

Theme: Language of Science (Fictional Text)

Text: (Extract from) Evgeny Zamyatin: *We* (1924)

Fifth Entry: The square / Sovereigns of the universe / A pleasantly useful function

Again, I don't seem to be starting off right. Again I am talking to you, my unknown reader, as if ... well, let's say as if you were R-13, an old friend of mine. He is a poet, with Negroid lips - why, everybody knows him. Yet when it comes to you - well, now, you may be on Luna, on Venus, on Mars, on Mercury; who knows what you are up to - where you are and who you are.

Tell you what: picture to yourself a square- a living, beautiful equilateral quadrangle. It has to inform you about itself, about its existence. The last thing that would enter this quadrangle's mind, you understand, would be to say that all its four angles are equal: it simply no longer perceives this, since it finds this fact such a customary, everyday matter. Well, I too find myself constantly in this quadrangular situation. There, take those pink tags, for example, and all that goes with them: I take the whole matter as much for granted as the square does the equality of its angles, whereas for you it may be a harder nut to crack than Newton's binomial theorem.

Well, now. Some ancient sage or other once said something clever (by pure chance, of course): 'Love and Hunger rule the universe.' *Ergo*, in order to win sovereignty over the universe man must win sovereignty over the sovereigns of the universe. By paying a high price our ancestors gained victory over Hunger - I am speaking of the Great Two Hundred Years' War, between city and village. The Christian savages, probably because of religious prejudices, held on stubbornly to their *bread*.* But in the thirty-fifth year before the founding of the One State the food we eat today, a derivation of naphtha, was devised. True, only 0.2 of the population of the terrestrial globe survived; but then, cleansed of its millennial filth, how glowing the face of the earth became! Then, too, the surviving two tenths certainly, came to know bliss in the many mansions of The One State.

Is it not clear, then, that bliss and envy are but the numerator and denominator of a fraction called happiness? Now, what would be the significance of all the innumerable sacrifices of the Two Hundred Years' War if, in spite of everything, there still remained any reason for envy? And yet a reason remained, inasmuch as there still remained 'button noses' and 'classical' noses (to quote the conversation during our recent Supplementary Walk), and inasmuch as the love of some was striven for by many, while the love of others wasn't striven for by any.

Naturally, having subordinated Hunger (a victory which was the algebraic = sign of the sum of external blessings), The One State launched an offensive against the other sovereign of the universe - against Love, that is. In the end this elemental force was likewise conquered - i.e. it was organized, mathematized - and three hundred years ago, or thereabouts, our historic *Lex Sexualis* was promulgated: 'Every number has the right of availability, as a sexual product, to any other number.' As for the rest of it - well, that is already mere technique. Your case is subjected to thorough research in the laboratories of the Sexual Bureau, the content of sexual hormones is determined with the utmost exactitude, and a corresponding Table of Sexual Days is worked out for you. After obtaining this you fill out an application, stating that on your Sexual Days you desire to avail yourself of such and such a number (or such and such numbers) and receive the appropriate book of coupons (it is pink). And that's all there is to it.

Clearly, there are no longer any grounds whatsoever for envy; the denominator of the fraction of happiness is reduced to zero - the fraction is converted into magnificent infinity. And that which served the ancients as the source of countless and exceedingly silly tragedies, we have converted to a harmonious, pleasantly useful organic function, much as we have done with sleep, physical labour, the intake of food, defecation and so forth. Hence you can perceive how the great force of logic cleanses everything it may come in contact with. Oh, if you, whom I do not know, would but come to know this divine force, would but follow it to the end!

*This word has survived only in the form of a poetic metaphor - the chemical composition of this substance is unknown to us.

Annotation:

3 unknown reader – the diary entries are addressed to extraterrestrials who might eventually receive the messages on board the spaceship whose construction the protagonist is in charge of **7** equilateral – with sides that are equal in length **13** sage – a wise person **18** naphtha - liquid mixture of hydrocarbons distilled from petroleum, coal tar, and natural gas **21** numerator - expression written *above* the line in a common fraction; denominator - ... *below* ...**29** promulgated – announced officially

Assignments:

- 1) Give an outline of the scientific nature that marks the society of *We*.
- 2) Enlarge on the literary features that qualify the extract as a dystopian text.
- 3) Compare this extract to Huxley's *Brave New World* pointing out parallels and differences. Say how encouraged you feel to get to know Zamyatin's complete novel.