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Zamayatin, Evgeny Ivanovich (1884-1937)

Yvonne Howell

University of Richmond, yhowell@richmond.edu

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ZAMYATIN, EVGENY IVANOVICH (1884–1937), Russian engineer, fiction writer, critic-essayist, and editor. Zamyatin was born in the provincial town of Lebedyan in central Russia. He joined the Bolshevik Party in opposition to the tsar's regime while still a student of naval engineering in the imperial capital of St. Petersburg. He was imprisoned and exiled from St. Petersburg, an experience that provided material for his first short novels and stories. Zamyatin's early works are distinguished by stylistic experimentation with ornamental prose, grotesque imagery, and (in some stories) neoprimitivist aesthetics. During World War I, Zamyatin was sent to England to oversee the construction of Russian icebreakers. His encounter with middle-class conformity in the West provided material for two satirical novels on the cultural inertia of bourgeois values, *Ostrovityane* (The Islanders, 1918) and *Lovets chelovekov* (The Fisher of Men, 1922). He returned to Russia when the **Russian Revolution** broke out in 1917, and for the next decade he was one of the most important figures in the explosion of innovative intellectual and aesthetic movements that characterized culture in the first years of the new Soviet state. He edited influential literary journals, led writing workshops that trained a generation of writers in modernist formal experimentation, and supervised translations into Russian of H. G. Wells, O. Henry, Anatole France, and others. Zamyatin's own mature style is an elliptical prose featuring a unique synthesis of modernist color symbolism, striking imagery, and an expert, highly effective incorporation of mathematical symbolism and scientific allusion. He is best known for his brilliant novel *We* (*My*, English publication in 1924, first Russian publication in 1987), which in many ways still surpasses its progeny in dystopian literature (such as Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*) in the psychological and political acumen of its depiction of the modern totalitarian society. Likewise, Zamyatin's 1924 essay "On Literature, Revolution, Entropy, and other Matters" still stands as a startlingly brilliant philosophical and aesthetic manifesto proclaiming the importance of heretics in art, science, and social life. Zamyatin's commitment to the idea of "infinite revolution" was increasingly out of step with the hardening dogma of Soviet communism, and from 1929 on, Zamyatin was vilified in the official Soviet press. In 1931, he wrote a letter directly to Stalin asking for permission to leave

his homeland, in which it was no longer possible for him to write. He spent the rest of his life in France, working on an unfinished novel depicting the conflict between Rome and Attila as a parallel to the conflict between the West and Russia.

Selected Bibliography: Brown, Edward J. "Brave New World," "1984" and "We": An Essay on Anti-Utopia (*Zamyatin and English Literature*). Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1976; Cooke, Brett. *Human Nature in Dystopia: Zamyatin's "We."* Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2002; Shane, A.M. *The Life and Works of Evgenij Zamiatin*. U of California P, 1968.

Yvonne Howell

ZIZEK, SLAVOJ (1949–). Born in Ljubljana, Slovenia, Zizek went on to become one of the leading Lacanian philosophers of the contemporary era. He obtained degrees in sociology and philosophy, a doctorate in philosophy, and another doctorate in psychoanalysis, the latter supervised by the Lacanian psychoanalyst Jacques Alain Miller. Influenced by the Slovene Lacanian school, Zizek has consistently demonstrated the importance of Jacques Lacan's concept of the Real to an understanding of contemporary culture and the possibilities of political action. A committed Marxist, Zizek stood as a presidential candidate for the Liberal-Democratic Party during the 1989 elections in postcommunist Slovenia as a strictly tactical move to prevent the seizure of power by rightist nationalists. Well known for a style that combines obscenity, jokes, and references to popular culture with theoretical readings of German philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Zizek frequently adopts the rhetorical strategies of both analyst and analysand in order to expose his readers to the Real.

For Zizek, the process of exposure to the Lacanian Real is torturous, but it is also always motivated by a materialist commitment to bring about political change. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology* and *Tarrying with the Negative* he offers a Hegelian reading of Lacan, demonstrating the importance of Lacan's thought for contemporary ideology criticism. Other books, such as *Looking Awry* and *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, examine Lacan's account of sexual difference. Zizek's provocative writing on themes such as political correctness and totalitarian politics have led him into a debate with Judith Butler and Ernesto Laclau about the possibilities of a universal political imaginary in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (2000). More recently, Zizek has made a plea for Leninist intolerance to neoliberalism in *Revolution at the Gates* (2002) and characterized the attacks of September 11, 2001, as America's encounter with the desert of the Real.

Selected Bibliography: Butler, Judith, Slavoj Zizek, and Ernesto Laclau. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London: Verso, 2000; Kay, Sarah. *Zizek: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity, 2003; Myers, Tony. *Slavoj Zizek*. London: Routledge, 2003; Wright, Elizabeth, and Edmund Wright, eds. *The Zizek Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999; Zizek, Slavoj. *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters*. London: Verso, 1996; Zizek, Slavoj. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1991; Zizek, Slavoj. *The Metastases of Enjoyment*. London: Verso, 1994; Zizek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1991; Zizek, Slavoj. *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1993; Zizek, Slavoj. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. London: Verso, 2001; Zizek, Slavoj, ed. *Revolution at the Gates*. London: Verso, 2002.

Stephen Morton