

For the love of love



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Sexual relations have different social implications depending on the society in which they take place. Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* is a 19th century novel and Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* is a 20th century novel. Both novels portray the imperfect realities of coupling, yet in very different fashions. *Anna Karenina* focuses more in depth on the third person relations between characters, while *We* narrates D-503's perspective. Both give the reader the understanding that society impacts the value of the relations between man and woman. The consequences of those actions are also depicted.

In order to have imperfect relations, there must be an ideal. Both novels inexplicitly explain an unidentifiable perfect couple. In *Anna Karenina*, this consists of a married man and woman, who peacefully interact socially and in the bedroom. *We*'s flawless couple includes a male Number and a female Number who have no emotional connection and "have the right of access to any other's Number as sexual product" simply to satisfy human need for sex (Zamyatin p. 22). These are very drastically different social implications: one insists on an emotional bond, and the other frowns upon it. Yet in both, social perfection is desirable.

In order to maintain the image of perfection, characters from both books endure discomfort. "The Karenins, husband and wife, went on living in the same house, met everyday, but were completely estranged from each other," because it upholds their image of an ideal couple (Tolstoy p. 353). Tolstoy writes, "The Karenin, husband and wife," emphasizing their role to each other and that both are partaking in the establishment of the image. They must endure this because Anna decides she loves a different man. This

is not socially acceptable, so rather than either of them facing the embarrassment, they pretend like everything is normal.

In Anna Karenina the ideal couple is a happy and married. In We, there is not the image of perfect unity, rather there is the ideal estrangement. D-503 and O try to maintain this, with their regulating the Sex Day rules, and not calling each other " my." D-503, however, become infatuated with another Number, I-330. Because in their society, in theory, " there's no longer the slightest cause for envy," so when D-503 hurts O with his affections towards another Number, he must recognize the faults with both himself and the system (Zamyatin p. 23). O loves D-503, and when she admits this, D thinks to himself, " What savage terminology - " mine." I was never... But I suddenly caught myself: It occurred to me that I wasn't before, true, but now..." (Zamyatin p. 76). Here he understands the difference in society's ideal and the reality. He was not socially hers, but emotionally he was. Now he loves I-330, which should not happen. He calls the word " mine" " savage" because it is from " the Ancient Days," and has been socially discarded; the feeling has not subsided.

The feeling of ' mine-ness' and deviating from the social norm is depicted in a drastic manor in each novel. In Anna Karenina, when Anna and Vronsky consummate their relationship, rather than the ideal perfect union, their coupling is compared to a dead body. Tolstoy emphasizing the unnatural reality of their relationship writes, " And as the murderer falls upon this body with animosity, as if with passion, drags it off and cuts it up, so he covered her face and shoulders with kisses" (Tolstoy pp. 149-150). This is a very horrific scene. Besides the word " murderer," other words like " animosity," "

drags,” and “ cuts,” give the reader the understanding that Anna has killed her potential for the ideal relationship. She has allowed herself to enter a dark place.

D-503 does not enter a dark place, but a place of freedom. Previously, he was only allowed to sleep with someone when other prescribed it, and only allowed as much emotional attachment as society deems appropriate. When D-503 and I-330 consummate their relationship, D-503 later describes the experience “... I tasted the swallow of burning poison, and another and another, and I broke free of the earth, a free planet, whirling furiously, down, down, along some orbit yet to be calculated” (Zamyatin p. 56). This “ free planet” depicts the freedom that D feels, the magnitude of it all. But it is mixed with the “ poison.” This toxin is arguably the alcohol, which D tastes for the first time, but is also possibly the forbidden love. He knows that estrangement is the ideal, yet he cannot help his feelings for I-330, making them toxic. His romantic interest in I-330 is poison for his relationship with O and his relationship with OneState. He feels free, despite all the issues, because he has a more humane kind of love.

With humane love, there is hurt. In Anna Karenina, Vronsky, learning the consequences of his actions, discovers Anna is pregnant. His experience is described, “ At this news he felt with tenfold force an attack of that strange feeling of loathing for someone that has been over him” (Tolstoy p. 188). This feeling of attack is the discomfort in love. Society perceives that a man and woman should be married to have sexual relations. Vronsky and Anna are not, and through Anna’s pregnancy, they will have to face the humiliation of breaking the ideal. This is uncomfortable.

D-503 experiences a similar discomfort in his new relationship with O. Since impregnating her, he has a more humane, and less robotic, relationship with her. With this, however, comes hurt. While he gives her what she wants, he does not love her. At this point, he recognizes his role in hurting her. O rubs his arm, as if to say, it'll be ok. D thinks, “ This was some kind of ancient caress that I'd never heard of... I felt such hurt and shame that I jerked my hand back (probably a little too roughly)” (Zamyatin p. 164). He reacts so sharply because he is unfamiliar with affection, and is aware that he has enabled this kind of affection. He feels guilty.

If one followed the social standards, he or she would not feel guilty. Both in *Anna Karenina* and in *We*, the couples are imperfect because they do not follow the expectations of that society. Anna decides she does not wish to follow the expectation of marriage, and D-503 decides not to act in estrangement. Tolstoy and Zamyatin depict very different societies, but both suffer from human love. The similarities in the character's trails highlight the inevitable struggle for perfect love, but the consequences of this inability.