

Reality in Unreality: Dystopian Dictums in Zamyatin's *We*

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Abstract: *This paper portrays the political influence in the storyline and includes a lot of biological and psychological scientific innovations to create a world where life and death are more systematized and enjoyable. There is no concept of marriage as well as family life. The only licensed governmental activity is sex, which is clandestine and promiscuous. The human spirit of Zamyatin which is against the mathematical society of his novel can be envisaged through the idea of reflecting how life should be lived amidst scientific progress can be seen through the quote expressed by Zamyatin himself.*

Key Words: *Reality, Unreality, science fiction, communism.*

We, by Zamyatin is a dystopian science fiction fantasy which projects the lives of people in the twenty sixth century. The novel is an extrapolation of the socialist Russia and its iron fisted dominion over its subjects in case the present scenario of communism continues. The novel faced many bottlenecks before its publication which was refused on the grounds of its ideological improbabilities. The novel though scripted in Russian has many translations and republications in Czech, English and French except its source language because, even today, the dystopian novel finds its way outside Russia, many years after the death of its author of the year 1937. The novel was a pioneer in creating a disgusting nightmare of totalitarianism and continued to heavily influence writers from Orwell to Ayn Rand.

The cardinal concern and the devastating similarity between *We* by Zamyatin and *Brave New World* by Huxley are that, both these novels refute the upsurge of a mechanized, restricted and emotionally painless society created in the name of perfection. The stories in both these novels take place after six hundred years and both the novels evoke the victory of human spirit against scientific spirit. The only palpable difference is that, Huxley's novel shows a lesser political influence in the storyline and includes a lot of biological and psychological scientific innovations to create a world where life and death are more systematized and enjoyable. There is no concept of marriage as well as family life. The only licensed governmental activity is sex, which is clandestine and promiscuous. The human spirit of Zamyatin which is against the mathematical society of his novel can be envisaged through the idea of reflecting how life should be lived amidst scientific progress can be seen through the quote expressed by Zamyatin himself. He says,

A man is like a novel; until the very last page, you don't know how it will end. Otherwise, it wouldn't be worth reading. You are afraid of it because, it is stronger than you; you hate it because, you are stronger than it. You love it because; you cannot subdue it to your will. Only the unsubdueable can be loved (www.goodreads.com).

The citizens of the state are designated numbers than names because, these numbers can be replaced unlike names and secondly, these numbers are an indirect inference to the idea that the numbers designate a unifying identity of a citizen to state. These numbers derive meaning only if they are a part of the society and become obsolete if they come out of the restricted wall of the society. The number is designated to signify the fact that identity rests within the society. When a citizen learns that he is of value only if he stays with the limits of the walled society, he develops allegiance and therefore understands that his identity is linked to the other members of the society. It is therefore mandatory to be within the collective identity because, individual identity cannot secure any individual in the One State.

The mathematical society of WE, was deemed to the model of a perfect society which can be considered as a working model to conquer other places outside the walled society. The only surviving evidence is the dairy of D-503 which delineates the life in this chaotic society. The language of the one state is socially constructed and framed according to the ideals laid down by the Benefactor, the god of the One State.

What remains outside this order can only be ridiculous and a source of embarrassment because, it would be as irrational as not believing that two times two equals to four. Since it is the case that One State is taken into account as the other side of the equilibrium in a mathematical operation like two times two, it is possible to argue that not following One State's principles are as absurd and irrational as claiming, for instance that two times two equals to five. (WE 9)

There is a misleading idea that is conveyed to the citizens that, something that is irrational and mathematical is not real and therefore the language was constructed to present only the rational quotient and any segment of the language that gives ideas of the emotional quotient is done away with. The language is devoid of abstract nouns such as love or

jealous as nonexistent and therefore only the ideas which were concrete found its way into the language. This becomes one of the reasons in the novel as to why the narrator, D-503 does not understand the feelings of another number, I 330 when he says, “Maybe that nonsense about love and jealousy is not just in stupid old books” (WE 63).

The language of the One State intentionally left the words that convey the abstract thoughts like love, hatred or jealousy because, these words were used by the people in the government to convey their emotions in governing a state. On the other hand, the citizens were forbidden to use these words because, the government feared that its citizens may rebel their governance if they are given the freedom to express their emotions in its fullest form. It is similar to the language, INGSOC, which is the shortened form of English Socialism, a language used by the citizens of Oceania, in the novel 1984 by George Orwell. The words which conveyed strong and powerful meanings were intentionally left to become a part of the language of the citizens.

The words in the language of the novel WE, as framed by the government has a twofold purpose. On the one hand, the words that convey a deeper meaning are given a newer meaning. These words which carried a certain meaning in the ancient times were now given a rationally new meaning. The second, is there were certain words in vogue only to prove that these words were absurd in its meaning and were used by the ancients with a purpose of rationality. Only those words which provided logic in language began to be used by the citizens of One State. Zamyatin, gives an example of how the word human heart, which is a platform to express human emotions is merely labeled as something that which uses to pump liquid. D-503 observes

That’s all the heart is –an ideal pump; a pump sucking up a liquid– to call that compression, contraction, is a technical absurdity; from which it follows how absurd, unnatural, diseased are all these ‘loves and pities’ and anything else that’s supposed to cause this compression (WE 165).

The language of the One State is formed by keeping the language of the ancients as a foil. These words were formed by juxtaposing the language of the ancients with the language of these citizens. By constantly comparing the language of the ancients, the government of the One State wants to prove that the language of the ancients had no purpose because it had no sense of rationality. These techniques are followed by the One State to show its superiority to its citizens and also bring it to their minds that they want to form a perfect society which is devoid of irrationality and illogicalities. It was instructed to the citizens that the language was framed in the society to provide a political and social stability to all its citizens but ironically, the language was full of resistance and blocks which was an impediment to the thought process of its people.

The ancient language finds its use to the government which uses it as a tool to reframe the language which is devoid of emotions and meaning for use by the citizens. The other segment which uses the ancient language is a rebel group called Mephi, which works underground to overthrow the Benefactor, the Demy-God of the One State. These rebels want to break the green wall, which stands with its towering tallness to draw a line of difference between the people of the One State and the outside world. The undercover activity of the Mephi is described by the narrator in the novel as

These are, fortunately, no more than little chance details; it is easy to repair them without bringing to a halt the great eternal progress of the whole Machine. In order to discard some bolt that has gotten Mephi’s are the members of the revolutionary organization called Mephi which works for overthrowing the “rational order” of One State by destroying the green wall that surrounds the civilization bent, we have the heavy, skillful hand of the Benefactor, we have the experienced eye of the Guardians. (WE 15)

D-503, the loyal servant to the orders of the government has his moment of realization after his encounter with I-330. He used to think that the purpose of the heart was only to pump blood but now, after personally realizing the struggles of his friend, he understands the significance of Mephi. The narrator also comes to know that the government had purposely banned the Mephi as fugitive because it did not want Mephi to usurp its governance by overthrowing its operations. D-503 comes to know that the same heart is the source for all human emotive. He also understands the concrete meaning for the abstract words such as love or jealousy.

The concept of soul was considered something which has no absolute meaning by the One State. It considered that the bounden duty of any law-abiding citizen was to employ the system of language dictated by the government to use it to establish the superiority of its governance across other places and if possible, bring its glory to the other planets. The reason, the government did not include words that did not have any rational meaning was that, these words of emotion may subdue an individual and make him emotionally weak thereby render him mute in serving the government to its fullest. The government asserts that all its citizens are extremely sensible and rational beings. These subservient emotions would rather disturb its stability and pose a threat to the governmental progress and it therefore decided to shun the words which evoke any painful emotions or abstract feelings. This was the reason why the government in the novel WE, abolished the past and derided history. the government felt that any connection with the past would render an individual become affiliated to any institution in the past and made him an individual who has thoughts of his own.

The narrative of the novel follows the technique of stream of consciousness which has a series of disjointed thoughts written in the form of a secret diary. He gives in his diary many insights of his personal life and strongly feels

that any individual is the product of his society and therefore its mandatory to have a society based on reality and rationality so that the citizens can be law abiding and sincere. The term ancient society was given by the government of One State to make it realize the wastefulness of life lived by these citizens in the past. Once the past is destroyed the roots to the ancient world is lost.

George Orwell was greatly influenced by two historic texts before writing his last novel, 1984. The first was, *The Iron Heel* by Jack London and the next was, *WE* by Zamyatin. Critics point out the primary difference between Orwell and Zamyatin with regard to their novels. For D-503, during the closure of the novel, he had a ray of hope that the government would be overthrown by Mephi, the rebellious group underworld. Therefore, the novel ended with a note of optimism fantasizing a glorious future. On the contrary, the novel 984 has a bleak futuristic time line where the past and the future are destroyed forever by the government of Ocenia as mentioned by O'Brien, a character in the novel, 1984. By destroying the past, the government creates a no affiliation scenario for the citizens to cling on to. They all become a bunch of collective numbers whose purpose is to wield the government by becoming a cog in the wheel under this massive mission of the government.

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