
From the Writer

My initial step in the writing process is always to read the novel with a pen in hand. As I read, I underline significant quotes, recurring symbols, ironies, and inconsistencies. I even write questions in the margins. I find I am a less passive reader with a pen, and, when it comes time to choose a topic, I am well prepared, already having a collection of questions I am genuinely curious about. Once I have chosen a topic, I repeat the process with potential sources, marking the authors' main ideas and noting any weaknesses in their arguments. Sometimes, when searching for a topic, it can be just as effective to work backwards, letting the sources spark some initial questions. Such was the case with this paper.

I became interested in religious allusions in *We* after my professor required the class to read Richard Gregg's essay. After a discussion with my professor, I was convinced that I had enough support to argue the role of I-330, and not D-503, as the Christ figure. In my rough draft, I attacked Gregg's essay and provided a list of allusions that supported I-330 in the role of Christ. My professor gave two important criticisms of my draft, and fixing them proved my greatest challenge. First, my argument lost its credibility because it was guilty of the same faults I had attacked in Gregg's essay. I couldn't criticize Gregg for ignoring religious allusions that pointed to I-330 as the Christ figure and simply list those allusions. My argument was equally guilty of ignoring allusions that indicated D-503 was the Christ figure. Rather, I needed to explore why Gregg was wrong, and it was his approach to the novel that I eventually chose to attack. Secondly, my thesis was supported by a list. I learned that paragraphs should not be lists of evidence proving the same point but should each contain smaller arguments that build upon one another. What started out as my rough draft, a list of allusions pointing to I-330 as Christ, in the end was just one point in my final paper.

— Rachel Fogley

I-330: COUNTERPART OF CHRIST IN ZAMYATIN'S *WE*

Religious allusions and imagery play a prominent part in Yevgeny Zamyatin's classic dystopian novel, *We*. With characters drawing direct parallels between their "mathematically perfect li[ves]" in OneState and Paradise of the Old Testament, *We*, with its Genesis theme, has been a popular subject of scholarly discussion (Zamyatin 4). Richard Gregg is no exception to this discussion, and, in his essay "Two Adams and Eve in the Crystal Palace: Dostoevsky, the Bible, and *We*," he characterizes D-503's account of OneState as a tragic counterpart to the Biblical tale. Gregg continues to examine another "Biblical pattern" in his essay, the Christ parallel, citing symbols and images to argue the classification of D-503 as the Christ figure; yet, he remains "doubtful whether its artistic integration into the novel as a whole is entirely successful," noting that Zamyatin's "symbolic patterns . . . blur and blunt more than they intensify" (65, 67). However, a conception of the novel as operating on two distinct levels both clarifies these symbolic patterns and suggests that the Christ parallel is a Biblical allusion that has been undervalued. Indeed, a number of allusions and images that Gregg excludes from his discussion reveal a more complete integration of the Christ parallel throughout the novel. These allusions and images interestingly point to I-330, not D-503, as the counterpart of Christ in OneState, consequently relegating D- to the role of what Andrew Barratt has called the "imperfect disciple" (68).

An understanding of the novel as functioning on separate levels helps to categorize its numerous Biblical references and images into two independent patterns: those of Paradise and the life of Christ. The first level concerns the way in which the characters themselves, the Numbers

of OneState, view the series of events in the novel, notably the rebellious actions of I-330. This level is comparable to Paradise, and, as mentioned above, the Numbers go so far as to liken their society to Eden of Genesis: “The old legend of Paradise—that was about us, about right now. . . . We helped God finally overcome the Devil—because that’s who it was that pushed people to break the commandment and taste freedom. . . . And we’re simple and innocent again, like Adam and Eve” (Zamyatin 61). In light of this first level of interpretation, I-330 is cast in the role of Eve, the seductress who persuades Adam to taste the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (*NRSV Bible*, Gen. 3.1–7). Similar to her Biblical counterpart, I-330 plays the seductress and convinces D-503, Adam, to rebel against OneState by joining the Mephi cause and tasting the freedom of beyond the Green Wall. I-330, like Eve, is responsible for the loss of D-503’s innocence and for his rebellious behavior. (During the launch of the INTEGRAL, D-503, under the influence of I-330, attempts to land the spacecraft on the other side of the Green Wall) (Zamyatin 197). Gregg’s argument operates on this first level of the novel, citing “a forbidden food, a bite, a figurative fall, and sinful intercourse” as support for the classification of OneState as a tragic Paradise: “If Genesis is tragic because Paradise was lost, and man’s happiness forfeited, its modern analogue is tragic because in the end Adam is saved and his ‘glass paradise’—putatively at least—preserved” (63, 65).

Gregg’s description of the Paradise of OneState as tragic touches upon the second level on which *We* operates: the way in which the reader—and likely Zamyatin—views the events in the novel and the behavior of I-330. While the comparison of OneState to Paradise is appropriate for the Numbers, it is not so from the author’s and reader’s perspectives. Zamyatin wrote *We* as an imitation of, perhaps even a warning against, the totalitarian tendencies he perceived in the Soviet Union following the Revolution. The novel is dystopian because, while OneState’s members perceive their society as operating perfectly, the author’s intention was likely to reveal the worst of all situations. Indeed, the novel is tragic—to the reader, not the Numbers of OneState—because D-503, I-330, and her band fail in their revolt for freedom. On this second level, the Christ parallel is a more accurate allusion than that of Paradise; for I-330 develops not as the figure responsible for the condemnation

of humankind but the one responsible for its redemption—or, at least, attempted redemption. The parallel between I-330 and Christ is a connection Gregg overlooks, despite substantial evidence in the novel for its support.

Gregg, rather, argues for the shifting of D-503 between the roles of Adam and Christ. (As mentioned previously, Gregg’s analysis does not explore Biblical patterns based on two distinct levels of the novel.) However, Gregg’s case for the connection between D-503 and Christ has weaknesses, and some of his central claims may similarly be used to support the argument for the role of I-330 as Christ. Gregg notes that the scene of D-503 before the Benefactor after the attempted rebellion “bears a bizarre yet unmistakable resemblance to that of Christ in the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor”: “Silent (like Jesus), [D-503] listens to the stern arraignment by his superior as the latter rejects the concept of freedom” (66). Andrew Barratt has similarly supported this resemblance in his essay “The X-Factor in Zamyatin’s *We*,” and this case may be argued as an instance where Gregg has claimed Zamyatin’s “symbolic patterns . . . blur and blunt” (668; 67). Yet, equally arguably, I-330 maintains silence when facing the questioning of the Benefactor, who demands the names of her cohorts, and suffering the torture of the Bell: “This happened three times, and she still didn’t say a word” (Zamyatin 225). Gregg also claims that, in the role of Christ, D-503 has “failed in his endeavor” “to liberate mankind” (66). However, he overlooks an important point: the liberation of the pregnant O-90 through her escape to the other side of the Green Wall. This point supports a triumph of freedom with the help of D-503 and, most notably, I-330, either both acting as parallels to Christ or as parallels to Christ and disciple (a categorization for D- explored later in this paper). Gregg finally makes one fatal assumption in his analysis of D-503 as the Christ figure, noting that paradoxically, as Jesus sacrificed himself so that humankind would be free, D- “submits to the machine,” ensuring that OneState will remain enslaved (67). No evidence, in fact, exists to warrant such an assumption, and one could equally argue that, in the moment of his enlightenment—“There where your finite universe ends—what’s there . . . beyond?”—, D-503 is “seized” like his neighbor, not self-sacrificed (Zamyatin 224). Zamyatin even provides direct textual evidence in support of this point: “That evening they seized my neighbor . . . and me . . .

and charged us with not having the certificate of the Operation, and took us off to the nearest auditorium” (224). Furthermore, as Gregg admits, the mere idea that D- undergoes the operation to ensure the enslavement of OneState is paradoxical, contradicting the message of freedom surrounding the sacrifice of Christ; conversely, I-330 remains true to her message of freedom through the end, refusing to betray her cause in her state of silence. Thus, though Gregg’s case for the classification of D-503 as the Christ figure is rooted in concrete parallels and allusions, therefore possibly complicating the two distinct levels this paper has claimed the novel operates on, it is quite arguable. Nonetheless, the parallel of I-330 with Christ shows a more successful integration throughout the novel than Gregg has claimed for D-503’s parallel with Christ and the New Testament symbolic pattern in general.

The complete integration of the connection between I-330 and Christ is supported by the character’s actions; the actions that are, in turn, taken against her; and D-503’s perceptions and relationship to the events, which are further supported by a series of largely overlooked religious allusions and images. The actions that link I-330 to Christ, and result in her condemnation by OneState, largely concern her rebellious behavior, apparent on both levels of the novel; for, as Eve she threatens the perfect system of OneState and, as Christ, the imperfect system.

Just as Jesus sought to bring a message of God’s truth and love—and the possibility of eternal freedom from sin through faith—to the Jewish state, I-330’s actions reflect her objective to bring freedom, love, and genuine happiness to the Numbers of OneState. Similarly, as Christ’s message of a higher power, God, threatened to undermine the power of the Jewish authorities, so I-330’s ambitions for freedom and love endanger the foundation of OneState. I-330’s revolt for freedom is most apparent in her plot to destroy the Green Wall and undercut the INTEGRAL mission, which seeks to spread the submissive OneState mentality throughout the universe. Her cry for freedom is heard in her rally with the Mephi beyond the Green Wall: “The day has come when we will demolish this wall, all walls” (Zamyatin 151). The leader’s message concerning love and true happiness is communicated through her influence on D-503 and the narrator’s resultant transformation from obedient Number to rebel. D-’s diary serves as evidence that the happiness guaranteed by OneState—which the narrator

once glorified—is an empty happiness when compared to the fulfillment I-330 brings him. D-503 explains that OneState has ensured happiness by eliminating “love and hunger” and emphasizing the power of logic over the power of love (21, 23). Yet, after establishing a relationship with I-330, D-503 writes of a different kind of fulfillment: “How full I am! If only you knew how full I am!” (74). He later remarks that the mere sight of I-330 “fill[s] the empty . . . world” for him (83). Indeed, I-330 literally, through her love, gives D-503 a soul (86). In knowing the true happiness that accompanies love, D-503 looks back on the so-called happiness guaranteed by OneState with doubt. A distinction between the empty happiness of OneState and the true happiness given by I-330 is revealed upon D-503’s acceptance of a certificate of illness (which he knows, but will not directly admit, will allow him to meet with I-330 the next day): “I knew that some sort of happiness was waiting for me tomorrow. But what sort?” (89). D-503’s questioning the so-called happiness guaranteed by OneState is again directly revealed when he sees a pair of yellow eyes beyond the Green Wall and asks himself, “And what if yellow-eyes, in his stupid, dirty pile of leaves, in his uncalculated life, is happier than us?” (91). Thus, though sexual gratification undoubtedly contributes to D-503’s new sense of happiness—an approach that lacks any parallel with Christ’s methods—I-330’s role as the bearer of a more fulfilling happiness and liberator of the soul has strong connections with the mission of Jesus, as do her aspirations for the freedom of OneState.

The condemnation of I-330 by the Benefactor for her rebellious actions and the Mephi leader’s consequent torture under the Bell successfully integrate popular Christian themes of sacrifice, suffering, and hope into the novel. The theme of sacrifice is directly introduced by D-503 when he compares his situation to that of the Old Testament figure Abraham, referring to the Biblical story of the Sacrifice of Isaac. To elaborate, D-503 perceives his feelings upon discovering that S-4711 is an ally of the Mephi as similar to those Abraham must have felt when, in the moment before he took a blade to his son as a sacrifice to God, an angel swooped down from the heavens to stop him. (God allowed Abraham to sacrifice a ram instead of his son (Gen. 22.1–19).) This Biblical allusion proves highly significant, for the story is regarded as an Old Testament parallel to the Lord’s sacrifice of his only son: Christ. I-330’s own suffering and martyr-

dom are recorded only two pages after D-503's reference to Abraham and Isaac. Another allusion to Christ's sacrifice and suffering concerns D-503's comparison of the Guardians to "thorns" on "the gentle State Flower" of OneState when glorifying the "famous 'Mathematical Rhymes'" taught to schoolchildren (Zamyatin 67). This image cannot simply be regarded as coincidence when one considers the role of the Guardians in capturing I-330 and her band. Indeed, the image of the thorns serves as a Biblical reference; for, just as Jesus was made to suffer under a crown of thorns, I-330 is fated to suffer the torture of the Bell after her capture by the Guardians: the thorns (Mk. 15.17; Zamyatin 225). In the end, one may argue that though I-330 as Christ is the martyred figure, her death brings no salvation, a central theme in the Christian faith. With his imagination removed, D-503 does not even appear to recognize his savior; yet, a trace of I-330's everlasting lay in D-'s statement: "When they started pumping the air out of the Bell, she threw her head back, and half closed her eyes and pressed her lips together, *and this reminded me of something*" (Zamyatin 225, italics added). Perhaps, a more palpable sense of hope for the salvation of OneState's Numbers and the legacy of I-330 lies in the flight of the pregnant O-90, who, with the help of I-330, escapes to the other side of the Green Wall (183–185). Further still, D-503's account does not end with a clear victory for OneState; for, as he writes, "In the western quarters there is still chaos, roaring, corpses, animals, and, unfortunately, quite a lot of Numbers who have betrayed reason" (225). The messages of hope for freedom and the legacy of I-330, though less emphasized than their Biblical counterparts, exist nonetheless, together with the themes of sacrifice and suffering, underscoring the role of I-330 as the Christ-figure.

Finally, D-503's record of his physical perceptions of I-330 and the way in which he relates himself to her at times in the novel supports her role as the counterpart of Christ. Perhaps subconsciously, D-503 links I-330 to the instrument of Jesus' crucifixion and most dominant Christian symbol, the cross, through his physical description of her face. As Barratt notes in his analysis of the transforming X-factor in *We*, the X formed by the dark eyebrows and facial lines of I-330's smile is referred to as a cross by D-503 at two crucial points in the novel: the Mephi leader's vote in opposition to the Benefactor and her revealing of the Mephi plot to D-503 (667). During these two moments when I-330's fateful suffering is

sealed, the narrator writes of a “cross on her brow” (Zamyatin 138–139). Though the instrument of I-330’s suffering in the end is not a literal cross, as in the case of Christ, the leader must endure the agony of the Bell three times (225). Unquestionably, I-330’s suffering fate and martyrdom, more than any other character in the novel, parallel the fate of Christ, and D-503’s physical identification of the character by the image of the cross highlights this connection. An account of D-503’s relationship to I-330 in the moment he foresees her suffering not only provides further evidence for the role of I-330 as the Christ figure but also may present readers with indisputable evidence for her categorization. In a conversation when D-503 is summoned to the Benefactor after the failure of the Mephi mission, the ruler of OneState discusses the crucifixion of Christ and the equal roles of executioner and onlooker: “Some are up on the top, bespattered with blood nailing the body to the cross; others are below, bespattered with tears, looking on” (206). When D-503 later foresees the execution of I-330 in a dream—“the Machine of the Benefactor,” “a blindingly white pillow,” “a reclining head with half closed eyes,” and “a sharp, sweet band of teeth”—he remarks: “It must have been raining: my face was wet” (208). Here, the sharp band of teeth clearly indicates I-330 in the moment of her suffering at the hand of the Benefactor and, most importantly, the wetness of D-503’s face is a direct reference to the Benefactor’s speech, to the wet faces of both executioner and onlooker. If D-’s wet face classifies him as an onlooker, only I-330, the victim of the Bell’s torture, can be classified as the object of the “crucifixion.” D-503, in describing his relationship to I- at the moment of her martyrdom, therefore secures the parallel between the Mephi leader and Christ by providing a direct, textual connection.

With I-330 strongly established as the Christ-figure, the classification of D-503 as the role of disciple logically follows. This categorization, like that of I-330 as Christ, shows a more successful integration into the novel than Gregg has claimed for that of D-503 as the Christ figure. Indeed, Gregg’s claim that D-503 resembles Christ—and D-’s own conception of himself as the martyr—in his attempt to “liberate mankind” seems futile when one considers that, had it not been for I-330, D- would never have joined the Mephi cause to liberate the Numbers of OneState (66). Likewise, it is I-330 who appears as the leader of the rebels, “up high, over the heads, over everybody,” when D- visits the other side of the Green

Wall (Zamyatin 150–151). A case for D-503 in the role of disciple is conceivably more accurate. As D-503 in the role of Adam is at first reluctant to submit to I-330 as Eve—“This woman was just as irritating to me as an irrational term”—so D-503 is at first reluctant to follow I-330 as the rebellious Christ. In his analysis of the X-factor, Barratt provides strong support for the role of D-503 as disciple to I-330 (Zamyatin 10). He notes that by divulging the secret Mephi plan to commandeer the INTEGRAL, I-330 forces D-503 “into the position of having to prove himself by making a conscious choice between OneState and the Mephi” (Barratt 667). Consequently, a sense of moral responsibility weighs on D-503, and, as Barratt has asserted, “Like Peter in the gospel story, [his] loyalty [is] put to the severest test, and . . . he [is] found wanting” (667). Indeed, like Peter, who thrice denied Christ after the crucifixion, D-503 betrays the Mephi cause: “The following day I, D-503, reported to the Benefactor and told him all I knew about the enemies of happiness” (Mk. 14.66–72; Zamyatin 224). Barratt observes another betrayal of I-330 by D-503, this time akin to that of Judas. He remarks, however, that “the betrayal occurs by default rather than by [D-503’s] design,” meaning that the betrayal is not planned but a mistake; D- inadvertently “leav[es] his journal around for the informer Yu- to inspect” (Barratt 668). Similarly, D-’s report of his knowledge of the Mephi to the Benefactor is not a deliberate betrayal but an act beyond his control after he has been subjected to the operation. Yet, by default or design, the reality of D-503’s imperfect discipleship still remains, and his relationship to I-330 and the revolt for freedom echoes that of the flawed follower, not the redeeming leader.

In the end, Gregg’s failure to understand the complex structure of *We* leads him to judge the novel as an artistic failure; for he asserts that the novel should be appreciated less for its Biblical “symbolic patterns”—which “blur and blunt more than they intensify”—than for the sheer “boldness and ingenuity of its satirical concept” (67). In profound contrast to Gregg’s judgment, this paper has revealed the remarkable artistry behind Zamyatin’s work. By infusing his work with two distinct and contradictory levels of meaning—a view of Paradise, as observed by the Numbers of OneState and an attempt at redemption, as viewed by the reader—Zamyatin was masterfully able to construct simultaneous Biblical patterns within the framework of one narrative. Ultimately, the patterns

are not intended to confuse but to offer greater meaning to the text. The message, like the structure, is complex; for, to the Numbers of OneState, *We* is the account of an established Paradise threatened by the forces of evil, and, to the reader, it is the account of a fallen world confronted with the hope for redemption.

NOTES

1. I-330's silence further supports the theme of her sacrifice (discussed later in this paper); unwilling to name her accomplices, she continually endures the torture of the Bell.

2. Subsidiary allusions that are beyond the scope of this essay include the scales mentioned on page 9, suggesting a reference to Christ as the Last Judge (“[I-330] weighed me with her eyes as if I were on a scales”) and the position of I-330 to the right of D-503—which the narrator repeatedly mentions when he imagines himself as the creator of OneState and, therefore, likens himself to the ancients’ God on page 8. Christ is said to have ascended into heaven and been seated at the right hand of God the Almighty (Mk. 16.19). In his essay, Barratt discusses another apt allusion, observing the capture of I-330’s Mephi cohorts as being “twelve in number” (668). With religious allusions and images woven throughout the novel, Zamyatin’s choice of the number twelve can be no mistake. The Bible records that Jesus had twelve apostles, and the capture of twelve Mephi is significant in that it indicates that I-330, their leader, parallels Christ, the leader of the twelve apostles (Mk. 14.17).

3. Another allusion to Christ’s sacrifice concerns D-503’s journey beyond the Green Wall with I-330, who appears as the leader of the Mephi and speaks of future triumph over OneState. The narrator describes the group as drinking from a communal cup (Zamyatin 150–151). This sharing of the cup may allude to the Last Supper, during which Christ discussed his future sacrifice, symbolized by the shared chalice (Mk. 14.21–25). Further, as Christ perceived his capture, so I-330 knows that her demise is approaching (and possibly sacrifices herself to see D-503 one last time): “They’re waiting for me downstairs” (Zamyatin 216).

4. The author’s choice of the number three at this critical point in the novel may serve as a reference to the Holy Trinity.

5. Gregg cites D-503’s sense of “solitude akin to that of Jesus before His crucifixion: ‘And though I were driving the nails in the corpse or being nailed to it (perhaps it is the same), she would hear what no one else could hear’” (67).

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