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# Revolt Against the Modern Utopia: The Threat of Collectivism in Three Early 20th Century Technological Dystopias

**Abstract:** This paper aims to analyze the relationship between the coercive power of the totalitarian state and the revolt of the individual against it in three dystopias written in the first decades of the 20th century: Owen Gregory's *Meccania: The Super-State*, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* and Ayn Rand's *Anthem*. By focusing on the values that the authors attribute to scientific and technological development, be they positive or negative, I intend to show that these dystopias are also anti-utopias, since they criticize not only historical regimes, but also utopianism in general as a way of thinking. My examination treats these texts as fictional demonstrations against utopian projections, highlighting the excesses they may lead to if put into practice without reflecting on the consequences of treating the individual only as an insignificant part of a larger whole.
**Keywords**: Dystopia; Technological Dystopia; Anti-utopia; Individualism; Collectivism; Totalitarianism; Owen Gregory; Yevgeny Zamyatin; Ayn Rand.

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According to George Orwell, the First World War represented a turning point in the historical imagination of modern man, shattering the three great ideas of modernity, science, progress and civilization: "Progress had finally ended in the biggest massacre in history, Science was something that created bombing planes and poison gas, civilized man, as it turned out, was ready to behave worse than any savage when the pinch came"[1]. The rise of totalitarian regimes continued this descending trajectory of history which reached its low point during the Second World War, whose horrors far surpassed those of the previous global conflict. Perhaps the most depressing reality of totalitarianism is its capacity of combining remarkable technological progress with the return of extremely violent repression practices, concentration camps being the worst expression of this alliance between science and barbarism[2]. Precisely the fact that such barbaric regimes were able to seize power proves that ideas such as science and progress had not simply disappeared after the disastrous consequences of the First World War, but had managed to survive through

revolutionary movements which came to govern various modern states. As Jean-Jacques Wunenburger notes, the outline of the progress of history engenders political myths, among which the conviction that the beginning of a new era, resulting from the coming to power of a new regime, must be accompanied by the invention of a new man[3].

Consequently, the critique of these new forms of government and of their legitimating ideologies suffered a mutation in the case of dystopian fiction. Satires directed towards 19th century utopias, obsessed with efficiency and productivity[4], became a phenomenon characteristic of a past in which projections of utopia could still be seen as comical. However, the new reality forced authors to write in a grave, prophetic tone, since the fantasies of utopians had transformed in actual regimes of terror moving towards new kinds of hell on earth[5]. As such, what my paper attempts to demonstrate is that dystopias written during the interwar years are often built as demonstrations, in a literary form, of the role that science and technology play in the totalitarian state by either dehumanizing the individual and forcing him to be integrated in a collective (Gregory, Zamyatin) or by opening a path to revolt through self-expression against the equalizing force of totalitarianism (Rand).

## Dystopia and Anti-utopia at the Dawn of the 20th Century

Although it is not my intention to draw an exhaustive history of the dystopian genre or to settle the discussion on the precise definitions of concepts such as "dystopia" and "anti-utopia", I believe a short presentation of the development of dystopian literature and of the meanings with which I will use these terms is essential as a starting point. Gregory Claeys argues that utopian projections suffered a great "dystopian turn" in Great Britain towards the end of the 19th century and extending into the first decades of the 20th century. This change was generated by three main factors: the development of social Darwinism, generating debates about how theories of natural selection could be applied through eugenics, the threat of socialist revolutionary movements and mass-mechanization seen as a danger to humanity[6]. New technological realities were at the forefront of the new genre of "the literature of terror", which expressed doubts regarding the sustainability of the industrial world and fears that technical advancement will inevitably lead to the destruction of life on earth[7]. These themes are further developed in more pessimistic directions in 20th century dystopias through visions of a humanity subjugated by science and technology or of a totalitarian form of collectivism similar to the fascist and communist regimes[8]. Two main concerns dominate the dystopian thinking of this period: the metamorphosis of revolutionary movements into new form of oppressive government, often even more severe than the ones they vowed to replace, and the duplicity of scientific and technological optimism, where aspirations of progress, happiness and welfare end up giving birth to new forms of barbarism and destruction[9]. These dilemmas are typical especially for texts written in the aftermath of the First World War.

As Erika Gottlieb highlights, there is a strong tension between the utopian and dystopian impulse, since any dystopia starts

as the dream of a utopia which ultimately fails or is betrayed, transforming into a totalitarian nightmare[10]. As a consequence, these dystopias are at the same time anti-utopias from several perspectives. On the one hand, they counteract the utopian spirit through a pessimistic view on the future of mankind. Krishan Kumar describes how initially utopias were also meant as satires, but this role was taken up by the anti-utopia at the end of the 19th century, when it seemed that it was only a matter of time until utopia would really be achieved. However, authors who refused to believe in the utopian dream were concerned with the trajectory upon which modernity was set, so that the anti-utopia manifested itself as a literary "revolt against modernity"[11]. The relationship between utopia and anti-utopia (and, by extension, dystopias marked by an anti-utopian spirit) is suggestively formulated by Kumar:

> But while the utopian order was *perfect*, in the moral sense, the anti-utopian order was merely *perfected*, in the social sense. It was the dreadful perfection of some modern system or idea. And while utopian societies were *ideal*, in the sense of the best possible, anti-utopian society represented merely the victory or tyranny of the *idea*[12].

On the other hand, if we borrow Corin Braga's distinction, dystopia criticizes a real society (or, more precisely, the author's image of a society, *mundus* or *imago mundi*) by selecting only its negative elements, whereas the anti-utopia attacks an ideal society (in other words, a utopia seen both as *outopos*, non-place, and *eutopos*, good place) by inverting its positive aspects and turning them into hellish realities[13]. I will demonstrate that the texts under scrutiny have both dystopian and anti-utopian valences, since they are critical towards both the authors' contemporary societies (the German Empire, the Soviet Union) and the utopian projects that generated these oppressive states (socialist collectivism, scientific and technological rationalism). As such, from Lyman Tower Sargent's perspective, the development of the 20th century literary dystopia can be seen as an ideological process, since utopias (and, implicitly, dystopias) are written from a certain ideological position in order to counteract another, antagonistic ideology[14]. As the relationship between technology, the individual and society can be imagined in various ways, I believe the comparison of the texts chosen, Owen Gregory's *Meccania: The Super-State*, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* and Ayn Rand's *Anthem*, is useful for illustrating various perspectives on science and its pact with or revolt against political power.

## *Meccania*: A Warning Unheeded

In *Meccania: The Super-State* (1918), the description of the imaginary dystopian society follows from the journal of a Chinese traveler, Mr. Ming, who spends five months of the year 1970 in Meccania, a Central European state functioning as a parable for the German Empire of Kaiser Wilhelm II[15]. The editor of the journal concedes that the fictionalized narrative conceals a very real and urgent warning: Mr. Ming (and, by extension, the author himself) wishes that the scenario presented in the book will not become a prophetic

one, since Meccania has access to a chemical arsenal capable of subjugating the entire world[16]. Thus, the militarized Super-State represents a threat through its technological innovations, which far surpass those of its neighbors.

Militarism is one of the pillars of Meccania, both from the perspective of its external politics and of its internal educational system. A foundational maxim directing the entire Meccanian government reads as follows: "The State must be strong within in order to be strong without"[17]. And a state that is strong within requires the complete dedication of its populace in promoting its national interest, even to the detriment of the private wishes of individuals[18]. Therefore, the educational system of Meccania functions as an institution of social conditioning, creating a nation of insects forming what Mr. Villele, another traveler, calls a "Super-Insect-State"[19].

The other pillar of Meccanian society is the bureaucracy, which functions as a perfect mathematical system. Through its various departments managing social life (Time, Health, Sociology, Culture, Trade and Industry etc.) and through the daily reports in which individuals are required to specify all activities they accomplished and the exact time they allotted to them, the Super-State has managed to abolish the boundaries between public and private life. The disappearance of the private sphere, now placed under the jurisdiction of the State, is seen by governmental agents as a great accomplishment of Meccanian civilization, proving how advanced they are in comparison to the neighboring nations[20].

When Mr. Ming arrives in Mecco, the capital city of Meccania, he realizes that the Meccanian individual does not exist, since he has become no more than a cog in the mechanism of the State[21]. The capital thus turns into a microcosm which reflects the entire macrocosm of Meccania. The Super-State projects itself as a surrogate parent and consequently justifies the right of property over all of its members, which manifests itself especially through the classification of its citizens. The seven classes constitute a very clear hierarchy which, although it allows a certain degree of social mobility, claims to be a rational, logico-mathematical model of separating the population. This classification system gives the impression of a large-scale experiment of social engineering, since children are sent to different schools depending on the class to which they are distributed.

Perhaps even more telling is the fact that eugenics is an extremely highly regarded science in Meccania. Women are encouraged to have sexual relations with the members of the military caste, even outside marriage, so that the number of weaker human types resulting from the other classes steadily decreases[22]. We now read these descriptions in a prophetic spirit, since they anticipate the genetic experiments that fascinated scientists serving the Nazi regime.

However, this strict control of reproductive practices, although nightmarish from our perspective, is not as uncommon in utopian projections as we might expect. Lucian Boia has shown that property and sex are the most heavily regulated aspects in a utopia, since they are an integral part of our private life, while the utopia is a communitarian projection that is more than willing to sacrifice individual preferences in the service of social harmony[23]. As opposed to the golden age myth that

promotes a return to the state of absolute liberty specific to man's early existence[24], the utopia finds itself closer to the other extreme, that of order[25]. Consequently, even though Meccania is a utopia for its inhabitants, it turns into a dystopia for foreign travelers and for the reader. In Corin Braga's view, one's utopia can easily become another's dystopia, since the solution one thinker finds for solving a problem may lead to an infernal society if regarded from a different point of view[26].

A similar conflict between two extremes is the foundation of modern Meccanian society: following the death of Prince Blodiron, who had begun the process of turning Meccania away from "old-fashioned" ideals such as liberty and democracy, the power-hungry government started a war after the end of which "the last vestiges of the obsolete doctrines of Individualism had disappeared"[27]. The Super-State was established by abolishing the principles seen as the source of all evil in utopian thinking, private property and individualism, and the author illustrates where this line of thought might lead to if it were followed to its logical conclusion[28]. After being defeated in the war, Prince Mechow comes to power and decides to strengthen the regime so that such a defeat cannot occur in the future. He has a strong central conviction: "the Super-State must be the only organ, uniting all others in itself"[29]. He makes use of the revolution in Idiotica (Russia) in order to install a totalitarian regime, the citizens of Meccania being forced to choose between the tyranny imposed by Mechow and Bolshevik anarchy[30], an insidious dilemma intended to bury any trace of individual freedom. Fearing one dystopia, the Meccanians run towards the other one, which represents a way for the Super-State to accumulate more power. Mechow found the perfect formula for consolidating his power: large-scale industrialization provides him with the necessary machines for total control, whereas socialism (a revolutionary movement initiated by Spotts, alias Marx, that is immediately instrumentalized by the agents of the regime) enables one all-encompassing power structure[31].

Despite the scientific and rationalist Meccanian spirit, religious thought is still present, but it has been perverted in order to turn Prince Mechow into a national hero encapsulating the "Meccanian spirit", a formula constantly repeated throughout the novel in order to justify the national character of the Super-State, as well as its superiority over other cultures. By espousing a strong belief regarding the civilizing mission that God entrusted Meccania with[32], patriotism becomes a form of total devotion to the divine State (not to its laws!). You must not only submit before it, but you also need to worship it[33]. The religious language reaches its peak in Professor Slimey the Theologian's speech:

> The Super-State […] is itself the Great Soul of Meccania; it includes all the individual souls. What you call the sacrifice of the individual soul is no real sacrifice; it is merely a losing oneself to find oneself in the larger soul of Meccania. And just as the individual soul may inflict suffering on itself for the sake of higher self-realisation, so the Super-Soul of Meccania may inflict suffering on the individual souls within itself for the sake of the higher self-realisation. The soul of Meccania

> is as wonderful in the spiritual world as the material manifestation of Meccania is in the material world[34].

Slimey continues this almost mystical declamation, concluding it with the idea that, just as the Super-State will conquer the material world, so the Super-Soul will absorb the spiritual world[35]. Since modern man has lost all hope of personal immortality, he is ready to accept a collectivist form of immortality[36]. The Meccanian government thus creates a collective eschatology at a national level, where the Super-State becomes a manifestation of the will of God on earth, with Mechow playing the role of the enlightened prophet. Considering this framework, Stillman's observation, a character hospitalized because of a sickness called *Znednettlapseiwz* or "Chronic tendency to Dissent"[37], bears more weight. In his opinion, Meccania cannot be free as long as the Meccanian spirit still exists. Its salvation could come only from the outside, but the free world that may oppose it is itself in danger while there exists a technologically advanced Super-State trampling on everything democracy stands for[38]. Even though Gregory's warning appears to have been written in vain, judging by future historical developments, his novel remains remarkable through its prescience regarding the national-socialist spirit which will possess Germany in the decades after the book's publication.

## *We*: An Outmoded Revolution

At first glance, the relationship between technological progress and control over the individual present in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (first published in 1924, in an English translation[39]) seems to be very similar to the one described by Gregory. However, a closer look brings to light relevant distinctions that are worth discussing for better understanding the author's perspective on the violent transformations taking place in the Soviet Union in his time.

Firstly, the difference in perspective is significant: while the image of Meccania derives from the observations of a tourist, the OneState imagined by Zamyatin is seen from the eyes of an inhabitant, D-503, even if he also writes his experiences in a journal. The protagonist truly believes in the propaganda disseminated by the authorities, but he starts doubting the felicity of his condition and the inner workings of the regime under the influence of I-330, a female character who is part of a rebel group, the Mephi, hunted by the government. At first glance, OneState is very similar to Meccania: technology and mathematical rationalism reign supreme, and the building of the INTEGRAL aims to begin the process of space colonization so that other planets may reap the benefits of the totalitarian state. The Promethean spirit of OneState manifests itself through its aspiration of bringing happiness by force to other worlds[40]. However, the state is not as strong and efficient as it seems.

On the one hand, the technological advancement is not as impressive as presented by state propaganda. Taking into account that the plot takes place a thousand years after the conception of the novel (1920), the technical progress is in fact quite limited and many mathematical calculations D-503 operates are wrong[41]. In fact, the technology of OneState is obsolete even for the 1920s, since the obsession

of control has placed obstacles in the way of scientific innovation[42]. Paradoxically, the Mephi use more advanced mathematics, such as irrational numbers and non-Euclidian geometry[43]. Although Zamyatin expresses fear regarding the replacement of humans by machines through a critique of the machine cult in the USSR, which risked annihilating man's humanity[44], his vision on technology is more nuanced.

For the author, technology appears to play a reflexive role rather than a functional one, considering that he endows it with almost human traits[45]. When D-503 looks at the mechanical assemblage working on the INTEGRAL, he has a moment of pure aesthetic pleasure:

> the regulator globes, their eyes closed, oblivious, were twirling round; the cranks were glistening and bending to the left and right; the balance beam was proudly heaving its shoulders; the bit of the router was squatting athletically to the beat of some unheard music. I suddenly saw the whole beauty of this grandiose mechanical ballet, flooded with the light of the lovely blue-eyed sun[46].

In antithesis to the utilitarian vision on technology that reduces it to efficiency, Zamyatin imagines a more intimate relationship between man and machine: the fascination and sense of wonder before the seemingly artistic functioning of mechanics cancels any attempt of bending it to political interests[47]. D-503 sees the INTEGRAL itself simultaneously as a woman prepared for giving birth and actually giving birth. His poetic mind is antithetical both to the utilitarianism of OneState (which sees the ship as an instrument of subjugation) and to that of the Mephi (who perceive the INTEGRAL as an object necessary for their liberation from dictatorship)[48]. But the image of the dictator is still associated with iron and steel machinery[49]: the Benefactor's body is "dead still, like something made out of metal", his face is marked by "strict, solemn, square lines" and his "heavy hands" are "made of stone"[50]. Consequently, technology can also be manipulated for political or religious propaganda: the Benefactor is considered to have several divine qualities and his every gesture is read symbolically. While Gregory shows only this negative aspect of scientific progress, Zamyatin appears to suggest that technology is not good or evil in itself, but man's attitude towards it and the way it is used may lead to dystopia.

On the other hand, the control of the State over the populace is not as complete as in the case of Meccania. The existence of the Mephi resistance and the fact that individuals may choose their sexual partners are signs that OneState is not capable of fully enforcing its totalitarian project[51]. The recourse to violent practices, such as the public sacrifice of rebels or the protagonist's lobotomization at the end of the novel, are another sign of the government's weak grip on political power. Such barbarous measures indicate that the citizens are not fully subordinate to OneState. In Gregory's *Meccania*, the Super-State does not need to control its population through violence, since the people already think they are part of the Meccanian spirit that surpasses any forms of individual striving. A kind of "harmony" has been achieved (even if in an anti-utopian sense). But Zamyatin's OneState is still marked

by many unresolved social and political tensions.

This situation may reflect the author's dialectic and revolutionary political philosophy. Even if he criticizes the Soviet regime, he maintains his revolutionary and progressive position, since he is disillusioned by how the spirit of the Bolshevik revolution has turned into dogmatism[52]. For Zamyatin, revolution must become a constant process in order for the social transformation to take place at both an individual and collective level[53]. This attitude is expressed by I-330 in the novel. Even after his initiation in the Mephi rebel cult, D-503 is still under the influence of state propaganda and thinks that the revolution that allowed the regime to seize power was the last revolution possible. Through a mathematical demonstration, I-330 wants to demonstrate that, just as there is no final number, "[t]here is no final [revolution]. The number of revolutions is infinite"[54]. She knows that their revolution, even if it will succeed, will ultimately become outdated and will be replaced by another one, since the law of infinite successive revolutions is dictated by "psychological entropy"[55].

Even in the city-nature dialectic, Zamyatin does not conclude that one is superior to the other. Just as the rationalist social order of the modern industrial city ignores or suppresses individual needs and wishes, so their uncontrollable expression in the wilderness outside the urban space results in the loss of a sense of security and social cohesion[56]. From Zamyatin's perspective, history progresses dialectically between order and freedom, but no principle can singlehandedly offer all the answers to questions of optimal social organization. As Peter Saint-Andre notes, this is the point in which Zamyatin separates himself radically from Rand, since the latter "sees a need for one alternative to overcome its opposite, thus cleansing the world of its sins in al almost apocalyptic fashion"[57]. This apocalyptic vision is precisely at the center of *Anthem*, the last dystopian text my paper is concerned with.

## *Anthem*: An Ode to the Self

Although Ayn Rand's *Anthem* (1938) was published almost twenty years after Zamyatin's novel, its conception can be traced back to the beginning of the 1920s, before the author emigrated from the Soviet Union to the Unites States[58]. The layout of the plot is similar to *We*: the protagonist, Equality 7-2521, writes in a journal in which he narrates his transition from a puppet of a collectivist totalitarian regime to a free and independent individual on the run from the state, with the help of a female character, Liberty 5-3000. However, even if there are many superficial similarities between the texts and although both authors believe in the value of human individuality[59], their attitude towards the role of technology distinguishes them.

As already mentioned, Zamyatin does not judge technology in itself, but the ways in which it is instrumentalized by humans. Rand, on the other hand, is not necessarily interested in technology's utility (which is of secondary importance for the protagonist), but especially in how it can uncover the human spirit. In comparison to the previous dystopias, in which scientific rationalism was a significant value and in which the main aim was technological development, the state imagined by Rand refuses science because it may have harmful

effects on society. The Council of Scholars determines the knowledge level acceptable for the ordinary citizen, even if it means returning to the theory of the flat Earth and to outdated medical practices[60]. People do not even have access to electricity anymore due to this anti-scientific and anti-technological spirit, a reality which lays the groundwork for the author's demonstration. The protagonist's curiosity grows ever greater and his revolt against the authority of the Scholars manifests itself through his dedication to science. The search for knowledge becomes an almost religious quest: "We forget all men, all laws and all things save our metals and our wires. So much is still to be learned! So long a road lies before us, and what care we if we must travel it alone!"[61].

For Rand, the free spirit of the individual is intimately connected to the wish to excel. As soon as Equality (re)discovers electricity, he presents his findings to the Council of Scholars. They criticize his hubris very strongly, since he believed that he, as an individual, is wiser than his fellow men. For the Council, "[w]hat is not done collectively cannot be good"[62]. This reaction causes a revelation for the protagonist: although he believed that the satisfaction he derived from his scientific work came from the conviction that it will lead to a better life for others, he realizes that he saw his invention as an end in itself, its effects and applications notwithstanding[63]. In other words, Equality realizes that he was searching for his own inner fulfilment through work, because a vital activity is its own reward. His Prometheanism does not presuppose that the genius has an obligation to the good of the community, but it means that each individual has the duty to search for his own path to self-fulfillment, in this case through scientific and technical research.

Rand's view on the value of technology is very similar to that presented by Oswald Spengler in *Man and Technics* (1931). Being an addendum to his well-known work, *The Decline of the West*, the text focuses on the relationship between man and the evolution of technology. In Spengler's vision, technical advancement is not a consequence of utilitarian considerations, but of an inner desire of surpassing oneself:

> In reality the passion of the inventor has *nothing whatever* to do with its consequences. It is his *personal* life-motive, his *personal* joy and sorrow. He wants to enjoy his triumph over difficult problems, and the wealth and fame that it brings him, for their own sake. Whether his discovery is useful or menacing, creative or distributive, he cares not a jot […] All great discoveries and inventions spring from the delight of strong men in *victory*. They are expressions of personality and not of the utilitarian thinking of the masses, who are merely spectators of the event, but must take its consequences whatever they may be[64].

Thus, any human deed represents a revolt against nature. But she proves to be stronger than man, which leads to the tragedy of the great civilizations[65]. Spengler's pessimism becomes the source of a dark vision of the future, in which "treason to technics"[66], i.e. its subjugation to an exclusively utilitarian thinking, will be its downfall, since it will be destroyed and then forgotten by future generations.

Spengler's apocalyptic picture of a society in ruins, which lost all scientific and technical knowledge necessary for its development, is very similar to the dystopian society imagined by Rand. However, the latter has a more optimistic perspective, since she believes in the excellence of man's spirit. After Equality, joined by his female partner, rediscovers the significance of the word "I", he becomes a spokesman for Rand's philosophy. Equality 7-2521 and Liberty 5-3000 start as mere numbers and they turn into individuals only when they name each other: Equality becomes "the Unconquered" and Liberty is baptized as "the Golden One"[67]. These names undoubtedly hold symbolic value and the characters gain mythical proportions through them. In fact, Rand's aesthetics has been suggestively named "Heroic Symbolism" exactly because her protagonists are ideals of virtue illustrating the best that humanity has to offer[68]. Running from state oppression, the couple arrive in the forest, where their mythological character becomes even more evident when they take the names of Prometheus, the light-bringer, and Gaea, "the mother of the earth and of all the gods"[69]. Culture and nature, the rebellious scientific genius and the great goddess of fertility live together at the edge of the world. However, as opposed to Zamyatin's novel, the male character is the mentor of the female one, since he is the one that has begun retracing humanity's progress through innovations in science and technology.

Therefore, Rand sees technology as a way of escaping the levelling tendency of a totalitarian state. Equality revolts against the idea that the genius must conform to the mediocrity of the masses. Through its protagonist, the novella displays the author's philosophy, Objectivism, very clearly. From a political and economic point of view, Objectivism stands against any form of collectivism and embraces a *laissez-faire* libertarian form of capitalism. From a literary perspective, Rand writes in order to present Man as "an end in himself"[70]. She wishes for the individual to have value as an individual and to fight against any attempt of forceful integration in a collective where he is forced to betray his values. The individual, always rational and driven towards self-fulfillment, should not be required to provide any justification for his striving. The unconditional love promoted by the regime in Rand's text is not an authentic one, since it does not involve volition. That is why, in the author's view, collectivism is not a form of love for the other, but an insidious desire to subordinate everything to an abstract and dehumanizing collective will. The hymn of the collective synthesizes this perspective very well: "We are one in all and all in one, / There are no men but only the great WE, / One, indivisible and forever"[71].

Rand has received numerous criticisms, especially regarding the fact that, in her philosophy, collectivism represents any appeal to the "common good" and that her ideology is just an extension of a "militant Protestantism" according to which hell is other people and the individual may cooperate only if it is in his own interest[72]. On the one hand, it is true that the ideal of freedom expressed by the protagonist is a freedom from others: "There is nothing to take a man's freedom away from him, save other men. To be free, a man must be free of his brothers. That is freedom. This and nothing else"[73]. This view appears to be incompatible with any attempt of establishing a community, since living together

implies that the collective can come to an agreement regarding certain more or less strict rules. From this point of view, Tocqueville is right: individualism can easily degenerate in a form of egoism attacking all other members of the community[74].

Nevertheless, we should reflect on the context in which the author writes her novella. The Bolshevik revolution had destroyed the life of her bourgeois family, which led to her emigration to the United States. This experience influenced her political philosophy and generated her repulsion towards any form of communitarianism. Seeing how totalitarian regimes, especially communism, invoked ethical principles in order to sow terror in the name of the common good, Rand decided to react in the opposite direction: she wrote in order to recover the virtues of individualism. The hymn of the collective is countered by the creed of the protagonist: "I AM. I THINK. I WILL"[75]. Existence, reason and will are consubstantial, they cannot exist in isolation. Rand's philosophy does not exclude cooperation, but it has to be a result of every person's individual will. Even in such an ideal case, "in the temple of his spirit, each man is alone"[76].

Equality concludes his journal with an almost religious vision, in which he is the one that will free all slaves and his house will become the center of a new world in which everyone will live for themselves[77]. As the protagonist of a dystopia condemns an entire society if he loses his mind or if he accepts the legitimacy of the totalitarian state[78], the new Prometheus delivers his whole community through the revolt of the ego. For him, the whole meaning of existence will center around the sacred word "EGO", in honor of which Rand writes her text[79]. Leonard Peikoff mentions that *Ego* was the working title of the novella, which for the author was not a symbol, since it meant "Man's Self" (i.e. his reasoning capacity) literally and not allegorically, as she mentions in a letter[80]. Although Rand's vision is undoubtedly one of a radical individualist, it should be evaluated in the turbulent context in which the text is conceived and published. In the end, as Tocqueville notes, the dangers of freedom are easy to identify, whereas an intelligent critique of equality requires an agile mind and a lucid sense of discernment[81].

## Conclusion

To conclude, I will return to the dystopian and anti-utopian character of the texts discussed. As already mentioned, the three writers offer a critique of their contemporary society, as well as of various utopian models prominent at the beginning of the 20th century. The taxonomy elaborated by Gregory Claeys is very useful for determining concretely which models the authors have in mind[82]. Owen Gregory criticizes not only the German Empire of Wilhelm II, but also any technological utopia by imagining the scientifically advanced Meccanian Super-State governed with mathematical precision. From a historical point of view, Yevgeny Zamyatin feels betrayed by the USSR, since it abandoned its revolutionary promises. However, his doubt also extends to the hedonistic utopia of the Mephi and, more broadly, to the *Gemeinschaft* utopian projections built on the faith in the possibility of reaching the end of history through a final revolution. Among the three authors, only Ayn Rand seems to propose a utopian project opposed to the

one she rejects: by combating the utopia of "Order and Restraint", she promotes a utopia of "Personal Autonomy", as well as one marked by the "Romantic Authentic Identity", which would imply the return of the "externalized self-as-God", to use Claeys' terms[83]. This is made very clear by her heroic protagonist and the new world he dreams to create. Rand does not necessarily reference a historical totalitarianism (even though her Russian origins cannot be ignored), her critique focusing on any repressive regime following a collectivist model.

In summary, dystopian fiction represents one of the best sources for investigating and understanding the political energies in the first decades of the 20th century. This genre is a product of a time of crisis, with manifestations of extremism appearing on all sides of the political spectrum. The diverse utopian ideas circulating in the period, often linked to ever more rapid forms of industrialization, are reflected in the various ways in which writers use the dystopian imaginary in order to elaborate their own vision regarding the political and technological threats that risked to afflict the whole globe, some of which unfortunately became a reality despite the warnings offered by dystopian literature.

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**2.** Erika Gottlieb, *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001, p. 37-38.
**3.** Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, *Imaginariile politicului*, translated from French by Ionel Buşe and Laurenţiu Ciontescu-Samfireag, Bucureşti, Paideia, 2005, p. 72-73.
**4.** Gregory Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 298.
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**7.** Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, Oxford and New York, Basil Blackwell, 1987, p. 127.
**8.** Gregory Claeys, *op. cit.*, p. 271.
**9.** *Ibidem*, p. 269-270.
**10.** Erika Gottlieb, *op. cit.*, p. 8-9.
**11.** Krishan Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 125.
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**13.** Corin Braga, "Lumi ficţionale. O taxinomie a genului utopic", in Corin Braga (ed.), *Morfologia lumilor posibile. Utopie, antiutopie, science-fiction, fantasy*, Bucureşti, Tracus Arte, 2015, p. 59.
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**16.** Owen Gregory, *Meccania: The Super-State*, London, Methuen, 1918, p. 298.
**17.** *Ibidem*, p. 229.
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**19.** *Ibidem*, p. 228.
**20.** *Ibidem*, p. 41.
**21.** *Ibidem*, p. 53.
**22.** *Ibidem*, p. 199-200.
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**24.** *Ibidem*, p. 334.
**25.** *Ibidem*, p. 341.
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**27.** Owen Gregory, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
**28.** Corin Braga, *Pour une morphologie du genre utopique*, p. 406.
**29.** Owen Gregory, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
**30.** *Ibidem*, p. 239.
**31.** *Ibidem*, p. 91.
**32.** *Ibidem*, p. 167-168.
**33.** *Ibidem*, p. 238-239.
**34.** *Ibidem*, p. 250.
**35.** *Ibidem*, p. 251.
**36.** Erika Gottlieb, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
**37.** Owen Gregory, *op. cit.*, p. 188.
**38.** *Ibidem*, p. 283-284.
**39.** The original Russian text was published in 1952 outside the USSR and the first Soviet edition appeared only in 1988.

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**44.** Erika Gottlieb, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
**45.** Julia Vaingurt, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
**46.** Yevgeny Zamyatin, *op. cit.*, p. 5-6.
**47.** Julia Vaingurt, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
**48.** *Ibidem*, p. 124.
**49.** Erika Gottlieb, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
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**51.** Peter Saint-Andre, *op. cit.*, p. 290.
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**56.** Phillip E. Wegner, *op. cit.*, p. 163-165.
**57.** Peter Saint-Andre, *op. cit.*, p. 292.
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**73.** Ayn Rand, *Anthem*, p. 101.
**74.** Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Translation by Henry Reeve, Ware, Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 1998, p. 205.
**75.** Ayn Rand, *Anthem*, p. 94.
**76.** *Ibidem*, p. 96.
**77.** *Ibidem*, p. 104.
**78.** Erika Gottlieb, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

**79.** Ayn Rand, *Anthem*, p. 105.
**80.** Leonard Peikoff, *op. cit.*, p. v.
**81.** Alexis de Tocqueville, *op. cit.*, p. 203.
**82.** Gregory Claeys, "When Does Utopianism Produce Dystopia?", in Zsolt Czigányik (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 45-47.
**83.** *Ibidem*, p. 45.