

# Water imagery and the emotional status of d-503 in we



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When it comes to innovative stylistic and thematic techniques in *We*, Zamyatin does not disappoint. Every detail of this novel is deliberate, from the colors of objects to characterization of names. While a heavy emphasis is often placed on the dystopian aspect of *We*, just as much can be said about the symbolism behind it. Water, in particular, plays a subtle but crucial role in the evolution of characters and the dystopia. Imagery and diction involving water are utilized by Zamyatin throughout *We* to symbolize the One State and D-503's developing state of mind.

Zamyatin establishes the relevance of water early in *We* in order to better portray his emotional progression and establish the characteristics of the One State. When D-503 describes a room as "flooded with pale blue sunlight," Zamyatin is familiarizing the reader with words that are related to water in some way (Zamyatin 4). The term "flooded" has cheerful connotations, having been used in relation to sunlight. This introduces the recurring water theme as a positive force for D-503. Zamyatin continues with this pattern on the next page by referring to four members of the One State as "but one of the innumerable waves in this mighty stream" (5). This metaphor is meant to depict the way in which the people marched every morning. Zamyatin's use of the word, "waves" suggests that the marching had the same fluidity and consistency that waves often do. Referring to the group of people as a "mighty stream" has powerful connotations, and suggests that seeing these members of the One State evokes feelings of pride for D-503. The connotations of particular words and characterizations of One State members aid in establishing water as a crucial theme in *We*.

D-503 first associates water with structured aspects of the One State. This quickly becomes apparent in a seemingly unimportant story told by a lecturer. While the message isn't immediately made clear, Zamyatin is deliberate in his use of words involving water. When the lecturer says, "every time the barometer indicated 'rain' it actually rained," water is directly associated with the One State (16). Due to the repeated use of rain in this speech, a connection between the lecturer and water is made both for readers and for D-503. This makes water a symbol for the dystopian society immediately in *We*. In addition to the story itself, the way in which D-503 describes the words provides imagery that is also associated with water. He refers to the voice of the lecturer as a "vitalizing stream" that "flowed" from the speakers (16). Zamyatin's choice to use the word "vitalizing" once again shows D-503's love for the One State and associates water with positivity and strength. "Flowed" also has powerful connotations, suggesting that the lecturer's words are very forceful. This symbol is also used later in the novel, as the One State begins to deteriorate. When D-503 says to "imagine yourself standing on the shore," Zamyatin is using the same wave metaphor as earlier to describe the members' daily walk (125). However, the repetition is quickly discontinued when D-503 says, "the waves rise rhythmically, then, having risen, suddenly remain there- frozen, congealed" (125). Zamyatin shows that both the water and the One State are approaching chaos. Words such as "frozen" and "congealed" have negative connotations and are interpreted as unsettling when compared to diction used in previous chapters. "Frozen" and "congealed" are used to describe water at freezing temperatures, which gives the impression that they are figuratively stuck in place. This connection between water and the One State

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is deliberate and helps to better demonstrate the deterioration of D-503's society over the course of *We*.

Unlike the One State, the water symbolism involving I-330 is meant to symbolically counter her beliefs and personality, which are often associated with fire. This is particularly evident when D-503 describes a night that he became inebriated. In describing the drink as "fiery poison", Zamyatin makes both the alcohol and I-330 oppositions for the One State in the same way that fire is an opposition for water (56). His use of the word "flowed" has forceful implications, and suggests that I-330 is becoming just as powerful in D-503's life as the One State. Zamyatin goes on to say that he grips the arms of his chair "as though clutching at a straw." This comparison allows D-503 to make literal sense of his inner conflict between fire and water. As hard as he may try, D-503 is unable to quench the "fire" that is figuratively inside of him. The description also makes D-503's desperation to stay loyal to the One State abundantly evident. Towards the end of the novel, the physical representation of D-503's inner conflict is revisited with a cup of water. When complaining that his "mouth was dry as though lined with blotting paper," the character finds himself unable to pour any water (223). Zamyatin returns to this metaphor to show the evolution of D-503's relationship. While D-503 feels conflicted, he ultimately chooses the One State over I-330. This is depicted through the fact that he "gulps it down greedily" the next morning (223). Zamyatin's use of fire in contrast to water when referencing I-330 is a perfect representation of D-503's inner conflict over the course of the novel.

Water is also used to show both the inner turmoil of D-503 and outer turmoil of the One State in the later chapters of *We*. Zamyatin at one point describes D-503 sinking into sleep like an “overturned, overloaded ship” (100). The use of words such as “overturned” evokes feelings of hopelessness, which is fitting for D-503’s emotional state. D-503 then calls the ocean he’s metaphorically sinking into a “heavy, dense mass of green water” (100). The fact that this water is described as green, rather than blue, could be indicative of impurity and symbolize the guilt D-503 feels for breaking regulations with I-330 in the previous chapter. While the use of ocean imagery gives insight regarding inner turmoil, water is used in later chapters to show disturbance in the One State as a whole. D-503 mentions a building members are avoiding “as if a pipe had burst there” and “cold water were gushing out” (149). The metaphor involving a pipe that has burst is less pleasant than those of earlier chapters, and could symbolize the downward trajectory of the One State. Zamyatin uses the word “gushing” to evoke a stronger response from readers and to foreshadow the importance of D-503’s upcoming discovery of the Mephi. The depictions of turmoil through descriptions involving water allow Zamyatin to portray both inner and outer conflicts in *We*.

The novel concludes with water themes as a final form of closure for D-503. In a scene that leads up to the operation that gives members completely over to the One State, D-503 says that it “must have been raining” because his “face was wet” (215). Zamyatin’s use of rain again associates rain and water in general with the One State, along with its victory over D-503. However, the context of this quote could insinuate that D-503 is crying, a

clear representation of negative emotions towards the dystopian society. While D-503 seems conflicted when sitting on the steps, his devotion to the One State is unwavering when talking about “ high-voltage waves” at the very end of *We* (232). This use of the word “ waves” isn’t meant to be a direct reference to water. Rather, Zamyatin includes “ high-voltage” to show the manipulation of the term “ waves.” Instead of the cheerful connotations water symbolism had in earlier chapters, “ high-voltage” is dark and violent. The fact that these waves involve high-voltage electricity carries very negative connotations and suggests that water (the One State) is ultimately responsible for destroying the rebellion. Despite negative connotations regarding the situation, D-503 seems very positive, suggesting he is finally one with the One State. Ultimately, Zamyatin shows the deterioration of D-503 and the One State through his increasingly dark utilization of water symbolism, diction, and imagery in *We*.