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WE (1924)

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WE (1924). One of the first and most important works of modern dystopian literature, this novel by Russian writer Evgeny Zamyatin was written in 1919–1920 and published in English in 1924. The original Russian version was not authorized for publication in the Soviet Union until 1988, when Gorbachev's policy of cultural openness (*glasnost*) allowed readers access to twentieth-century Russian literature inimical to the communist project. The novel *We* is set in the twenty-ninth century. It posits that almost all of remaining humanity (most of which had earlier been wiped out in a world war of apocalyptic proportions) lives in the One State: a perfectly organized, rational, and harmonious city of glass buildings and happy citizens. Citizens of the One State have been raised to see themselves as part of a collective, and their seeming lack of individual desire or will might indicate that the state's methods have been effective—both the “carrot” of predictable, material happiness (even the weather is always perfect) and the “stick” of execution if deviation from the norm is caught by one of the ubiquitous Guardians. Every aspect of this society is regimented, ostensibly for the good of all. Citizens are designated by numbers rather than personal names, and both their meals and their sex lives are organized to maximize health benefits and minimize the potential for irrational indulgence and passion. The entire novel is a record of the diary of D-503, an engineer who is building a rocket that will carry the One State's message of collective bliss to other planets. As the novel proceeds, D-503's narrative voice registers his slowly dawning consciousness of the hazards of imposed mass happiness. His irrational dream world comes out in startling symbolic imagery, whereas in his conscious life, he tries to express his emotions with mathematical metaphors. When he falls hopelessly in love with a female revolutionary, I-330, he is lured into her conspiracy to escape the One State's regime of happiness. For I-330, freedom is not compatible with ideas of fixed, eternal order, since “There is no such thing as a ‘last’ revolution. The number of revolutions is infinite.” Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) both pursue Zamyatin's dystopian theme of enforced conformity in modern industrialized societies, but Zamyatin's novel is funnier and more ironic. It has been read as a prophecy of twentieth-century fascism and as a prescient anticommunist parable, and it can certainly prompt post-Soviet readings as a satire aimed at any ideological establishment (bourgeois or socialist, secular or religious) that claims to have the final answer to the problem of human happiness.

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Tony. "Zamyatin's *We* and Postmodernism." *Utopian Studies* 11.1 (2000): 66–90; Cooke, Brett. *Human Nature in Dystopia: Zamyatin's "We."* Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2002; Kern, Gary, ed. *Zamyatin's "We": A Collection of Critical Essays.* Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1988.

Yvonne Howell

WEATHERWAX, CLARA (1905–1958). The descendant of an early, prominent Aberdeen family, Clara Weatherwax was the author of *Marching! Marching!* one of the most ironically positioned novels of American proletarian fiction. While the novel was awarded a prize as the best American novel on a proletarian theme in a contest sponsored by the John Day Publishing Company and *New Masses*, it also came to be, over time, the most widely abused of its genre, characterized as inept and programmatic. Nevertheless, *Marching! Marching!* was one of the most formally innovative of American proletarian novels and deserves a closer critical scrutiny.

At the time she decided to write the novel, Weatherwax and her husband, composer Gerald Strang, lived in the hills above Berkeley and associated themselves with the cultural and political left. Strang was a friend of several musician/composers associated with the New Music community, a loose association of avant-garde figures who mixed social and aesthetic innovations into their compositions and performances. Weatherwax's brother, John, was closely connected to the Communist Party in California and wrote music and cultural journalism. He also translated the Mayan epic myth *Popol Vuh* and convinced his friend, Diego Rivera, to produce twenty-three watercolor illustrations for it. During Rivera's sojourn in northern California, he and Frida Kahlo became friends of and frequent visitors to the Weatherwax/Strang household.

Weatherwax observed the San Francisco general strike of 1934–1935 while writing her novel, and drew from it and from stories of the labor unrest that had plagued her hometown earlier in the century. With the \$750 prize money, Clara and Gerald moved to Los Angeles, where she attempted to continue to write. The onset of rheumatoid arthritis hindered her, and she gradually declined in health. By the mid-1950s, she was virtually blind. She died without having completed another novel or work of any considerable length.

In *Marching! Marching!* Weatherwax sought and found a collective persona for the center of her story and represented its voice via the use of stream-of-consciousness techniques and experiments in the use of fonts, layout, and punctuation. In effect, hers was the first real attempt to apply modernist stylistic innovations to the American propagandistic novel of the left. Nevertheless, *Marching! Marching!* drew few reviews and fewer good reviews. Neither Weatherwax nor her book were mentioned in the landmark collection of 1935, *Proletarian Literature in the United States*, nor was the book mentioned in most later histories of the proletarian "moment" except as an object lesson in what not to do. These judgments were both premature and unfortunate. Weatherwax's role as an innovator in political narrative and her connections to the cultural left of the early 1930s go uninvestigated and unappreciated to this day.

Selected Bibliography: Cantwell, Robert. "A Town and Its Novels." *New Republic* 86 (February 1936): 51–52; Suggs, Jon-Christian. Introduction to *Marching! Marching!* by Clara Weatherwax. Detroit: Om-