

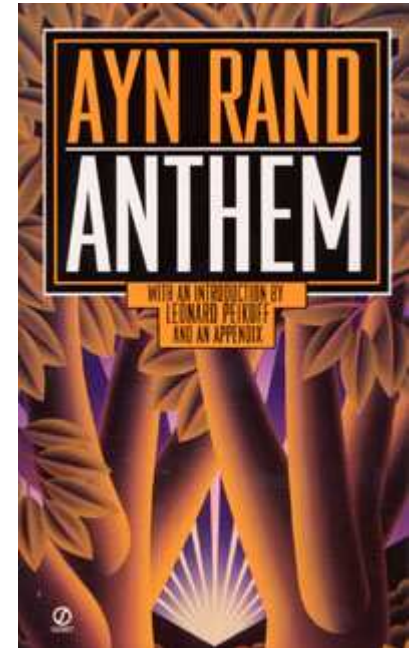
Anthem (novella)

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Anthem (ISBN 0451191137) is a science-fiction novella by Ayn Rand, first published in 1938.

Anthem is a dystopic science fiction story taking place at some unspecified future date. As a result of what Ayn Rand saw as the weaknesses of socialistic thinking and economics, mankind has entered another dark age. Technological advancement is now carefully planned (when it is allowed to occur, if at all) and the concept of individuality has been eliminated. As is common in her work, Ayn Rand draws a clear distinction between the "socialist/communal" values of equality and brotherhood and the "productive/capitalist" values of achievement and individuality.

Many of the novella's core themes, such as the struggle between individuality and collectivization, are echoed in Rand's later books, such as *The Fountainhead*.



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Plot synopsis

Equality 7-2521, writing in a tunnel under the earth, explains his background, the society around him, and his Emmigration. His exclusive use of plural pronouns (*we* and *they*) to refer to himself and others is immediately obvious. He recounts his early life. He was raised in the Home of the Infants, then transferred to the Home of the Students, where he began his schooling. At the latter, he realized that he was born with a curse: he is eager to think and question, and unwilling to give up his self for others. He excelled in math and science, and dreamed of becoming a Scholar. However, the Council of Vocations assigned him to the Home of the Street Sweepers.

Equality is assigned to work as a street sweeper to repent for his Transgression. He works with International 4-8818 and Union 5-3992. International is exceptionally tall, and a great artist. Union, "they of the half-brain," suffers from epilepsy.

However, he remains curious. One day, he finds the entrance to a subway tunnel in his assigned work area, and explores it, despite his colleague's protests that an action unauthorized by a council is forbidden. Equality realises that the tunnel is left over from the Unmentionable Times, and is curious about it. Every day, he enters the tunnel and undertakes scientific experiments.

Working outside the City one day, by a field, Equality meets and falls in love with a woman, Liberty 5-3000, whom he names "The Golden One".

Continuing his scientific work, he rediscovers electricity and the lightbulb. He decides to take his inventions to the World Council of Scholars, so that they will recognise his talent and allow him to work with them. He is also motivated by a socially instilled need to aid his fellow citizens. However, his absence from the Home of the Street Sweepers is noticed,

and he is arrested and sent to jail, from which he easily escapes.

The day after his escape, he walks in on the World Council of Scholars, and presents his finding to them. They are horrified, and reject it because it was not authorized by a Council and threatens to upset the equilibrium of their world. When they try to destroy his invention, he takes it and flees into the forest outside the City.

After living in the forest for several days, Equality stumbles upon the Golden One, who has followed him from the City. They embrace, and struggle to express their feelings to each other, despite having no knowledge of the word "I". They find and enter a house in the mountains, and decide to live in it.

Whilst reading books from the house's library, Equality and Liberty discover the word "I", and understand the word's sacred value and the individuality it expresses. They give themselves new names from the books: Equality becomes Prometheus, and Liberty becomes Gaea. As the book closes, Prometheus talks about the past, wonders how men could give up their individuality, and charts a future in which they will regain it.

Anthem and We

Anthem bears notable similarities to Yevgeny Zamyatin's novel *We*, which also influenced Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Like Zamyatin, but unlike Huxley or Orwell, Rand had some experience of the Soviet system.

We was published before *Anthem*, in 1920, and Rand would have been able to read it before it was translated into English. In fact she left Russia six years after *We* was published (Rand boasted that she had beaten both Orwell and Huxley into print with *Anthem*). *Anthem* was first published in English in Britain, in 1937, just after Zamyatin died in Paris. *Anthem* was written seventeen years after *We*.

Below is a list of the similarities and differences between the two:

Similarities

- The narrator speaks in the first-person plural, rather than the first-person singular, i.e. "We" rather than "I", at least to begin with.
- People have numbers, rather than names. Although this particular Hive/Ultra-Communist set up has been much copied since in science fiction, it was not so common when Zamyatin was writing.
- Both novels take the form of a secret journal or diary.
- The narrator is a male who is influenced positively by a female character.
- The society raises children away from their parents.

Differences

- *Anthem* takes place in a regressing society, "We" involves the setting off of a space craft to new worlds.
- Rand's characters win, but *We*'s undergo medical treatment.
- *Anthem*'s society has fuller control over its subjects.
- *Anthem* is serious, whereas *We* is more satirical.

Copyright status

The introductory text of the Project Gutenberg edition asserts that *Anthem* is in the public domain in the United States due to an unspecified failure of the rights-holders to renew its copyright at some unspecified point in the past. It is the only one of Ayn Rand's novels to be in the public domain in the United States, because she began her writing career after 1922.

It is still under copyright in other countries party to the Berne Convention, and will be until 2033.

2112

The title track on the 1976 concept album *2112*, by progressive rock band Rush, has a story that very strongly parallels *Anthem* (although, perhaps naturally, the protagonist of *2112* discovers a guitar instead of a light bulb). The liner notes of the album acknowledge "the genius of Ayn Rand."

Neil Peart, lyricist for Rush said that *2112* was based on Anthem and inspired by it; though he did say that he didn't notice that they were so alike until afterwards, and so thought that it was necessary to provide a reference. Through his success as a lyricist and drummer in pop culture, Neil Peart has become one of the biggest popularizers of Rand's ideas, although that was not the purpose of *2112* or his song "Anthem" on their earlier album *Fly by Night*.

Even though it was a successful album and came out a few years before her death, there is no widely known record of Rand commenting on the album. In fact, there is no evidence that she was ever aware of its existence. She had gone on record saying that she didn't like rock music, and made antagonizing comments on the fact that musicians "went back" to the use of drums during the 20th century in one of her essays on esthetics. This is at least mildly ironic considering that Neil Peart was not only Rush's lyricist, but also their drummer.

External links

- Book outline (<http://www.ayn-rand.com/ayn-rand-anthem.asp>)
- The Project Gutenberg E-text of Anthem (<http://www.gutenberg.net/etext/1250>)
- Annotated E-text (<http://www.noblesoul.com/orc/texts/anthem/complete.html>)

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