

ACTS OF REBELLION: E-330 IN ZAMYATIN'S *WE* AND JULIA IN ORWELL'S *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR*

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When Yevgeny Zamyatin was writing *We* in 1920, the figure of the 'femme fatale' had reached an apotheosis in Western art, literature and society. The 'femme fatale' had been labelled with the attributes for seduction and the ability and capability to destroy. She was depicted as a woman of beauty blessed with the power to allure but also capable of beguilement, evil and destruction. She was not satisfied with the seduction of her lover, she had to destroy him. She could be remote, cruel or sensuous, evoking desire and reverence, or she could evoke contempt, disgust and even fear in her victim. This product of male fantasy and imagination pervades our literature as the demon lover, witch, sorceress disguised in the raiment and beauty of an angel.

In *We*, it is E-330 who is the 'femme fatale'. She succeeds in seducing D-503 (women members are allotted vowels, men are allotted consonants) away from his mathematical happiness, his 'oneness' with the One State and introduces him to all that is prohibited therein: to colour and fantasy, to alcohol and cigarettes, to the 'savage freedom' which exists on the other side of the Green Wall, the wall which keeps the members of the One State from escaping. E-330 leads D-503 on a dance of death. Like a spider, she spins an invisible web around her victim, trapping him in a world of chaotic colour so loud that they drowned any logical course of thoughts' (*We*, p. 169). E-330 entangles him, not in silence but in cruel laughter. Her laughter is tinged -or rather, tainted- with colour:

Laughter comes in different colours. It is only a remote echo of an explosion within you; it may consist of festal rockets, red, blue, golden; it may consist of gobs of human flesh blown skyward.

(*We*, p. 210)

D-503 is a hapless victim, as he struggles in vain to escape from his entangle-

ment with E-330 with the only weapons he knows: reason and logic. These weapons, however, are of no avail when he looks into her eyes and sees his own reflection captive in them. E-330's eyes are like deep dungeons, hiding unknown danger, terrible secrets, in their depths. They are 'eerily dark windows'. When D-503 looks into them he is taken on a journey into the unknown, into an alien and frightening land.

To resist E-330's guiles is impossible. She appears in many guises and is difficult to avoid. She is a whore, a demon lover and vampire. Her teeth are very sharp and upon her lips is traced the deadly smile of Medusa; her mouth is:

blood, a gash made with a keen knife. (*We*, p. 80)

D-503 soon realizes that this hurricane of love is a dance of death: his death. It is his reflection in E-330's eyes, however, that is doomed, not he, himself. By an ingenious twist of fate, D-503 knows he will betray her to the Guardians of the One State and that he is doomed to become E-330's executioner.

It is obvious that E-330 is more than a 'femme fatale'. She is also a revolutionary and rebel against the mathematical One State. She is the spokeswoman for the Mephis (from 'Mephistopheles'), the enemies of the One State, who live on the other side of the Green Wall. *We*, the title of the dystopia, stands for the members of the One State and, as Anthony Burgess suggests in *1985*, it could allude to a slogan of Bakunin:

I do not want to be I, I want to be We. (*1985*, p. 53)

Nonetheless, it could also refer to D-503 and the conflict between his two I's: on the one hand, as a faithful member of the One State, representing reason, logic and '100 per cent mathematical happiness' and on the other hand, his second I which is to be found in the reflection of E-330's eyes, representing his irrationality, fantasy, colour and his link to the dwellers on the other side of the Green Wall.

E-330 is conscious that D-503 will betray her to the authorities and yet, when this happens, she remains cool and calm, a strong woman up to the last, refusing to give any information about the Mephis even under torture. E-330 continues true to her cause to the end.

In George Orwell's dystopia, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Julia, too, is young and beautiful. Whereas E-330 is full of fantasy, Julia is very much a practical down-to-earth woman whose frankness often surprises Winston. She, like E-330, is also a rebel -but in the personal sense- within her own private sphere. Orwell misogynistically describes Julia as 'a rebel from the waist down' (p. 138), who is only capable of serious thought if it concerns her own sexuality. Her promiscuity adds to the attraction Winston feels towards her:

His heart leapt. Scores of times she had done it: He wished it had been hundreds-thousands. Anything that hinted at corruption always filled him with a wild hope.

(1984, p. 111)

Winston is not attracted to Julia for what she is but for what she represents. His desire to possess her is not motivated by physical attraction alone but by a desire to rebel, to commit 'sexcrime', to react against Big Brother. The more corrupt Julia is, the more attracted Winston is towards her. Committing 'sexcrime' with Julia is Winston's blow struck against the Party' (1984, p. 112). 'Sexcrime' is considered a dangerous political act of treason.

Julia is not interested in conspiring against the Party and Big Brother in order to bring about their fall. Her rebellion is expressed in evading Party vigilance and the Thought Police. The kind of freedom she seeks is personal freedom to do what she wants, to express her sexuality freely. Although she resents the Party's absolutism on sexual matters, Julia believes that it is possible to create a 'secret world in which you could live as you chose' (1984, p. 120). Julia's cunning and boldness, mixed with a certain measure of luck has allowed her to find the small secret room which Winston and she rent and which becomes their utopia within dystopia. The room is the real world; what lies outside the room is the nightmarish world of the Thought Police, the Telescreens and the vigilance of the other Party members. Inside the room there is safety and protection; an oasis where simple pleasures can be enjoyed. Eating real chocolate, drinking real coffee sweetened with real sugar, smoking real cigarettes. It is Julia who brings these black market delicacies to the room. She, too, takes risks. Of the two, Winston and Julia, it is often Julia who is the greater rebel. Where Julia gives, Winston receives. Julia makes the plans, Winston obeys. Julia is alive, she is real:

I'm real, I'm solid, I'm alive! (1984, p. 120)

She refuses to sympathise with Winston's despair. Within the room she casts off her drab Party uniform, dons make-up and perfume, and dreams one day of wearing stockings and high heeled shoes, preferring to be 'a woman, not a Party comrade' (1984, p. 127). Winston, however, cannot transform himself, as Julia does within the room and deeply resents Julia's ability to cast off the Party traits, and when he sees her new image degrades her to the level of a whore and considers her to be incapable of political thought. Winston seems to be quite unfair in this opinion of Julia. It is true she does commit an unpardonable crime by falling asleep when he reads aloud from the forbidden book, but there is no doubt that Julia is aware of what is happening. She is certain that Goldstein and the Brotherhood are simply inventions of the Party. The war was probably not happening either, the rocket bombs that were falling on London were doubtlessly fired by the Party itself. One war after another, whether against Eastasia or Eurasia, the news that the Party

issued was all lies. Julia's weakness is not that she is unable to understand politics but that she is certain that the Party is invulnerable, and that any sort of organised revolt against it would be foolish and doomed to failure. The Party exists; Julia cannot change it so she lives with it:

The clever thing was to break the rules and stay alive all the same.

(1984, p. 117)

Because Julia is clever, she has joined the Anti-Sex League, and to keep her own sexuality in camouflage she would yell and shout the loudest in the Two Minutes Hate to resist her strong desire to explode into laughter.

If you kept the small rules, you could break the big ones.

(1984, p. 115)

Julia is willing to take risks but only for things that are worthwhile: for the room and for all it represents. Herein lies her identity as a rebel.

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Note: Quotes in the above text pertaining to the dystopian novels have been followed by the relevant page number in brackets. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been shortened to *1984* for the sake of brevity.