley is deliberately making his artificial environment feel uncomfortable by way of association with the word “sterile.” Such is the power of individual words.

³ Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936) was a Russian physiologist who discovered that dogs could be “conditioned” to salivate at the toll of a bell, if that bell were associated with food in the dogs’ minds. That association could be created by routinely sounding the bell before feeding the dogs. Other experiments would later show that humans could also be conditioned to behave in a variety of different ways through repeated physical stimuli (see Waude).

For that there must be words, but words without reason. In brief, hypnopaedia” (28). But what does he mean by “words without reason?”

The words are not unreasonable because they are spoken without reason: rather, Huxley is referring to the words as they are possessed by the listener. Residing in the subconscious, these messages are not a creation of the mind, but a *predisposition* of the mind. In short, these words have the capacity to override the usage of other language, of language that could lead to thoughts that might run counter to State purposes. By creating these predispositions, the State ensures that their set of values will be easily accepted as “what feels right” to people. Like “drops of liquid sealing-wax, drops that adhere, incrust, incorporate themselves with what they fall on” (Huxley 28), the hypnopaedic messages become the inner voice, take over the dialectic of the mind. They essentially become the native language of these citizens, the comfortable home base of rhetorical thinking. Of course, these values are not up for debate: they are more or less integrated with cultural normativity. Anyone who speaks out in opposition to these values is marked as an outsider, or a mentally unhealthy person.

For example, after Bernard and Lenina (two of the book’s three main characters) go out on a date (insofar as a couple hours in the bustling crowds at a wrestling championship can be considered a “date”), Bernard tries to share his desire for a sense of individuality with Lenina in his helicopter on the way home. Bernard wants Lenina to see the beauty of the ocean, and participate in an experience of the sublime with him: “It makes me feel... as though I were more *me*, if you see what I mean. More on my own, not so completely a part of something else. Not just a cell in the social body. Doesn’t it make you feel like that, Lenina” (90)? To which she replies, “It’s horrible, it’s horrible... And how can you talk like that about not wanting to be a part of the social body? After all, every one works for every one else” (91). Her reply is

automatic: when she is asked to engage in philosophical or spiritual discussion, Lenina merely repeats the maxims she has learned in her sleep. Bernard is frustrated to find that Lenina stubbornly has no opinions of her own, and he knows exactly why this is the case—but no amount of explanation and reasoning can displace the values that have been planted in Lenina's feelings.

Bernard feels "Wretched, in a word, because she had behaved as any healthy and virtuous English girl ought to behave and not in some other, abnormal, extraordinary way" (Huxley 64). Not even he can escape the values that have been planted in his mind. Just note the words that he uses to describe someone who follows State guidelines: "healthy," "virtuous," versus "abnormal," and "extraordinary." Even though he is conscious of something more than what he has been taught to know, he is still using terms for value as defined by the State in regards to himself and others. Such is the veracity of hypnopædic control over the public discourse: and where the public discourse is not free, and thinking is frowned upon, the individual subject has no means of accessing an alternative set of definitions, and every attempt to create a new definition or value is met with strong resistance. He is not free to talk about what he feels, and so he can never claim the agency and pride of someone who has formed a good opinion of his own.

Thus, the individual is crafted from the beginning to fit in. He or she has no choice in the matter of his or her occupation; nor is there any social mobility. The individual is not free to self-determine, to ask his relevant questions about life: his questions and answers are both given before he is even old enough to speak; and, as Zamyatin says, "Dealing with answered questions is the privilege of brains constructed like a cow's stomach, which, as we know, is built to digest cud" ("On Literature" 110). For those who desire more than the life of a cow, already the social contract is broken because the public discourse is dead: no one has anything new or original to

talk about. Socialization is limited to the reconfirmation of previously held beliefs. It seems that the only way to keep people from becoming altogether bored of social encounters is to supply them with a never-ending stream of distractions, such as movies with sex scenes that the viewers can feel through neurally stimulating theater seats (such movies are known as “the feelies”), and lots of drugs.

However, hypnopaedia, early-childhood social engineering and drugs are not the only tools that the World State uses to control its populace. After all, studies have shown that conditioned behaviors can be unlearned without a regular means of reinforcing them (Waude): thus, the World State establishes a religious aspect to everyday life, and this religion—Fordism—does the work of maintaining a fanatical and ecstatic attitude towards State-held values. This is why Lenina’s reaction to Bernard’s eccentricity is pointedly negative: she views his thought process not only as uncomfortable, but blasphemous. “Lenina was shocked by his blasphemy. ‘Bernard!’ She protested in a voice of amazed distress. ‘How can you?’” (91)?

“On Fordism and Religious Speech”

Here, as the director of the human hatchery gives his tour, “his fordship, Mustapha Mond” (33) makes his first appearance, with a play on the phrase “his worship.” This introduction solidifies the relationship that the common people have with the ideology of Fordism and with the World Controllers: by substituting “ford” for “wor,” the connotations of the word “worship” are transferred onto Ford, and all of the things he stands for. Since “worship” can be applied both to a monarch and to a religious practice, it is easy to assume that “fordship” not only implies reverence towards the authority of Mustapha Mond, but also that Mond has religious significance. Thus, before Mustapha Mond has even begun to speak, we know that this

society somewhat resembles a monarchy of divine right, and that the World Controllers derive their power from Fordism.

“Fordism” represents the sanctification of the ideologies that surround the State’s behavior. A strict definition of Fordism can be difficult to pin down, as it balances somewhere between the secular and the religious. While the practices of Fordism deify Henry Ford, they also prevent the contemplation of an afterlife, which is a key element of any religion. Whether people in *Brave New World* believe in an afterlife or not is unclear, but what *is* clear is that they do not believe that there is any correlation between their actions and the afterlife. Fordists embrace a *carpe diem* mentality that is, at least on the surface, decidedly hedonistic—pleasure for pleasure’s sake. But when everybody has their basic physical needs met (for technology and social engineering have solved the problems of world hunger, drought, and housing crises), and everybody can indulge in pleasure pretty much at any time that they please (except at work, of course), then there is peace. And where there is peace, there is stability, which is a core value of Fordism. Pleasure is given an ultimate excuse and a purpose through Fordism: it serves to reinforce the effectiveness of the State’s ideology, and to sustain the “happiness” of all.

More than that, Fordism treats the religious feeling as if it were just another biological need to fulfill. Congdon holds that this treatment of religion is attributable to Huxley’s older brother, Julian Huxley: Congdon says, “...Aldous focuses on his brother’s concept of a religious emotion, showing how a biological function could be harnessed by the wrong kind of belief system, a capitalist system which leads to a dystopic future” (Congdon 93). He goes on to say that

Aldous’s attacks on Fordism account for the existence, and ubiquity, of consumerism in the novel, despite the fact that a society structured as his is would have no need for money. Indeed, the novel seems to portray a world that should be devoid of capitalism...

Capitalism exists not to satisfy the demands of the economy but, instead, the individual religious emotion. (Congdon 97)

Fordism recycles the language of a capitalist society, and assigns it religious value by inserting terms familiar to capitalism into a religious context. We have already seen one example of this, with “his fordship Mustapha Mond.” Another example is the biweekly Solidarity Service that it seems as though people are required to attend. One’s experience at a Solidarity Service is framed as a religious one, a communion of sorts. Congdon considers this communion to be a stand-in for the religious emotion:

In accordance with Julian’s previous statements on religion, *Brave New World* features ‘organized communal gathering(s)’ with ‘recognized procedure(s)’ in the form of the Solidarity Services, where twelve individuals sit around a circular table and sing Solidarity Hymns, songs valorizing fellowship and total integration (‘corporate activity’)... For someone fully imbricated into Fordism, the Solidarity Service is a perfect religious experience satisfying the religious emotion. (Congdon 97)

To give an example of a Solidarity Hymn, consider this excerpt from the “Orgy-porgy” chant:

*Orgy-porgy, Ford and fun,
Kiss the girls and make them One.
Boys at one with girls at peace;
Orgy-porgy gives release.* (Huxley 94)

It is the individual who judges quality in things, be it art, food, or character. This is why we consider someone who possesses a good sense of judgement to also be sober, in control of his faculties, etc.. Here, however, the people are not sober. Far from being able to recognize that the phrase “Orgy-porgy” sounds infantile, they are actually dissolving their sense of self through pleasure. In this case, it is sexual pleasure as amplified through mind-altering drugs that does the work. To them, there *is no concept* of “ridiculous,” at least temporarily. Their minds become suggestible: thus they are willing to accept the suggestion that this experience is religious, that it

is enough to “give release” to that latent human desire for divine communion. In fact, we might see the Solidarity Service and its mandatory drug-induced haze as another form of Pavlovian conditioning: the brain is trained to associate sex, pleasure, and divinity with one another through the use of mind altering drugs, so that the individual will strongly support the government for its role in maintaining a world where those three things are possible. A neat circle of influence is created to ensure that the State’s rhetoric becomes a golden law.

Thus, at the same time as Fordism solves the problem of a need for religious communion, it also functions as a means of legitimating the suppression of language. After all, outlawing certain patterns of speech is not enough to suppress the impetus to invent a language conducive to thought: people still might do so in private, beyond the prying eyes of government officials. Fordism is the means by which the World State wields the religious sentiment to place a taboo upon what might be termed a “language of thought,” which is more efficient than most laws—because laws based upon religious feelings and values are much closer to the heart of the believer (having been “sanctified” through religious experience), and thus far more difficult to betray. As noted above, a neat cycle of influence is created between the individual’s perceptions of reality and the words he has to understand them: they mutually reinforce one another.. However, Huxley intends us to see that in fact this cycle does not completely close the mind to new perceptions. He wants us to see that the limitation of language does not entirely wall-off perception, and that human nature still shines through the muck of conditioning. He does this through narrative contrivance (such as word choice, or rapid subject changing as discussed below) and through his choice of characters.

“The Methods of Huxley’s Satire”

Huxley’s opinions are made clear as his narration pokes fun at how degrading and unpleasant all of this can be for the people who are subjected to these social conditions. As the critic Joanne Woiak notes, “Later (Huxley) told a journalist that he favored neither the conditioned stability of the novel’s World State nor the outsider John Savage’s desire for ‘freedom to be unhappy.’ Instead there had to be a workable compromise between the two extremes, and until that was found ‘our efforts might have to be limited to the training of an intellectual aristocracy” (Woiak 114). While he did favor some aspects of eugenics at the time, *Brave New World* undoubtedly represents his worst-case-scenario for if eugenics were applied on a grand scale.

One way that he demonstrates the negative effects of this dystopia on the mind is to gradually increase the speed at which the subject of the paragraphs change. He does this throughout the first segment of the novel: the narrative begins with the director giving a tour to some students, but then between paragraphs, on page 34, the narrative follows Lenina; then later, it briefly returns to the Director, only to shift attention to Henry Foster and then Bernard Marx, seemingly at random. Eventually the subject is changing with every single sentence. This creates a sense of being in an argument, or being stuck between several opposing conversations. The direction of the narrative is skewed, and the reader is confused. Because of this confusion, the reader is given over to the discomfort of being constantly interrupted in the process of forming a coherent thought; this could be seen as a textual means of acting out what it must be like to have one’s own thoughts overridden by powerful indoctrination. Our discomfort stands opposed to the voices of the Director and the World Controller, who are insisting that life is better this way,

without understanding. This discomfort is Huxley's proof that the World State's rule is dystopian, not utopian.

Another method that Huxley uses to give his narration a satirical edge is to emphasize how repugnant this world is to an outsider at the same time as he shows how powerless the State is to prevent outsiders (or rather, people who would aspire to be individual human beings as we know them today) from emerging. Our main cast, when the narrative finally settles upon them, are all examples of people who become estranged from the rhetoric they were born to, though in various ways. Each of these characters lacks the proper vocabulary to express what it is that ails them, and they all suffer for it. Lenina feels herself slipping into love with Henry, but she does not know that it is love; nor does she identify her feelings for John as love later in the text, but only as a vague "liking:" "'I can't make it out,' said Lenina. She couldn't make it out; and not only was bewildered; was also rather upset. 'Because, you see, Fanny, *I* like him.' Liked him more and more" (Huxley 166). She suffers bewilderment not only because she has no word to describe what she feels, but because others, like her friend Fanny, are too brainwashed to understand her feelings.

Sadly, John also has feelings for Lenina, at least before she attempts to sleep with him (sex being demonstrably the only way that she knows how to express affection). The problem is that John's world is built upon a far more sophisticated language from a bygone era. We see this when, looking down upon Lenina as she sleeps, he murmurs,

*Her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait, her voice;
Handlest in thy discourse O! that her hand,
In whose comparison all whites are ink
Writing their own reproach; to whose soft seizure
The cygnet's down is harsh...* (Huxley 144)

John's language is that of Shakespeare's. All his education comes from a copy of Shakespeare's complete works that his mother acquired on the reservation. The plays informed his ideas of what an ideal world should be. Because of this, John is unable to assimilate into the human machine: he has developed a preconception of the complexity of the individual, and learned the possible value of experience through meaningful poetry.

The insertion of Shakespeare into *Brave New World* emphasizes the fact that real poetry has no place here: by comparison, socially acceptable poetry is a mockery of the genre. For example, Lenina sings, “*Hug me till you drug me, honey, / Kiss me till I'm in a coma: / Hug me, honey, snugly bunny; / Love's as good as soma*” (166). She, like so many others, is taken in by the simplest and vaguest of pop songs, not the gripping depth of art. This song is very much intended to offend the audience's more refined sensibilities.

This conclusion is underscored by John and Helmholtz Watson's observations about the emptiness of the “new art” (or perhaps better defined as mindless distractions). For instance, after being reprimanded for writing real poetry, Helmholtz reflects that he felt “as though I were just beginning to be able to use that power I feel I've got inside me—that extra, latent power” (182) accessible through the creation and usage of meaningful language. But he is not allowed to express himself in that way. Later on, he agrees with John about the foolishness of the work he is expected to produce. Specifically, he notes that it is “idiotic” to be “Writing when there's nothing to say” (Huxley 221).

Why does a totalitarian government restrict the creation of art, and of meaningful words? The answer is quite obvious: the censorship of language, both written down and spoken aloud, effectively prevents the development of concepts that could threaten the rule of the state. How does a rebellion form without the word “rebellion?” How can a man *know* that he lacks love in

his life when he does not know what love is, and when he does not have words to describe why he needs it? Again, we see that a person's vocabulary affects what he can learn and observe, just as what he observes affects the words he uses.

John is a great example of this relationship between a conscious, free thinking individual and his language. In one of his articles on dystopian literature, the critic Thomas Horan gives an example of how, in *Brave New World*, the expansion of John's vocabulary actually leads to the development of a greater awareness of his surroundings, and a better understanding of his own identity. He notes that John's character growth is dependent upon the words he learns from reading, which is another taboo activity in the World State:

As he begins absorbing the language of Shakespeare, John is able to contextualize both his burgeoning desire and his latent rage. One day, when his mother neglects to close her bedroom door while engaging in intercourse with her boyfriend Popé, John's jealousy ignites a political epiphany and he rebels. (Horan 332)

Horan then quotes from *Brave New World*: I provide that quote here, with my pagination: "But their magic was strong and went on rumbling in his head, and somehow it was as though he had never really hated Popé before; never really hated him because he had never been able to say how much he hated him" (Huxley 132). For John, the words have a magical effect on perception. They allow him to become *certain* that he feels one way or another about something. Words provide rigid definition to concepts within the mind, and thus a solid basis for the formation of opinions.

In this way, words are "magical" because they are not merely the indicators of our meaning, but to a certain extent they are the perception of meaning itself. Human understanding is entirely contingent upon the existence of language. Without it, we cannot understand. Logic, reason, intuition... these are the concepts that built all other concepts, and yet these things first became recognizable through language. "Reason" is a word itself, and therefore only valuable

insofar as it can be defined through other words. Without words to define “reason,” we could not hope to understand it. In the same way, without words, emotions can have no definition. The very idea that emotions are an effect of a cause could not exist without the words to explain those causes. Thus John’s distaste could not develop into a full-blown vindictive hatred until he had found words to ascribe meaning to the word “hatred.”

John’s epiphany, then, is that feelings can be addressed through language in much more nuanced ways than those in control of the World State would have him believe. Moreover, the human tendency to illuminate one’s own nature through words is actually proof of the creativity inherent to human consciousness. The words we have to describe an object must create the object as an idea within our heads as we give it a name, and yet those very descriptive words are of our own creation: thus, our perceptions are, to a certain extent, of our own creation. This is not to say that a tree ceases to be a tree in objective reality outside of human perception, but that tree’s impact on us will be altered by the language we have developed to describe it. Our perception of the tree is dependent upon language—and subsequently, the way we evaluate the tree is altered by language.

To quickly sum up the points above, the contrast between what the characters could be and what society requires them to be is the fulcrum that Huxley’s satire balances upon. Each wants something, be it love, freedom of expression, or a sense of connection with one’s self and, in John’s case, something we might call God. These are all unattainable without a free public discourse, which is the foundation for the creation of descriptive words.

“The Argument Between Mustapha Mond and John”

Huxley wants the outsider’s perspective because he is interested in where the system *fails* to suppress the essential humanity that people (albeit people with what Huxley considers to be a certain modicum of intelligence) possess. Huxley wants us to be looking for the negative side of this indulgent culture, and to pick apart the Fordist ideology that Mustapha Mond so eloquently presents in his argument with John. There are many presuppositions and subjective definitions embedded within his argument that require a keen eye to unpack: and so, to develop that keen eye in his readers, Huxley put this argument near the end of the text, after the reader had gotten a chance to see this society in action and form opinions about it. Similarly, I reserved my analysis of this argument for the end of this chapter so that I might operate from the standpoint of a more rigidly defined relationship between the individual and language in *Brave New World*.

In order to understand the power of the public discourse as it stands opposed to the ideologies presented throughout the novel, we must develop a solid understanding of this argument. Alexandra Aldridge gives some terms that aid us in defining the two sides of the argument in her book *The Scientific View in Dystopia*: “Huxley’s fiction takes the overall form of a satirical dialectic (that hallmark of his technique) between what is actually a mechanist world view... and an essentially vitalist ideal represented by the Reservation and the protagonist/adversary, John Savage” (Aldridge 49). Mond’s argument, the “mechanist” view, is only valid given that “the assumption that the human organism, in the last analysis, consists of biological and psychological systems the operation of which can be formulated into laws and in turn applied to the engineering of human behavior” (Aldridge 52) is correct. Thus, by extension, the World State’s suppression of the public discourse is only valid if Mond’s philosophy is true. Likewise, “The vitalist doctrine in philosophy... (which) principally assumes that phenomena are

in some measure independent of mechanical forces, that a 'life force' distinct from chemical and physical properties partly explains the evolutionary existence of living organisms" (Aldridge 45) relies on the faith that some things simply cannot be explained scientifically. Evidence from Huxley's own interviews shows that he disagreed both with Mond's philosophy (as noted above) and with John's (the vitalists) (Aldridge 45); rather, Huxley believes, as he says in his essay "Beliefs," that "All that we are, is the result of what we have thought" (*Essays Vol. 4* 355); and what we think is contingent upon the public discourse. Thus, the results of Mond's philosophy as it is applied show that the World State actually does its people a massive disservice by preventing them from thinking. Of course, Mond has his excuses, but those are based on assumptions that can be quickly debunked.

First, Mond's philosophy presumes that happiness, a key element in sustaining society, is incompatible with high art, which is a staple of a healthy public discourse. Mond says, "You've got to choose between happiness and what people used to call high art. We've sacrificed the high art. We have the feelies and the scent organ instead" (220). Importantly, he conflates stability with happiness, as if happiness were only possible in a stable, thoughtless system. If the argument went no further than this, we could contest his beliefs on the basis of there being a great deal of happy individuals even in the most abysmal conditions, and even in a crumbling society.

But of course the argument is more subtle than that: *Brave New World* functions by removing everything from the lives of the citizenry that could prevent happiness. This includes war, famine, sexual frustration, crossed political loyalties, the fear of death, loneliness, dissatisfaction in the workplace, and any number of those things that we commonly complain about in our daily lives. A global society without all of these things would, at first glance, appear

to be a utopia indeed. Through Mond, Huxley asks, “Do we not want world peace and freedom from our anxieties? Note that ‘In the past you could only accomplish these things by making a great effort and after years of hard moral training. Now (under utopian social conditions), you swallow two or three half-gramme tablets, and there you are. Anybody can be virtuous now’ (Huxley 238).” But, upon closer inspection, the mental framework that gives any of these things meaning—formed through free thinking, exclusive familial relations of both relative and sexual kinds, and the liberty to choose one’s own occupation—is gone, sacrificed for the sake of those very things that they give value. Earlier in the novel, Mond qualifies this sacrifice with a metaphor:

“Think of water under pressure in a pipe.” They thought of it. “I pierce it once,” said the Controller. “What a jet!”

He pierced it twenty times. There were twenty piddling little fountains...

Mother, monogamy, romance. High spurts the fountain; fierce and foamy the wild jet. The urge has but a single outlet. My love, my baby. No wonder these poor pre-moderns were mad and wicked and miserable. Their world didn’t allow them to take things easily, didn’t allow them to be sane, virtuous, happy... they were forced to feel strongly. And feeling strongly (and strongly, what was more, in solitude, in hopelessly individual isolation), how could they be stable? (41)

This metaphor would have it that the strong jet of feeling resulting either from love or loss is itself dangerous to society. Thus, given the assumption that a society can be permanently fixed because human behavior can be programmed, reason would dictate the removal of love and loss. The lasting minor “happiness” brought by stability (i.e. the lack of wars, absence of heartbreak, and the instant gratification of all artificially implanted desires) optimally would be enough for the individual to remain in his or her given place: no one would want to interrupt the easiness of life.

The problem is that the process of making life easy involves the removal of the public discourse, and subsequently the removal of everything that makes a life meaningful. When

people cannot create definitions and engineer words, they cannot find answers for their deepest questions about themselves and reality. Recall that this was the original purpose of society and language: to join together individual human beings in the effort to establish the freedom of the individual from his surroundings, so that he may seek the answers to his questions in peace. In *Brave New World* there are no questions, and therefore nothing to achieve, nothing to work towards, and no way to consciously appreciate the benefits of being free from conflict. No mind is paid to the possibility that, as John says, “the tears are necessary. Don’t you remember what Othello said? ‘If after every tempest came such calms, may the winds blow till they have wakened death’” (238). Huxley agrees when he says, “Knowledge is always a function of being. What we perceive and understand depends upon what we are; and what we are depends partly on circumstances, partly, and *more profoundly, on the nature of the efforts we have made to realize our ideal and the nature of the ideal we have tried to realize*” (*Essays Vol. 4* 379, italics added). The essentially human purpose behind forming a society is lost along with the public discourse and the individuals that once composed it. People are prevented from being all they can be, which is an essential aspect of being an individual, conscious human being.

Brave New World is a warning: a pleasure-driven society, taken to its logical extreme, is not good for people because it suppresses the public discourse. But excessive pleasure is not the only threat to the public discourse.

Chapter 2

1984 and the Cult of Fear:

Control Through the Destruction of Language and Surveillance

George Orwell's *1984* is in many ways an entirely different creature than *Brave New World*: in his afterword to the 60th anniversary Penguin edition of *1984*, the critic Erich Fromm says, "One can say that Zamyatin's and Orwell's examples (of dystopian societies) resemble more the Stalinist and Nazi dictatorships, while Huxley's *Brave New World* is a picture of the development of the Western industrial world, provided it continues to follow the present trend without fundamental change" (Fromm 284). Life in Orwell's dystopia is about as cheerful as Nazi Germany. This is because the political organization of the "country" known as Oceania creates stability in a much more overtly sinister way: it is not pleasure that suppresses the public discourse, but fear and the pain of daily survival.

It is important to remember the political atmosphere in Europe at the time that Orwell wrote *1984*. The book was first published in 1948. WWII had only recently come to an end, and Europe was exceedingly wary of any globalizing ideology that could potentially lead to a repeat of that tragedy. Orwell, it seems, was particularly concerned by the social structure of the Soviet Union: many aspects of Oceania seem to be direct criticisms of that country. Take for example, everyone in Oceania is supposed to refer to one another as "comrade," which was a common form of address in communist organizations, particularly in the USSR. Additionally, the lowest class of workers and commoners are known as the proletariat, which is a Marxist term. In Marx's communism, the proletariat are supposed to run the government; the fact that in Oceania the proletariat are mindless slaves implies that the Soviets, who were still using that term, were actually further enslaving the proletariat instead of freeing it.

But this is one interpretation, and that is by design: Orwell's idea was to respond to the oppression within the Soviet regime with a novel that could satirize the nation without directly aggravating it, or assuming the form of an official British rhetoric... after all, *1984* is vehemently against rigid forms of discourse. The form of a novel has the added benefit of engaging the creative mind of the public in the act of breaking down what exactly is wrong and dangerous about regimes like the USSR without becoming entangled by the anti-Communist dogma, and by extension, the hatred and suspicion of socialism. For it is noted that Orwell was "a long-time socialist" (Spiller 150) at a time when the Red Scare (a period of general paranoia about the intentions of purportedly socialist and communist regimes that began the Cold War) was just beginning, and therefore he likely needed to pose his critique in such a way as to strengthen the public discourse through the conversation of multiple interpretations, *without* being lumped into the anti-Communist, anti-Left wing bloc. As such I will not look at his book as a critique of socialist and communist systems of government, but rather as a cautionary tale exploring the means by which an exploitative government controls the public discourse in order to control its people. While *1984* does share several methods in common with *Brave New World* and *We*, it nevertheless succeeds in drafting a mind-bending nightmare world, and a basis for an entire dystopian school of thought and concepts that we will forever ascribe the adjective "Orwellian."

The plot of *1984* follows a man named Winston Smith, a lower level government worker. Throughout he struggles to understand how and why Oceania's political system works. He falls in love with a woman named Julia, and together they philosophize about the government until they are caught. What follows is a gruelling series of torture scenes where O'Brien, Winston's captor, gradually conditions Winston to accept the insanity of the State's rhetoric. In the end, all

that is left of Winston is an empty husk of a man, a robot that is programmed to love Big Brother (the country's leader).

The ruling faction of Oceania's government (known simply as "the Party") effectively controls the public discourse through a number of methods: first, through the replacement of common English with a much less flexible language known as Newspeak; second, through the implementation of a massive surveillance system that constantly threatens to expose and execute those who are unfaithful to the Party; third, through the censorship of all media published before the Party came to power and the retconning of all media that could retrospectively cast the Party in a bad light; and fourth, through the establishment of a cult of personality that centralizes the people around a man known as Big Brother, who happens to be the Party's leader. The Party's methods of language suppression and social conditioning have the effect of reducing human beings to the mental state of insects, incapable of asserting the validity of their own perceptions. The narrator notes, "It was curious how that beetlelike type proliferated in the Ministries: little dumpy men, growing stout very early in life, with short legs, swift scuttling movements, and fat inscrutable faces with very small eyes. It was the type that seemed to flourish best under the dominion of the Party" (Orwell 53); then, later in the text, "Not merely the validity of experience, but the very existence of external reality was tacitly denied by their philosophy. The heresy of heresies was common sense" (Orwell 71). The metaphor of the insectile physique is directly noted in the appearance of most Party men, and the lack of common sense is evidence that the Party members are on par with a beetle in their mental facilities as well. In many ways, as we shall see, this mental state is even worse than that of citizens in *Brave New World*; and, disturbingly, it seems that advances in surveillance technology have made such a totalitarian regime possible.

“Newspeak”

Orwell’s appendix to *1984*, titled “The Principles of Newspeak,” is arguably a demonstration of how doctrines can gradually destroy the beauty of language, as well as its utility for a free thinker. The unnamed narrator notes,

Even in the early twentieth century, telescoped words and phrases had been one of the characteristic features of political language; and it had been noticed that the tendency to use abbreviations of this kind was most marked in totalitarian countries and totalitarian organizations. (274)

To a certain extent, Orwell implies that Newspeak is a symptom of the ossification of political discourse. Newspeak, quite contrary to its name, is by no means “new” (which is unsurprising, given that things in Orwell’s nightmarish world are usually given paradoxical names, e.g. The Ministry of Love is where torture occurs). It is the ultimate result of a totalitarian regime’s attempt to secure its power over the public discourse through language.

We are first introduced to the principles of Newspeak by Syme, a “friend” of Winston’s, though as the narrator says, “Perhaps ‘friend’ was not exactly the right word. You did not have friends nowadays, you had comrades; but there were some comrades whose society was pleasanter than that of others” (Orwell 42). Syme is an architect of the Newspeak language. He describes it well: “You think, I dare say, that our chief job is inventing new words. But not a bit of it! We’re destroying words—scores of them, hundreds of them, every day. We’re cutting the language down to the bone” (Orwell 45). The language of Newspeak is not an invention, but a reduction of language available to think with, to express one’s self with. Syme says, “Don’t you see that the whole of aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it” (Orwell 46). Without proper words, feelings and impressions have no outlet, no permanent form for the mind to grab hold of. Objects in the mind cannot assume definition without a word to

connect with it—thus we have the word “definition” to indicate the need for words, both as signifiers and as a means to determine exactly what other words mean.

Therefore it seems that the goal of Newspeak is not to create a form of discourse that could not challenge the Party, but rather to destroy discourse altogether: the act of speech is severed from communication. There is no longer any unique meaning behind speech, as all meanings are preordained through the Party. With Newspeak as their only language, and with sophisticated surveillance systems in place to prevent the development of new language, the public has no choice but to repeat the Party’s slogans until, as in Huxley’s sealing wax metaphor, the people must believe the slogans *for that is all they know*.

But then again, if that is all they know, do they really know anything? Syme says that in the future, when Newspeak will be the only language that people use, “In fact there will *be* no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking—not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness” (Orwell 47). How can there be knowledge without thought? What value is there in knowledge without thought? And was not consciousness the very distinguishing factor between a human being and a vegetable? “Ultimately it was hoped to make articulate speech issue from the larynx without involving the higher brain centers at all. This aim was frankly admitted in the Newspeak word *duckspeak*, meaning ‘to quack like a duck’” (Orwell 276). The goal of Newspeak is thus to make people as dim as ducks. Accordingly the people lose their political voice. As Rousseau said, “If, therefore, the populace promises simply to obey, (as it does by accepting and using Newspeak), it dissolves itself by this act; it loses its standing as a people. The very moment there is a master (in this case, Big Brother), there no longer is a sovereign, and thenceforward the body politic is destroyed” (170). A duck does not question why. It lives by instinct and the command of higher powers (i.e. the weather). Similarly, the

citizen of Oceania does not question, and lives by instinct and the command of Big Brother. Thus he is not a true citizen by Rousseau's standards, but rather a slave, an automaton.

Of course, some readers will immediately dismiss Newspeak as a valid means of control, considering how easily the human mind grows bored with words and thus creates new ones (for example, consider that almost every generation forms its own new form of "street slang:" some of these new words inevitably make it into the standard language). This shifting quality of language is unsurprising, and it would be an even less surprising development under conditions similar to Newspeak: after all, it is reasonable to assume that by the time a man grew to adulthood, he would have already exhausted every avenue of thought that his language could afford him. What is the purpose behind the repetition of a slogan that had long ago been ingrained in the subconscious minds of the public? If I know it, you know it, and I know that you know it, then there is no reason for me to speak. Thus it is not difficult to imagine that Newspeak would fail as a language, and it seems that Orwell would agree.

There are several places throughout the text where we can see that Orwell does not think that Newspeak is enough to control people's thoughts. For instance, when Winston is captured, tortured and interrogated at the hands of O'Brien, O'Brien couches his arguments about the subjectivity of perception not in Newspeak, but in terms that we recognize as eloquent and convincing *precisely because* those terms allowed for the transmission of his ideas. Perhaps the significance of this fact is lost on O'Brien, but it certainly is not lost on Orwell, or his readers. It is perhaps true that even the brainwashing that we see here would not be possible without the very words that the Party wants to destroy, and thus the destruction of language as a method of control is patently ridiculous.

Additionally, all throughout his essay “The Principles of Newspeak” at the end of *1984*, Orwell’s narrator refers to the applications of Newspeak in the past tense, as though it had been tried and eventually abandoned. Furthermore, if we remember what *1984* is—namely, a novel written in modern English—then what appears to be a beautifully rendered expression of hopelessness when approached from within the novel becomes a vigorous attack on totalitarian regimes in general. The very fact that Orwell decided to express his disdain for such regimes through a novel is a testament to the multi-faceted power and strength of words. Unlike an essay, and unlike the written form of a dogma or rhetoric, the novel contains words that form essentially interpretable symbols and metaphors that inspire constructive thought, which is the only thing that can prevent such regimes from taking absolute power.

Of course it is important to remember that Orwell wrote many essays as well, several of which directly or indirectly support the argument I am presenting. For example, in “Politics and the English Language,” Orwell addresses what he sees as the degeneration of the English language, and the dangers that this brings. He says, “(The English language) becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.” But, he immediately goes on to say, “The point is that the process is reversible.” Through an effort of the will, we can prevent language from becoming incapable of expressing subtle, powerful thoughts. It is a matter of recognizing that our relationship with language is like the relationship between a craftsman and his tools. It is “an instrument which we shape for our own purposes” (Orwell, “Politics...”).

Orwell notes that indirect, vague, passive language is what defines bad speech and writing. He says, “The whole tendency of modern prose is away from concreteness.” The idea is that a flowery and indirect form of language can help someone who is not intelligent or inventive

to sound as though he were, at least, to the lazy observer. This is especially relevant in the field of politics; any politician who has something morally reprehensible in mind that he wants to get passed into law simply couches his ideas in vague terms and euphemism. Orwell gives several examples, such as the following: “Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the woads with no more than they can carry; this is called ‘*transfer of population or rectification of frontiers*’” (“Politics...”). These names cover up the sacking of the countryside. There is no one in specific to mourn for. It is especially important to note that no image corresponds with the information, but it sounds pretty and authoritative to an uneducated, disinterested audience that lives in the city and cannot afford to investigate matters for themselves. Thus any number of atrocities pass before the public’s nose, and no alarm is raised. We see this regularly throughout *1984*, where the dumbing-down of language and the disconnection of words from their true meanings has been taken to its utmost extreme. Newspeak is presented as the final result of the degradation of language, should the public neglect it.

“The State as Panopticon”

Having explored the implications of Newspeak we must note that in Winston’s time, Newspeak has not yet been established as the primary language of the people, and therefore the Party needs more than just an artificially imposed language barrier to prevent the public discourse from developing revolutionary sentiments. One means of doing just that is to establish a massive system of surveillance, thereby making the State resemble a “Panopticon.” The Panopticon was an idea first envisioned by Samuel Bentham, and later developed by his brother Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century. It was to be an ultra-efficient prison, consisting of a central tower encircled by open prison cells. The central tower would house the guards. From

there, the guards could see into every cell, but from the cells it would be impossible to see the guards. Thus prisoners would feel compelled to obey prison rules at all times, not knowing whether or not they were being watched. Theoretically, in this way, very few guards could effectively control a massive number of inmates because the inmates never know how many people are actually watching⁴.

In 1984, the “telescreen” transforms a Party member’s home and workplace into a cell within a virtual Panopticon. A telescreen is in many ways disturbingly similar to a laptop computer monitor nowadays: it is a device that consists of a television screen and an on-board camera. Winston describes it in the beginning of the novel: “The instrument (the telescreen, it was called) could be dimmed, but there was no way of shutting it off completely... The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it... he could be seen as well as heard” (Orwell 2). The owner of the telescreen can never know when someone is watching him, and as such “You had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized” (Orwell 2).

Thus, even within the confines of their own homes, those in the lower echelons of the Party have to carefully guard their speech for the fear that someone could overhear them saying something illegal. Like in a Panopticon, men like Winston, the prisoners of Oceania’s regime, have to police their own language and behavior at all times in order to avoid detection. This is another way that the State enforces their restrictions on the public discourse. Eventually, through

⁴ For more information, see *The Works of Jeremy Bentham, Vol. 4.*, freely available online.

years of cautionary behavior, citizens are conditioned to be paranoid, and sharply aware of every little detail about their own bodies.

But even more, there is a third way that Oceania destabilizes the public discourse on the level of the individual. As Michael Clune notes in his paper “Orwell and the Obvious,” at the same time as it maintains paranoia with its telescreen-Panopticon, through the retconning of history (even as recent history as only a moment before), “Oceania’s totalitarian regime imposes a rigorous and unenforceable prohibition against perceiving the surface of the world... the effect of this prohibition is to preserve the novelty of the world’s surface” (Clune 32). Because it is considered a crime not to believe in how the Party’s high officials define reality, it is by extension illegal to trust in what one’s own senses tells one about his surroundings. He must deny the surface of the world. But, through denying it, the surfaces of things become even more prominent. All objects become novelties that draw and amaze him.

Winston’s reaction in this case is an “intensity procured not by embedding the sensation more deeply in layers of discourse, but by removing it from every possible discursive context. Sensation becomes ‘unthinkable’” (Clune 36-7) for Winston. This intensity makes it difficult to identify the significance of an experience through words. There is no time to develop and safely create a public discourse away from the prying eyes of the Thought Police before the next denial of expectations renews Winston’s shock and amazement. In this way, there is no time for any alternative systems of thought to develop.

Because the state of constant amazement prevents the individual from understanding at the same time as it maintains his heightened awareness and his highly emotional mental state, the Party is able to use its monopoly over the media and historical evidence to redirect his emotion in ways that serve its own ends. “A Party member is expected to have no private emotions and

no respites from enthusiasm. He is supposed to live in a continuous frenzy of hatred of foreign enemies and internal traitors, triumph over victories, and self-abasement before the power and wisdom of the Party” (Orwell 188). The Party gives an explanation for feelings when the public cannot find that explanation for themselves; the Party rises to fill the need for explanation that it has created. In this way it gives those people’s feelings a *purpose*, which is to say an answer to the question of “Why do I feel this way, so disturbed?”

The public more readily accepts the State’s explanations because they are conditioned (perhaps using methods similar to those in *Brave New World*) to do so: “...an elaborate mental training, undergone in childhood and grouping itself round the Newspeak words *crimestop*, *blackwhite*, and *doublethink*, makes (a Party member) unwilling and unable to think too deeply on any subject whatever” (Orwell 188). Thus from the beginning, Party members are trained to be reluctant to establish a public discourse; and the mental state of paranoia and amazement reinforces that training. But even more than this early-childhood training, the Party needs something more to control its people completely: it needs the help of a religious sentiment, just as in *Brave New World*. The cult of Big Brother, with its idolization of Big Brother as a messianic figure against the backdrop of total fear and anxiety, and with its Hate Week and Two Minutes Hate events (not unlike Huxley’s Solidarity Services), rises to fill that need.

“Big Brother, the Panopticon’s Preacher”

In the book “The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism” (that was supposedly written by the political dissident Emmanuel Goldstein, but was actually written by O’Brien and several other Inner Party members), it says, “Big Brother is the guise in which the Party chooses to exhibit itself to the world. His function is to act as a focusing point for love, fear, and

reverence, emotions which are more easily felt toward an individual than toward an organization” (Orwell 185). In this way, the Party takes on the semblance of a church, with Big Brother as its figurehead. As the text later goes on to say, “Oceanic society rests ultimately on the belief that Big Brother is omnipotent and that the Party is infallible” (Orwell 188). It is an act of faith to believe in everything the State says.

In order to foster this faith in its citizens, the State of Oceania utilizes the shocked mindset that it has imposed: it organizes events like Hate Week and the Two Minutes Hate, which are like the sinister counterparts to Huxley’s Solidarity Services. People are gathered together to witness a piece of inflammatory propaganda, featuring acts of tremendous violence and other evil deeds all associated with the State’s equivalent of a Satanic figure: Emmanuel Goldstein. “He was the primal traitor, the earliest defiler of the Party’s purity. All subsequent crimes against the Party, all treacheries, acts of sabotage, heresies, deviations, sprang directly out of his teaching” (Orwell 10), similarly to how, in some Christian traditions, all sins can be traced back to Satan. In turn, Goldstein is associated with Oceania’s political enemies—those who Oceania are currently at war with—and so the video of the Two Minutes Hate invites its viewers to express unity underneath Big Brother through their shared “hideous ecstasy of fear and vindictiveness, (their) desire to kill, to torture, to smash faces in with a sledge hammer” (Orwell 13). Notice the religious phrases here, the “ecstasy,” the “heresies.” Orwell is positing that the absorbing qualities of the mob mentality can, through clever control of the media, be conflated with a religious transport. The mob’s actions, and the actions of the individual within the mob, become acts of devotion to Big Brother.

Winston describes being forcibly drawn into participation with the mob as it chants Big Brother’s initials:

For perhaps as much as thirty seconds they kept it up. It was a refrain that was often heard in moments of overwhelming emotion. Partly it was a sort of hymn to the wisdom and majesty of Big Brother, but still more it was an act of self-hypnosis, a deliberate drowning of consciousness by means of rhythmic noise. Winston's entrails seemed to grow cold. In the Two Minutes Hate he could not help sharing in the general delirium, but this subhuman chanting of 'B-B!... B-B!' always filled him with horror. (Orwell 14-5)

The "overwhelming emotion" is redirected into a "hymn," and that hymn's purpose is to drown out thought, to prevent the gathering of words into a coherent discourse. Funnily enough, a chant, which is a form of language, is used to suppress the true function of language, in order to leave a clear path between Big Brother and his devotees.

And these mob-goers are certified as devotees by this emotional connection to Big Brother. This is most evident in the sandy-haired woman who Winston sees at the event: "With a tremulous murmur that sounded like 'My Savior!' she extended her arms toward the screen. Then she buried her face in her hands. It was apparent that she was uttering a prayer" (Orwell 14). Seeing Big Brother as a Savior is exactly the desired result. The sandy-haired woman gives herself body and soul to Big Brother, even though Winston "knew that in the cubicle next to him (she) toiled day in, day out, simply tracking down and deleting from the press the names of people who had been vaporized and were therefore considered never to have existed. There was a certain fitness in this, since her own husband had been vaporized a couple years earlier" (Orwell 37). In this way the sandy-haired woman is the perfect picture of thoughtless faith, truly the ideal Oceanian. Her experience of religious ecstasy supports her faith in Big Brother even when the State is responsible for the death of her husband.

Of course it is important to remember that Orwell did not favor organized religion because of its capacity to produce thoughtless human beings, and it is doubtful that, like the Huxleys, he believed that the religious experience was a biological necessity. As John Rodden

notes in his essay “Orwell on Religion: The Catholic and Jewish Questions,” “Orwell's post-Enlightenment view, intellectual disburdenment of religion was a stage in the species' progress toward maturity. To be a skeptic was to be ‘grown up’” (Rodden 53). Rather, for Orwell, churches filled the biological need for brotherhood, for camaraderie. Thus religious language is steeped in the practices of institutions that once fostered camaraderie among people, and it is therefore used to establish a sense of solidarity under Big Brother, who is a man given the appearance of omnipotence through his control over the public discourse. At the same time he is not considered to be literally a god, though, like God, “Nobody has ever seen Big Brother” in real life (Orwell 185). Unlike a God, who is purported to have unlimited power over everything both inside and outside of men’s awareness, Big Brother is only omnipotent in his relation to people through his insistence, through language, that there is no reality beyond the human mind. “I tell you, Winston,” says O’Brien, “that reality is not external. Reality exists in the human mind, and nowhere else. Not in the individual mind, which can make mistakes, and in any case soon perishes; only in the mind of the Party, which is collective and immortal. Whatever the Party holds to be truth *is* truth” (Orwell 222). Thus the cult of Big Brother is not a religion in the sense that religion deals with what is believed to exist beyond what we can know: in *1984* there is no such thing as the supernatural.

Whether or not there is a reality outside the human mind is too large of a philosophical question to deal with here. But, its consideration brings up one last important question that will influence how we read *1984*.

“Is Orwell a Mechanist or a Vitalist?”

If Orwell were a Mechanist, and it was his intention to demonstrate how the Mechanist philosophy is correct because in *1984* people could be totally controlled through the restriction of the public discourse, then we would interpret the novel as an expression of bitterness and disappointment. And indeed at first glance it might seem that Orwell himself believed that men could be reduced to biological functions and “programmed” to believe anything, perceive anything, feel anything. Considering how vividly he describes how Winston’s reality is broken down, it feels as though Orwell was a Vitalist who tragically found himself embedded in the scepticism of the Mechanist worldview: “‘They can’t get inside you,’ she (Julia, his lover) had said. But they could get inside you. ‘What happens to you here is *forever*,’ O’Brien had said. That was a true word” (Orwell 259). It is easy to imagine that the change in Orwell’s characters reflects some personal experience of his, and that *1984* is an expression of his hopelessness.

Still, the broken form that was once Winston is a testament to the strength of inner feelings that arose on their own, and persisted against all but the most direct forms of mental and physical torture. As Erich Fromm says in his afterword to *1984* that Orwell, Huxley, and Zamyatin “do assume that man has an intense striving for love, for justice, for truth, for solidarity, and in this respect they are quite different from the relativists. In fact, they affirm the strength and intensity of these strivings by the description of the very means... necessary to destroy them” (Fromm 284). These desires arise in people who could not have developed them if the Mechanist viewpoint was true. They manifest as something essentially non-verbal, and hence it is safe to say that, from Orwell’s perspective, there is a deeper human nature independent of the words we have to define it. This human nature still inspires people enough to try and create the language and the discourse necessary to understand it, even in the most horrid of social

conditions. It is inspiring to imagine that this is why the enforcement of Newspeak failed, that somewhere along the line towards the reduction of human consciousness into that of an insect, the inner strength of men says “No.” Even more inspiring is the thought that the horrors of *1984* have not yet come, and that we can seize upon the powers of the public discourse to make sure that it never does.

I admit that when I first read Orwell, I misunderstood him. Where I saw a nihilistic story about the frailty of human identity, in fact there was testament to the power and value of humanity. I would paraphrase that message as follows: “Be wary of the promises of men. The same law of entropy that destroys regimes can and often does create the circumstances necessary for another to take its place. Guard your history against those who would rewrite it, even if it appears at first to be to your own benefit, because history—in words and memories—comprise your identity, your reality, permeable as it may be. And to any would-be tyrant, be aware of what you sacrifice for power. O’Brien aims to take away every human feeling from Winston, saying “We shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves” (Orwell 229), but the irony is that O’Brien is quite empty himself. He says that ““The party seeks power for its own sake,”” and yet his “face looked tired. There were pouches under the eyes, the skin sagged from the cheekbones” (234-5). This is the sad, true face of the tyrant, the face that you shall wear one day. You will be illogical, deprived, an animal. Is this what we truly want for the human race?”

Chapter 3

We and the Cult of Rationality:

Control Through the Suppression of the Irrational

A mocking, sharp triangle of eyebrows: “My sweet, you are a mathematician. More than that, you are a philosopher of mathematics. So then, tell me: what is the final number?”

“What is that? I... I don’t understand: which final number?”

“Well—the last, the highest, the biggest...”

“But, I-330—that is ridiculous. The number of numbers is infinite; which final one do you want?”

“Well, which final revolution do you want then? There isn’t a final one. Revolutions are infinite.”

—*We* 159

I am not the first critic to cite this passage at the beginning of a discourse on Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We*, and nor will I be the last. Zamyatin himself quoted this passage to begin his essay “On Literature, Revolution, Entropy, and Other Matters” (*Heretic* 107). It is so important because it contains the heart of Zamyatin’s critique of his fictional One State, and by proxy, any government that would, in Orwell’s words, stop “the familiar pendulum swing” of societal change and human history (*1984* 180). A cursory reading of this passage yields a similar message to that of *1984*, namely that there is no perfect system, no power structure that can save itself from entropy. Any government that installs itself with the intent to permanently retain absolute control over its population, be it for good or ill purposes, is deluding itself.

The novel as a whole is a satire pointed towards the totalitarian regime that Zamyatin feared the USSR was becoming. Natasha Randall, the translator for the 2006 Modern Library Edition of *We*, notes in her introduction that in the Soviet Union at the time Zamyatin was writing,

The ‘greens’ (peasants), the ‘blacks’ (anarchists), and the Whites were being reduced to ashes while the only remaining ideology was forging the idea that man could be made mechanical. Zamyatin, an engineer, quantified this moment in his anti-utopia, fast-forwarding the cogs and wheels of early Soviet society *ad absurdum*. There is not one

detail of life in the One State that doesn't illustrate a given theory or discovery of his day.
(Randall xi)

The history of *We*'s publication and Zamyatin's exile from the Soviet Union confirms this narrowing of ideologies in that region. Though *We* was written throughout 1920 and 1921, Joseph Stalin's regime did not allow Zamyatin to publish it in the Soviet Union, and all of his works were removed from Soviet libraries (Sterling ix). Much of Zamyatin's writing, particularly this novel, was considered too politically subversive for its own good because, as Gary Kern writes in his introduction to a collection of essays on Zamyatin, "*We* accurately presages Stalin's cult of personality ('the Benefactor'), *Pravda*'s monopoly on truth ('the State Gazette'), the travesty of one-party voting ('the Day of Unanimity'), the control of literature ('the State Union of Poets and Writers') and the Iron Curtain (or Berlin Wall), beyond which one is not allowed to go ('the Green Wall')" (Kern 20). He suggests that these negative parallels, along with the novel's insistence that there is no final revolution, made the work "intolerable to the Soviet power" (Kern 20). It was only when the manuscript found its way into the hands of a translator named Gregory Zilboorg that the novel entered circulation, in an English translation first published in New York by E. P. Dutton, in 1924. The suppression of Zamyatin's work was itself an act of controlling the public discourse: he was very intimately familiar with censorship, even before writing *We*. Thus, naturally, censorship plays a major part in the book.

We have seen how control of the public discourse factors into this message across two very important dystopian novels, both of which likely took inspiration from *We*.⁵ Zamyatin's

⁵ Kern notes that the plot of *We*, "whereby a true believer comes to question the validity of a totalitarian state and thus to transform it from a utopia into an anti-utopia, has been repeated by Aldous Huxley (coincidentally)... and George Orwell (consciously)" (Kern 9). While it is unclear whether Huxley ever read *We*, we do know for certain that Orwell read *We*. In fact, the back cover of my edition of the book includes a quote from Orwell: "[Zamyatin's] intuitive grasp of the irrational side of totalitarianism—human sacrifice, cruelty as an end in itself—makes [*We*]

vision of a nightmarish future society is in some ways the precursor to the anti-utopian novel, appearing roughly six years before *Brave New World* (1930) and 25 years before *1984* (1949). It is easy to trace Zamyatin's influence through Orwell's work: for example, *1984*'s Thought Police closely resemble Zamyatin's Guardians; *We*'s Benefactor and *1984*'s Big Brother serve similar functions; Winston and D-503 (the main character and narrator of *We*) are both forced to conform in the end of their stories; and the themes of violation of privacy, destruction of family life, and slavery as a means of forcing happiness and consent to heavy-handed rule are all present in both texts.

Additionally, and most importantly, the One State in *We* has a similar approach to the control of language as Oceania. It is the strict control of language, with its capacity to emote and define what a culture finds aesthetically pleasing, that protects the image of the Benefactor and the State. Speaking against the State's belief system is considered heretical, and a punishable offense. Sometimes ciphers are even executed for heresy: for example, in the case of the execution that D-503 attends, the crime is composing "blasphemous poems" (*We* 43) that called the Benefactor names that D-503 cannot even bring himself to repeat in his narrative. His hesitancy to repeat slanders is a sign: we get the sense that heresy often consists of verbal and written transgressions because Zamyatin does not paint a world that is overly violent. The Guardians, much like Orwell's Thought Police, persecute thought crimes in the absence of overtly revolutionary actions. This potentially fatal surveillance is enough in most cases to suppress the development of the public discourse, and by extension the emergence of revolutionary movements: it establishes a permanent fear of discovery. In this way, the One State

superior to Huxley's [*Brave New World*]." Orwell may have been particularly bitter towards Huxley's work in this praise of *We* because Huxley didn't respond to *1984* as well as Orwell had hoped. After all, there are more similarities between the two books than this comment would suggest.

also functions quite like the Panopticon, where the threat of surveillance is enough to keep prisoners in line.

Yet, *We* is also different from its fellows: unlike in *Brave New World* and *1984*, *We* is framed as the journal of a character who is already deeply ensconced within his government's system of thought from the beginning: there is no critical distance between the speaker and the ideology he expresses. Thus the ideology only surfaces in the form of direct explanation sometimes, and in little snippets; at all other times, both the ideology and Zamyatin's critique of it appear organically through the observations that D-503 chooses to share with his readers. It is in the *method* of writing—in the syntax, diction, and choice of metaphors—that we hear Zamyatin's critical voice most clearly, pointing out the flaws in a totalitarian regime and illustrating how our human nature recoils from its practices.

Through our interpretation of Zamyatin's critique, which is embedded within D-503's struggles, we can see that the language of *We* is a reflection of the utopian idea that removing the irrational (i.e. emotions, and the sexual and aesthetic encounters that typically inspire those emotions) from the human experience is a means of escaping the pains of life, and that to escape pain is the goal behind controlling the public discourse, as in *Brave New World*. And also like in *Brave New World*, the removal of the irrational from speech (and subsequently thought) results in dehumanization: as is common within these dystopian novels, the individual is reduced to the state of a machine, governed by a limited and strict set of principles. We observe this dehumanization in the form of alphanumeric names, the religious speech that people use and the descriptions of the practices surrounding the cult of the Benefactor, and the biblical references couched all throughout the text. Zamyatin's critique of these elements comes down to us through the linguistic structures that characterize D-503's writing.

“Analysis of the ‘Infinite Revolutions’ Passage”

Many of the novel’s tropes are demonstrated in this chapter’s epigraph; a close analysis of this passage is enough to reveal most of the linguistic structures that define the narrative and carry its meaning. First to note is that when D-503 speaks in metaphors, those metaphors are almost all related to mathematics: for example, I-330 is often described in geometrical terms, such as “the sharp triangle of eyebrows” we see above. D-503’s language never refers to organic things: his mathematical vocabulary does not natively contain words necessary to understand the irrational, emotional and spiritual experiences he has.

Second, he still tries to express these feelings through words. His struggle to find the right words and his creativity in shaping metaphors for that purpose are both signs that he desires to integrate the emotional into his worldview, despite what society has conditioned him to believe regarding emotions. D-503’s struggle for words is represented by the frequent use of ellipses, which are also present in this passage: though D-503 often interrupts his own sentences with ellipses, he always continues them afterwards, making due with whatever language he does possess. That he does not merely fall silent or change the topic is evidence of his desire to put words to his feelings. Hence we have reason to believe that Zamyatin was also not a Mechanist, but a combination of a Mechanist and a Vitalist. The interpretation that *We* is actually a vote of confidence in our ability to prevent an outcome like the One State naturally follows this conclusion about the author’s philosophy.

Third, throughout the narrative his desire is spurred on by I-330, who refers to D-503 as a “philosopher of mathematics,” as opposed to merely a mathematician. She attempts to show him that the logic of the State falls short of the truth by omitting the irrational, which is in fact a key

concept in mathematics (a fact that D-503 knows, but chooses to ignore). I-330 enters his life, and D-503 can no longer accept the traditional mathematics, nor a life of simple truisms.

As Zamyatin says, “The ordinary, the banal is, of course, simpler, more pleasant... Euclid’s world is very simple, and Einstein’s world is very difficult—but it is impossible to return to Euclid” (“Entropy” 112)⁶. Having stumbled upon a higher truth, we as readers hope that D-503 will favor the truth as it develops, no matter how unpleasant it may seem at first; D-503’s eventual lobotomization underscores how difficult but necessary it is to pursue the truth.

“The Alphanumeric Name”

The first (and perhaps the most obvious) narrative decision that Zamyatin made was to give characters letters and numbers instead of proper names. Instead of “citizens,” subjects of the One State are called “ciphers:” and while “cipher” can mean “a combination of symbolic letters,” it can also mean “zero,” “one that has no weight, worth, or influence,” “a method of transforming a text in order to conceal its meaning,” and “a message in code” (“Cipher” Merriam-Webster). All of these definitions are suited to Zamyatin’s purpose: they emphasize that the individual is undervalued in the One State, and that the names themselves are a means of devaluation. The One State would have its people believe that each individual is merely a part of the whole, not unique: as I-330 says, “...to be original means to somehow stand out from others. Consequently, being original is to violate equality... And that which in the idiot language of the Ancients is called ‘being banal,’ for us just means doing your duty” (*We* 27). These names are not a symbol

⁶ Recall that at the time that *We* was published, Einstein’s theories of Special Relativity (1905) and General Relativity (~1915) had only recently emerged. In many ways, *We* can be read as a creative response to the enormous shockwave that these theories made, overriding centuries of thought. Perhaps *We* could be a theoretical world in which Einstein has been rejected in favor of simpler truths, in which case the One State that prides itself on its capacity to reason is in fact unreasonable.

of originality, but a symbol of duty to the One State. They are less for the individual's use than for the society's use, to establish a completely egalitarian social structure that is firmly under its power. The act of giving a person an alphanumeric name is part of what makes him a cipher in every sense of the word, because it suppresses his individuality.

Alphanumeric names serve this purpose in part because everyone has the same pool of letters and numbers to choose from, and thus naming is standardized; however, their primary use value is in how easily they are forgotten. Surely anyone who had recently read *We* could recall that D-503 was the name of the protagonist, but give that reader half of a lifetime and ask him again about the names of characters, and he may not remember so clearly. Perhaps he would mistakenly think that the protagonist was D-305: it is not uncommon for people to mix up the sequence of numbers, even in people who do not suffer from dyslexia. What is more, if we are to believe D-503 when he states that the population of the One State is ten million, and the longest names we have encountered in *We* are only one letter and four digits long, then it must be true that many people have the same name. How is anyone to know that one person, specifically, were responsible for something notable?

But then, D-503 implies that the One State goes even further in its restriction of signifying language: "On my left was O-90 (a thousand years ago, our hairy forebears most probably would have written that funny word 'my' when referring to her just now)" (*We* 7). Even the personal pronoun has been phased out of usage, though everyone clearly knows what it means. This lack of a personal pronoun in common speech would mean that the One State intends for there to be no word to qualify the individual consciousness as opposed to other beings. Importantly, by extension, this would mean that there *are no individuals* to be equal, as people lack the capacity to imagine themselves as individuals: then the very purpose of equality

is lost in the pursuit of it. The definition of “equality” as it relates to government, i.e. “like in quality, nature, or status; regarding or affecting all objects in the same way” (“Equal” Merriam-Webster), has not been achieved.

What is more, if we think about it, these cipher names would not be truly egalitarian even if the use value of equality were not lost: though the text does not explicitly say so, the reader may notice that males are given a consonant and an odd number, and females are given a vowel and an even number. These names divide people into two groups, the males and the females. Note that there are more consonants than vowels in the alphabet, and it will immediately become evident that there are still inequalities among the sexes: women have fewer possible signifiers than men. The attempt to organize name-giving inadvertently leads to inequality, for women are at an even greater disadvantage when it comes to being remembered through a unique signifier.

Zamyatin builds on the idea that the One State’s restriction of the public discourse by their attempt to suppress the individual (both through the application of alphanumeric names and other methods I shall address later) has actually failed to create a true sense of equality among the citizens. He does this by showing how D-503 still retains certain biases about others: for example, he demonstrates that he is somewhat sexist when he has just finished calculating a particularly difficult mathematical equation, and O-90 (one of his regular sexual partners) enters his room. This exchange follows: “‘Stunning, isn’t it?’ I asked. ‘Yes, the spring, it is stunning...’ O-90 smiled pinkly. Wouldn’t you know it: spring... I say ‘stunning’ and she thinks of spring. Women... I fell silent” (*We* 6). His usage of the word “women” implies that he believes that O-90’s lack of appreciation for mathematics is attributable to her sex. He thinks that women possess this flaw, that they first appreciate nature and then the artificial constructs of the rational mind, which should be the first consideration of any good cipher... in short, they are inferior

citizens because they are moved to emotion by things that they should not be. Thus if I could choose one word to describe D-503's retelling of this moment, it would have to be "patronizing." He adores O-90, but he thinks of her more as a child than an equal. Of course, Zamyatin intends us to see how D-503 is himself moved by things he should not be, and that his indoctrination prevents him from recognizing this until he has to keep a journal for his work on the Integral. In the beginning, he is sexist and egotistic, but unconsciously so: and without consciousness, without the *awareness* that an open public discourse and a wide vocabulary can bring, D-503 could never have recognized what equality could actually be, or what it should feel like. Just as John the Savage could not define his hatred towards his mother's abusive lover until he had the vocabulary of Shakespeare in *Brave New World*, D-503 cannot begin to understand until the process of writing forces him to create a vocabulary where previously none existed.

"Writing as a Means to Approach Consciousness"

It is the act of writing, of using metaphors and similes to reflect critically on his experiences, that allows D-503 to develop his thoughts and individuality: in the beginning he is one of the many under the "blessed-blue sky, the tiny baby suns in each badge, faces unclouded by the folly of thought," one of these "rays you see—all made of some sort of unified, radiant, smiling matter" (*We* 7), blissfully unaware of all his personal flaws and the lack of meaning in his life. As such, his initial purpose for creating the journal is to spread the One State's ideology to the stars. He says,

My pen, more accustomed to mathematical figures, is not up to the task of creating the music of unison and rhyme. I will just attempt to record what I see, what I think—or, more

exactly, what we think... So these records will be manufactured from the stuff of our life, from the mathematically perfect life of the One State, and, as such, might they become, inadvertently, regardless of my intentions, an epic poem? Yes—I believe so and know so.

(*We* 4)

He intends to write the epic of a State that is already perfect. But, as we have seen, his particular brand of narration (what events and observations he chooses to convey) has much to say about him, and the imperfection of the State; and, throughout his writing process, he discovers new and unexpected facets of himself that he comes to understand through his writing.

This unintended result of writing occurs because there is a difference between what D-503 thinks that literature is and what Zamyatin says it is in his essay “The Goal:” “The purpose of art, including literature, is not to reflect life but to organize it, to build it” (“The Goal” 130). If there is no final revolution and no final truth (for “today’s truths become errors tomorrow” (“Entropy” 110)) as Zamyatin would have us believe, then as the critic Brett Cooke notes, “writing and its many equivalents of creativity in the arts and sciences develop us to the point of cognitive function that no despotism can tolerate, if only by making us accustomed to this, the actual state of our universe” (Cooke 167). The text, as a compilation of D-503’s thoughts and observations, is not “an epic poem” because it builds a picture of the One State, but because it allows us to see D-503’s actual world, and to interpret D-503 as a *man* whose experiences (which are not ideally uniform and prescribed) create the lens through which we can draw our own conclusions. His syntax, diction, and choice to relate certain details while omitting others inevitably leads to an understanding of what D-503 is thinking, feeling, and believing. What is revealed to both the reader and to D-503 himself is a person still in formation, changing and trying to cope with those changes. D-503 discovers through writing that he does not understand

himself, and that therefore he cannot write as though the One State were perfect insofar as it produces perfect social units. Thus, where he intended to write only praise of the One State, he actually spends most of his time writing about himself. His own experience becomes more valuable to him than the desires of the State.

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, D-503's struggle to understand himself through his writing is made evident through his use of ellipses. At first he actually debates with himself as to what should be included in his records, as he sees bits and pieces of his own concerns slip into his text. The ellipses, and sometimes the "em dash," mark the places where D-503 either cuts himself off mid-thought because he suddenly becomes aware of how subversive his words are becoming, or where he does not possess the words needed to express himself. The following passage is an excellent example of these two uses (note that the ellipses in parentheses are mine, to show that I have skipped part of the text, while the others are Zamyatin's):

...Strange: I was writing today about the highest of heights in human history and all the while breathing the cleanest mountain air of thought, but, meanwhile, there were clouds and cobwebs and a cross, some kind of four-pawed X, inside me. (...) Could there actually be, within me—

I wanted to cross out that last part because it goes beyond the bounds of my preselected keywords for this record. But then I decided: I won't cross anything out. Let my records—like the most sensitive seismograph—produce the crooked line of even the most insignificant brain oscillations. Sometimes it is exactly these oscillations that serve as forewarning of...

Okay, this is really absurd, this really actually should be crossed out: we have channeled all the forces of nature—there cannot be any future catastrophes.

And now everything is clear to me: that strange feeling inside is all due to that very quadratic predicament of mine, about which I spoke at the beginning of the record. (*We* 22)

In the beginning of the passage, D-503 detects that something is wrong inside of him, and he pauses to think about it, as indicated by the ellipses. He cannot understand it. Still, even though

his personal matters fall outside the bounds of his journal's intended subject, something about the feeling convinces him that his own experiences are valuable. He likens his thoughts to the lines on a seismograph (which, as we know, is an instrument for measuring the earth's tremors and predicting earthquakes), as though they were the indicators for natural disaster. By extension of the metaphor, D-503 is insinuating that an "earthquake" could take place in the minds of ciphers, as the need for a seismograph admits, and that this "earthquake" could shake the foundations of the One State. This thought stands against the infallibility of the One State, and D-503 recoils, speechless. His attempt to come up with a metaphor that justifies his desire to write about himself leads him to a seditious conclusion, against all of his social conditioning. Shaken, he defaults to *We's* equivalent of Huxley's sleep taught hypnopædic maxims, and repeats the message to himself in writing: 'The One State has mastered nature. Everything is great now. The problem is with me, not the One State.' Still, the damage to his conditioning has been done: he cannot stop thinking about his problems, and he continues to write about them.

The fact that D-503 does not seem to realize that the act of writing actually humanizes him, and that his writing becomes an expression of the need to understand his own feelings, is evidence that the restriction of the public discourse has at least been partially effective. In his life, prior to the events of *We*, language had only served the purposes of mathematics and the dictates of unambiguous reason. Thus, when he is faced with the task of describing the less tangible aspects of his real world, he finds his language terribly inadequate for his purposes, and he must create a language to fill in the void in his understanding. But, the One State has placed certain moral obstacles in the way of creating such a language through its cultish worship of the Benefactor. Hence, D-503 has such a difficult time finding the right words because the meanings they would express are a transgression, heretical, immoral.

“Religious Speech in *We*”

Like the other dystopian societies, to create this cult and maintain it for the purpose of suppressing the formation of a public discourse, the One State of *We* uses religious speech, along with the religious sentiment. Again, this speech consists of terms of religious reverence, and these terms are centered (through the restriction of their use elsewhere) around a singular being, whose name is capitalized. Similar to Big Brother in *1984*, *We* has the Benefactor. As the Benefactor is considered to be a divine being, there are cultural ceremonies and special greetings that one uses to address him, processes freighted with symbolic meaning and power: no one else in the One State is treated in this way.

Importantly, this differential treatment seems to conflict with the general sense that the individual does not matter, or else only comes to matter in relation to others. Through this contradiction, Zamyatin is highlighting that the diversity of language necessary to create the fanatical reverence that the One State desires actually unveils certain tensions within the One State’s doctrine. The One State desires the citizens to suppress their irrational thoughts and behaviors, but it uses the religious sentiment to do so, a feeling that is not firmly based in rationality. As such, anyone willing to think about it could see that the irrational remains influential in the human mind, and that its “rationality” is a facade. It is the task of the Benefactor and the other religious aspects of *We*’s government to ensure that no one notices how the One State only wears the disguise of rationality as a means of justifying its rule.

Again, it is the control of the public discourse itself (which entails the enforcement of religious language and adherence to a church-like scheme of regular religious events that reinforce the importance of that religious language) that maintains the power of the Benefactor and the One State. Taking note and analyzing several instances in which the religious language

comes into play will help us to paint a better picture of Zamyatin's critique of the One State and the ideologies behind it, as well as reveal their hidden implications.

To begin, as noted just above, the fact that the Benefactor exists and the ways in which he is presented are the first indicators that the One State's rule is imbued with a divine mythology. The Benefactor is immediately distinguished from others because he possesses a non-alphanumeric name. Furthermore, his name is presaged by a definitive article. In our society this would not be so unusual: definitive articles often follow titles. However, in the context of a world without unique identities, a definitive article becomes significant because it sets its object apart from others. Non-definitive articles such as "a" or "an" only indicate that an object is one example of a type or collection of similar things, whereas "the" implies some level of preeminence, if not uniqueness, in an object. For example, when we say "A groundhog emerged from the earth," less emphasis is placed upon that groundhog in particular than if we had said "The groundhog emerged from the earth." "A groundhog" could be any groundhog, while "the groundhog" could only mean one: the very groundhog that we render special through our attention. Hence the name "non-definitive:" "a" is not used in conjunction with adjectives that strictly define a subject from other subjects (for instance, when we say that a swimmer is "fastest" among his fellows, we say that the swimmer is "*the* fastest," not "*a* fastest"). Thus, as the only man with the appendage "the" before his name, the Benefactor is doubly set apart from his fellows in terms of quality.

Through the uniqueness of his name and the articles used to address him, it is clear that the Benefactor is an important individual in a world where individualism is frowned upon. Having reached this conclusion, Zamyatin would have us ask, "Why then is it necessary to have a singular being in control of the government? Why is there an annual 'election' where

individuals ‘vote’ to reinstate him as the ruler of the world?” While we know from our previous readings of *1984* and *Brave New World*, these elections and mandatory sermons in the various auditoriums of the One State are merely symbolic events meant to provide a religious experience. The religious experience needs a focus, some analogue to God; and as the One State cannot have people believing in a higher power beyond the laws of men, the Benefactor must serve as a substitute.

Given that the public is made to overlook the contradictions inherent to the worship of an individual under the One State’s ideological framework, the Benefactor’s status as an idol is actually protected by the One State’s general lack of individuality. As Cooke notes, “In the course of the entire novel, D-503 names many people who were famous in or before our era, but this list does not include a single name from the eight hundred years of the One State, except the Benefactor” (Cooke 57). Because the Benefactor is the only icon, and the only living example in thought and legend that people can admire. He becomes the only outlet for the passion of the people. The singular focus of passion makes the experience of passion much stronger, alike to religious transport. Thus it is easier to forge a belief in the Benefactor, whose presence brings about such ecstasies.

As the Benefactor alone possesses a mythology, he is elevated to the status of a god, a manifestation and proof of concept. As such, his regime actively prevents the formation of other mythologies regarding prominent individuals. In order to do that, the One State requires ciphers to attend regular events so as to condition them into associating their passion only with the Benefactor. Additionally it creates the Guardians—spies who report or arrest anyone who subverts the official ideology—whose jobs are made easy by the transparent architecture that the One State uses. Also, with the glass buildings, everyone can become a spy and report strange

behaviors to the Guardians: the people veritably police themselves.⁷ But, more than in *1984*, we have seen that the One State forces its citizens to adopt alphanumeric names. Insofar as the relationship between one's identity and one's name goes, the individual more easily fades into the background of history without a prominent, unique name. Thus, the application of all these methods of thought and language control effectively prevents new mythologies from forming around individuals that could contend with the mythology of the Benefactor: he in effect becomes the only man that everyone remembers, and therefore the only man about whom anyone cares.

All of these observations point to the fact that the cult of Rationality only maintains a front of rationality, while it is truly sustained by the faith of its constituents, who effectively sacrifice their humanity for a cause that is not what they imagine it to be. The One State has not transcended the human condition, but has rather tried and failed to master it through manipulating the public discourse to favor religious fanaticism. Moreover, if we are to believe that the One State has survived for over eight hundred years and still has not solved the problem of human happiness (as D-503 says, "I will be totally frank: the absolutely exact solution to the mystery of happiness has not yet fully materialized even here" (*We* 13)), then it seems unlikely that its methods ever will succeed. That, at least, is a silver lining to what is otherwise the tragic tale of D-503's growth into a conscious individual and eventual fall back into ignorance.

"Biblical Figures & Language"

One last notable aspect of *We*'s language control is its expression through references to the story of Genesis. Zamyatin parallels the Fall of Man and exile from Eden with the awakening

⁷ It is here that Orwell may have seen how effective a combination of secret police and the threat of constant surveillance could be.

of an oppressed subject to the evils of a jealous government. For example, D-503, like Adam tending the Garden of Eden, is tempted by I-330 to expand his horizons, to go against the will of the Higher Power. Before I-330 rattles his belief in the One State, D-503's world is blissful, and his existence is painless. In mourning for the loss of this state of mind, D-503 exclaims, "Great Benefactor! What absurdity to want pain. Who doesn't understand that pain is negative, a component that decreases the sum total that we call happiness" (*We* 120)? And yet there is no true happiness in the One State, insofar as true happiness requires a knowledge of happiness. The search for happiness as an object to be found, discerned from its surroundings, isolated, *named* as it were, given a form in language—this is the need that compels Adam to taste the Fruit of Forbidden Knowledge, and the reason why he is driven from the Garden just as D-503 is driven from the One State. There is textual evidence for the connection between happiness and knowledge: after they first make illicit love in the Ancient House, I-330 says to D-503, "'I knew this... I knew you...'" said I-330, very quietly. Quickly getting up, she put on her unif and there was her ever-sharp smile-sting. 'Well, now, fallen angel. You, I'd say, are now lost. You're not afraid, are you...?'" (*We* 66). The parallel is rather overt. Love, which we would consider the highest form of happiness (and sometimes pain as well), is inextricably tied to a form of knowledge,⁸ and it is the acquisition of this that leads to D-503 becoming a "fallen angel."

The reasoning behind this connection is easily explained through a simile: like how a sleeper only realizes the pleasure of sleeping when he wakes up in the morning and must face the responsibilities of the day, the bliss that D-503 imagines that he once possessed is only given its blissful quality in retrospect: the sleeper is not awake, not *present* to experience the pleasure of sleep. Thus D-503 "wants" pain in order to know what pleasure is in relation to what it is not, so that he can apply meaningful words and definitions to that experience. D-503 desires to know

⁸ Often in the Bible, the verb "to know" is also a synonym for intercourse.

happiness as a conscious individual, though he does not realize it—he cannot stay asleep forever. Zamyatin admits that waking up is painful, “But the wound is necessary: most of mankind suffers from hereditary sleeping sickness, and victims of this sickness (entropy) must not be allowed to sleep, or it will be their final sleep, death” (“Entropy” 112). D-503 must be *present* as an individual to reach that cathartic experience of true happiness—happiness with *fulfillment*—or else die in his sleep.

In this way, through his biblical parallel, Zamyatin is giving us his own interpretation of the Bible: he suggests that the Fall of Man was an inevitability, and ultimately the right thing for Adam to do. When given a choice between freedom (and the awareness that comes with it, as made possible through language) and happiness, one must always choose freedom because without awareness, there is no understanding of happiness, and therefore no acknowledgement of it: there is no conscious individual to be happy in the first place without freedom. Discussions of the relationship between freedom and happiness are certainly not new, nor was the topic new to Zamyatin: rather, *We* was participating in a much larger literary and philosophical tradition. For example, Richard A. Gregg, a Zamyatin critic, in his article titled “Dostoevsky, the Bible, and *We*,” notes the prevalence of this dilemma in both the story of Jesus and Dostoevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. He observes that there are forty journal entries in *We* to match the forty days that Jesus wandered the desert of doubt; that D-503 was thirty-two years old when he figuratively died via lobotomization, just as Jesus was thirty-two years old when he was crucified; and that, like Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor who “knows that the forced benefactions of the good society outweigh the freedom which Christ... would offer” (Gregg 66), the Benefactor moves to quell D-503’s line of thinking. However, Gregg adds,

D-503’s ultimate decision is, of course, the opposite of Christ’s (in *The Brothers Karamazov*). Instead of dying so that men may be free, he lives so that they will remain

slaves. Yet, paradoxically, even as he submits himself to the machine which makes soulless robots of its victims, he is—if we accept his own identification of communism and Christianity—behaving like a Christian.

If we read D-503 as being a true repentant, like a good Christian in his own right, then our reading of his lobotomization as a tragic event is actually a criticism of both the Christian faith and the argument for happiness over freedom. D-503 is a failed Christ-figure precisely because he chooses not to rebel, and figuratively spits out the Fruit of Forbidden Knowledge. By drawing these religious parallels, Zamyatin is actually satirizing Christianity—or at least the “good Christian”—as being decidedly un-Christlike, because he imagines that Christ was a revolutionary who spoke the truth, thereby strengthening the public discourse instead of limiting it, and ensuring the freedom of men.

So what do we make of this parallel? And what effect does it have upon the language throughout the text? First of all, these characters make these biblical references in both their dialogues and their writing, for D-503 is communicating this text through his journal. He is at least tangentially aware that his story is framed as a religious allegory about the fall of man from a state of unthinkingness, a state only posthumously given the name “bliss.” In order for him to have this awareness, some knowledge of the past must have made its way down to him, presumably through writing. Thus we can infer that the One State has not attempted to craft itself as independent from its history, as Orwell’s Oceania, but has rather sprung from a tradition of thinking that can be traced. The ciphers of the One State are at best marginally well educated, and so it cannot be said that the government attempts to control its populace in as hands-on a way as in *Brave New World* or *1984*. Still, it seems that the context by which the ciphers are educated, and allowed to read the ancient texts, remain highly prescriptive. Zamyatin’s narrative never mentions a cipher reading, or talking about reading; nor does he mention anyone openly

discussing history, or even discussing the facets of State ideology in any meaningful way. The public discourse remains highly stunted, then, and the absence of other methods of control (like the physical conditioning of *Brave New World*, for example) indicates that this stunted public discourse is even more essential to the functioning of the One State than in other dystopian societies.

Conclusion

In three of the most influential dystopian novels we have seen how the restriction of the public discourse is the most essential aspect of a modern totalitarian regime. This is because in order to effectively control enormous amounts of people, a regime must have (or at least appear to have) the unquestioning support of a majority of its population. It must unify the people under a common cause, and prevent the formation of alternative ideologies: there must be no other choice for the people but to sustain the State, and the individual subject must not be conscious of this limitation. Ideally he should be less like a human being and more like a machine, a tool in the very system that makes him a tool: as he consents to the enforcement of a State-regulated language, not only are his own views and thoughts constricted, but he actively contributes (through his daily use of said regulated language) to the social obligation of compliance. Essentially, the ideal dystopian citizen participates in the reduction of the public discourse when he narrows his own vocabulary.

Luckily for dictators, humans demonstrably have a capacity to adopt moral systems based upon beliefs that are strengthened through religious practices. If those religious practices are controlled, and alternative ideologies have been suppressed for long enough that no one remembers them, then the State can impose belief systems that discourage alternative ideologies from ever forming. Then, with their beliefs tailored to support the regime, to a certain extent the people police themselves: in *1984* for instance, children who have been constantly indoctrinated all throughout their lives can and do often turn their parents into the Thought Police for saying something seditious or acting suspiciously; likewise in *We*, the transparent architecture invites people to spy on one another; and in *Brave New World*, social pressure to imbibe mind-altering substances and to distract oneself with pleasurable activities takes away the need for surveillance

and a threat of punishment altogether. The result in every case is a scenario where there are very few chances available for an individual to create and freely use the language he needs to even begin understanding how oppressive his government actually is.

As such, the dystopian State is very politically stable. It takes advantage of this stability and pictures itself to be a utopian society, thereby justifying the constant policing, hypnotizing, or doping necessary to keep it in power: stability is heralded as the primary attribute of a perfect world. This is because in these three books, and almost invariably in other dystopian novels, the totalitarian regime arises out of the desire for a utopian social organization to save what remains of humanity before it destroys itself through war and repression. Compared with total destruction, stability becomes an even more attractive option... so attractive in fact that men are willing to go to extreme lengths to attain it, even to sacrifice their own freedom of speech and hence their capacity to form coherent, innovative, rebellious ideas.

This typical origin for dystopias is partially attributable to the time in which these pivotal books were written: as Fromm notes, World War One “was the beginning of that development which tended in a relatively short time to destroy a two-thousand-year-old Western traditional hope (in the goodness of humanity) and to transform it into a mood of despair” (Fromm 282). Modern weaponry made the fear of total annihilation very real for the first time, and these early writers of dystopian fiction were afraid that the desperation of the times could lead people to mistakenly place their trust in a predatory form of government, one that only pretends to have their best interests in mind, that offers the fruit of peace and stability only to negate the very public discourse that gives those those things any value to a conscious individual.

We thrive because we are conscious, because we are *self aware*, because we desire *to know* things. These dystopian novels are still relevant today because they detail the ways in

which we can strip those essential human characteristics from ourselves. The point in expressing this is not to show that our perceptions and understandings are wholly subjective, and that the individual is powerless against a strong totalitarian social system as I mistakenly believed the first time that I read *1984*, but rather to show that there are such things as human nature, and human dignity, and that these things require our protection. If we understand that there is a relationship between the language that we speak and the thoughts that we have, then we should be exceedingly wary of any ideology that would prioritize national security over the freedom of speech, that would claim the ultimate moral high ground for itself, or that would justify the censorship of the facts by claiming that stability is somehow more valuable than the truth.

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