

Proposal

Title – “Examining D-503: Modernity’s Dystopia of Knowing Oneself and Being Known”

Program of Study – M.A. in English

Presentation Type – Choose one of the following: PowerPoint, Print Poster, PowerPoint (Remote)

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Category – Choose one of the following: Basic, Applied, Theoretical Proposal, Textual or Investigative, Creative and Artistic

Abstract: In 1924, Yevgeny Zamyatin published *We*, an early dystopian novel that portrays a rigidly structured and mathematical society governed by a table of hours. The novel is comprised of journal entries written by D-503, the builder of a vessel intended to spread the confidence of the One State’s supposed superiority and modernity throughout the universe. Yet, the evolution—or, more likely, the devolution—of D-503’s journals reflects his deteriorating confidence in the One State’s ideology, much like the doubt of the masses during the Modern period. Because *We* is among the first dystopian novels, and because dystopian literature reflects a cultural spirit, an evaluation of where Modernist tensions appear and of how D-503 responds to them proves worthwhile for understanding the novel’s interaction with developing psychological and philosophical trends. I argue that *We*, as a product of the Modern age, inflates the cultural energy from which it draws its foundations and suggests the prominent influence of Freud, whose arguments act as a gateway for implicating in *We* the presence of other various cultural trends in thought that were influential in the Modernist era, such as those that would culminate in Sartre’s philosophies. I argue, then, that *We* impends upon society more realistically than it may seem as the novel highlights, though exaggerates and looks toward, the trends that were

controlling culture at the time of the novel's publication. Zamyatin's novel thus offers a step into the ambiguity of D-503's identity—borne out of the ambiguity of Modernism's fragmentation and ideological conflict—to reveal the structure of a dystopian society. This paper culminates in an examination of how D-503's dreams and self-consciousness indicate the cultural understanding of motive and selfhood as D-503's soul causes his desires to wander; D-503, in writing for the *Integral*, not only attempts to identify himself for his own sake but also to convey that wandering identity—conflicted by self and State—to the unknown. In *We*, then, D-503's records aboard the *Integral* essentially gaze out of the One State, implicating the far-reaching Modern tensions that will sweep the universe and unavoidably define life.

Christian worldview integration: Dystopian literature, in its attempt to define what good life and right living look like, presents weighty concerns for Christians to consider. Because dystopian literature examines humankind as it strives for—but falls short of—perfection, the conclusions drawn from dystopian literature intersect with a Christian worldview that recognizes man's depravity and pursuit of a standard for truth. Dystopian literature thus testifies both explicitly and implicitly to the faults of man's reasoning when it is uninformed by a pursuit of God's truth and righteousness. Particularly in Zamyatin's *We*, the problem of conscious identity formation (and identity imposition) defines itself against the form of identity in Christ accepted by believers. My research, then, has been prompted by a desire to see how the (secular) modern and postmodern philosophical, psychological, and political climate can influence society's perception of good and bad life and how that climate penetrates individual identity in contrast to how the Christian faith can—and should—shape individual and communal identity. The dystopian genre itself expresses the failure of mankind's self-sufficiency, which results in a

picture of a broken and fragmented identity in literature that corresponds to—and perhaps exaggerates for didactic purposes—the fragmented world of reality. In such ways, dystopian literature can serve as a cautionary genre that reminds us of our limits and the insufficiency of the humanist philosophies and identities that resulted from the Fall in the Garden of Eden, which was, in the truest sense, a utopia. In my research, then, I have sought to explore how literary images of dystopia—a bad place—embody postlapsarian reality and instruct us in how to resist mankind's postlapsarian tendencies.