

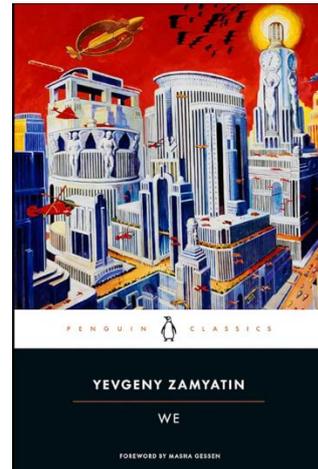
Book Review: Yevgeny Zamyatin's WE

George Taylor

Nottingham Trent University

BA English (Hons)

N1195518@my.ntu.ac.uk



We is a book about the fears of totalitarianism, losing your sense of self and being forced/ coerced by the 'state'. The book about the fears of totalitarianism and being spread beyond the scope of Earth. It's a critique about the human nature being controlled and wanting a constant state of order and freedom, for example D-503 (our main character) and R talk about how disorderly their ancestors were for smoking tobacco, mainly because the vapor can't be controlled, and that they control imagine a world without the green wall (a giant dome over the city) as everything in the green wall is controlled, and compare it to how 'unruly' nature is outside the cities, this is where O-90 runs out to with her child to experience freedom with their child.

In 'We' the reader follows the story of D-503 an engineer for Integral, a spaceship whose goal is to spread the ideology of the 'One State' to other planets. D-503 is obsessed with numbers as that's what he needs to get his objective done, as numbers are orderly and the answer to the universe. The ship is a military vessel, as

the 'One State' wants to become a universe spanning empire.

By the end of the book D-503 is being operated on to have his imagination and freedoms striped from him after the rebellion he was involved, being 'mathematically' corrected while watching his rebellious lover I-330 also getting tortured.

The ending is bleak but the fate of the 'One State' is left ambiguous, giving the reader some hope as O-90 (D-503's assigned sexual partner) was able to bear a child in her freedom, unlike the ending of the book it inspired '1984' where Winston is brainwashed into becoming a compliant worker for Oceania and believes the words of 'Big Brother' a character who was inspired by the 'Benefactor' character, the is a similarity between D-503 and Winston shows how much We inspired George Orwell's writing.

Like 1984 the 'One State' in 'We' lies to the people to keep them inline and to control every aspect of their life. Another example is the control over their sexual lives. D-503 and O-90 by the start of the book are already assigned as partners by policy, but O-90's foil is I-330 who shamelessly flirts with D-503 in front of O-90. I-330 breaks all the laws of the 'One State' like smoking, drinking and of course flirting with D-503 even though he has an assigned partner. This can be connoted as a deconstruction of societal norms.

Later in the book I-330 reveals to D-503 that she is part of the rebellion known as the Mephi (related to a demon from German folklore). And D-503 becomes a part of the rebellion when having unsanctioned sex with I-330. I-330 also helps O-90 with the birth of her and D-503's child, helping her look past breaking the rules. This love triangle could also be interpreted as sexual freedom as in the early 20th century there was fixed laws disregarding homosexuality.

During when 'We' was published it was shortly after the Russian Revolution, and for the typical attitudes of the Soviet Union towards media that criticised forms of government, Yevgeny even though he was a pro-Bolshevik, he wrote 'We' as a response to the individual freedoms being suppressed after the Bolsheviks lost the 1917 Russian general election where they disregarded the election and took control over the country installing a totalitarian regime with Lenin as its dictator. This led to another civil war between the White

army and the Soviets. This war would lead to the execution of the Tsar's the former royal family of Russia.

It can be interpreted that the 'Benefactor' character who the readers assume to lead the 'One Nation' is a Lenin insert, someone who is devoted and committed to the communist manifesto above all and who notably rejected all forms of criticism. Lenin like the benefactor clings to power at any cost, even the lives of innocent people, this sentiment would later be echoed by Lenin's successor Joseph Stalin.

Yevgeny was blacklisted from publishing any of his works' post 'We' and being imprisoned for third time in 1922 only being let out by his friend Maxim Gorky. In 1931 he was granted permission to leave the Soviet Union by Joseph Stalin, he left for Paris and died 6 years later from a heart attack while living in poverty.

His works including 'We' was made popular in underground publishers known as samizdat's. But in 1988 Gorbachev made most banned (mainly western), able to be published in the Soviet Union, including 'We' and the book it inspired 1984. We is one of the rare books that even though criticises dictatorial government that is still free to read in Russia.

My rating: ★★★★★