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Anthem as a Psychological Fantasy

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The opening of *Anthem* takes the reader into strange territory.

"It is a sin to write this," writes the narrator. "It is as if we were speaking alone to no ears but our own. And we know well that there is no transgression blacker than to do or think alone" (17). This is an arresting formulation of a peculiar sentiment; but the real shock comes with the revelation of who is referred to by the plural pronoun. "We are alone here under the earth," the narrator says—"there is nothing here save our one body, and it is strange to see only two legs stretched on the ground, and on the wall before us the shadow of our one head" (17).

The reader has been introduced to a mind unlike any to be encountered in normal experience—the mind of a man who, lacking the concept "ego," or "I," refers to himself as "we."[1] *Anthem* is the story of how this man discovers his ego.

In addition to its lack of realism, this central story premise has one striking characteristic: its purely mental orientation. The hero of *Anthem* goes from ignorance to knowledge of a fact about his own consciousness.

Anthem, in Ayn Rand's own words, is a *psychological fantasy*.[2]

The genre of *Anthem* follows from its central premise, and these in turn determine all of the novel's other distinctive features. Take, for instance, the *setting*. To explain the hero's predicament, Ayn Rand places him in a future collectivist "utopia" where the word "I" has been eradicated and everyone refers to himself as "we" and to another individual as "they."[3] The utopia's philosophy is expressed in the words cut in marble over the portals of the Palace of the World Council:

> *We are one in all and all in one.*
> *There are no men but only the great WE,*
> *One, indivisible and forever.* (19)

The hero has been taught this philosophy since childhood. His acceptance of it is the bar to his forming a concept of the ego.

The term "ego," in Leonard Peikoff's formulation, "designates the mind (and its attributes) considered as an individual possession."[4] In this regard, observe that the word "I" can be used as a noun; one may speak of "the I," meaning the mind or self of an individual, whereas "we" is merely a pronoun. But for the collectivist utopia in *Anthem*, the human mind is, fundamentally, a collective possession. Thus it is "we" that gets to be a noun—"the great WE"—and "I" is not even a pronoun.

If the collective mind has metaphysical primacy, then it is logically the arbiter of truth and goodness. Thus the hero of *Anthem* writes that “the World Council is the body of all truth” (19), and “the Councils are the voice of all justice, for they are the voice of all men” (22). Further, as the body of truth and the voice of justice, the collective mind is entitled to *reverence*. In nightly Social Meetings, the inhabitants of the collectivist utopia sing the Hymn of the Collective Spirit (27–28).

This context explains not only why the hero of *Anthem* lacks the concept “ego,” but also why his discovering that concept will be a prodigiously difficult task.

Note that he does have some awareness of himself as an individual. He can directly perceive his own body: “two legs stretched on the ground.” He has been given the name Equality 7-2521, and although this combination of a collectivist slogan and a number is meant to eradicate his individuality, it still distinguishes him from, say, Equality 7-2522. More significantly, when he says that “there is no transgression blacker than to do or think alone,” he knows that such is exactly what he is doing. “It is a sin to think words no others think and to put them down upon a paper no others are to see” (17). But this is the very sin he is committing. It is precisely for the individual exercise of the human mind that Equality condemns himself in the novel’s opening.

However, he *does* condemn himself—and there lies his problem.

Whereas the collective mind is (supposedly) metaphysically normal, epistemologically potent, morally good, and worthy of reverence, Equality has been taught that any individual exercise of the mind is just the opposite: a transgression and a sin. Add to this the fact that a man experiences his mind, not as a perceptible object, but as a continuous stream of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, memories, etc. To grasp these as constituting an *ego* is difficult enough in the ordinary case.[5] But so long as Equality regards his own mental actions as aberrant, impotent, evil, and loathsome, his isolation and integration of them into the concept of an enduring, autonomous *self* is impossible to him.

To form such a concept, Equality must first learn the true nature and significance of his mind.

He must live through the story of *Anthem*—the events of which correspond to the novel’s theme: “the meaning of man’s ego.”[6]

THE INTEGRATION OF STORY AND THEME IN *ANTHEM*

The Tunnel

The first chapter of *Anthem* is the story of a crime.

“We were born with a curse,” Equality writes in his diary. “It has always driven us to thoughts which are forbidden. It has always given us wishes which men may not wish” (18). And it has “brought us step by step to our last, supreme transgression, our crime of crimes hidden here under the ground” (20). That crime is Equality’s clandestine research in the old subway tunnel.

Written as Equality’s own retrospective on the steps which brought him to his crime, the first chapter poses two major puzzles, to Equality himself no less than to the reader. The first concerns Equality’s motive: why does he do that which he thinks is wrong? “We know that we are evil,” he says, “but there is no will in us and no power to resist [our curse]. This is our wonder and our secret fear, that we know and do not resist” (18). Compare Equality to Andrei in *We the Living*, who says: “If it’s right and you don’t want to do it—you don’t know what right is

and you're not a man."[7] This is how one expects an Ayn Rand hero to talk. By contrast, Equality is a mystery to himself, like the tormented St. Paul, who said: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Romans 7:19).

The second puzzle of the first chapter concerns the emotional effect of Equality's crime: unlike Paul, Equality is *not* tormented. The retrospective that begins with his consciousness of sin ends with his consciousness of a profound lack of guilt. "The evil of our crime is not for the human mind to probe," writes Equality.

> And yet there is no shame in us and no regret. We say to ourselves that we are a wretch and a traitor. But we feel no burden upon our spirit and no fear in our heart. And it seems to us that our spirit is clear as a lake troubled by no eyes save those of the sun. And in our heart—strange are the ways of evil!—in our heart there is the first peace we have known in twenty years. (36–37) [Equality is twenty-one.]

But the ways of "evil" are not as strange as Equality thinks. For what is his curse? It is "our cursed wish to know" (29). And what is the essence of Equality's crimes and transgressions? The exercise of his individual mind in struggling to understand the world.

In the Home of the Infants, he writes, "we fought with our brothers" (20). One can infer that this was the only way an independent but (at that age) intellectually helpless mind could resist the conformist pressure of the pack. In the Home of the Students (after the age of five), the nature of Equality's transgression changes: he is too bright. It "is a great sin, to be born with a head which is too quick" (21). Equality tries to be like Union 5–3992, "a pale boy with only half a brain" (21), but the teachers see through him and he is lashed. "We wished to know," Equality relates. "We wished to know about all the things which make the earth around us. We asked so many questions that the Teachers forbade it" (23).

It is his desire to know that leads Equality to the grave Transgression of Preference: he wishes to be sent to the Home of the Scholars. But the Council of Vocations, no doubt informed about his active mind, makes him a street sweeper instead. He resolves to accept the decision: "we would work for our brothers, gladly and willingly, and we would erase our sin against them, which they did not know, but we knew" (26). This is his "victory over ourselves" (26)—his attempt, in Paul's terms, to do "the good that I would" rather than "the evil which I would not."

Equality sustains his resolve for four years. His life in those years is described in *Anthem*'s longest paragraph, a monotonous catalog of bleak regimentation, stuporous routine, exhausting toil, and mindless propaganda—all of which leaves not a moment's room for thought.[8] "Such would have been our life," says Equality, "had we not committed our crime which changed all things for us" (29).

Triggered by his accidental discovery of the old tunnel from the Unmentionable Times, Equality's crime consists of his claiming the tunnel for himself, as his clandestine base for scientific research. For two years, he sits in his tunnel each night, melting strange metals and mixing acids; and in those years "we have learned more than we had learned in the ten years of the Home of the Students" (36). Although he judges his action as a sin, he is at peace with himself. "We wish nothing, save to be alone and to learn, and to feel as if with each day our sight were growing sharper than the hawk's and clearer than rock crystal" (36). Still, as we have seen, he cannot explain his deeper motive. "We ask, why must we know [the things on this earth], but [our curse] has no answer to give us. We must know that we may know" (24).

The actual answer, which Equality will eventually discover, is that he *has* a mind and that its nature is to perceive reality and guide his actions. To exercise his mind or not is his deepest choice—and *not* to exercise it is to blank himself out of existence. He is implicitly aware of this, since for four years his mind *did* lie dormant—as idle and irrelevant as the mind of Union 5-3992 (who had become his fellow street sweeper). And what he experienced in those years was not existence as a human being. This implicit knowledge is what makes him grab without a second thought at the fortuitous chance to conduct his research. Although he believes his desire and action to be evil, to act as he does is ultimately *not* a breach of integrity, since without his crime, there literally is no *him* whose convictions he could betray.

It is for the same reason that his "evil" brings him not a psychological punishment, but a psychological reward. He *has* an individual mind, and its function is to perceive, explore, and come to know reality. Each day in which his sight grows "sharper than the hawk's" is a day when his mind, and thus his *self*, is brought into its proper relationship to existence, and brought to life—which is the ultimate source of serenity and happiness. Equality is a long way from grasping all of this—because his *real* curse is not the wish to know, but his lack of a concept of the ego. However, the two puzzles he confronts in this chapter are themselves the first pieces of evidence in the chain that will eventually lead him to form such a concept, and thus to answer the puzzles.

It is clear how the events of the first chapter relate to *Anthem*'s theme—"the meaning of man's ego"—and to the core premise of showing a man who lacks, and then discovers, the word "I." A subtler issue is how the same events fit the novel's *genre.*

Observe first that Equality's adversary, the collective, is a faceless mass who hardly notices his existence. The obstacle posed by the councils to Equality is structural rather than dynamic: they *would* stop him if they knew what he was doing, so he is forced to act in secret. But they take no active measures against him, and he has little practical trouble in eluding their grasp. "It is easy to leave the Theatre" at night and to run through the darkness to his tunnel, and later "it is easy" to fall back in line as the column of street sweepers leaves the Theatre (35). Aspiring writers of suspense thrillers have nothing to learn from Ayn Rand's literary technique here.

Next observe that the big turning point in Equality's life is triggered by an accident. Once he finds the tunnel, he uses it purposefully to conduct his research. But he does not actively seek such a hiding place; he stumbles upon it. In this, Equality is unlike the typical Ayn Rand hero, who never lets his life course be determined by happenstance.

However, suppose Equality had not chanced upon the tunnel but, say, had dug a secret hole for his research, like the escape tunnel dug by the Allied prisoners of war in *The Great Escape.* Equality would then have been responding to a central conflict—the collective versus himself—with an assertive plan of action designed to overcome practical obstacles. The result would have been logical plot connections, melodramatic suspense, a stronger existential *story*—and a fatal displacement of focus away from Equality's *mind.*

In a plot story, like Ayn Rand's other novels, the link between the theme and the events is the element which Ayn Rand called the plot-theme. She described this as "the central conflict or 'situation' of a story—a conflict in terms of action, corresponding to the theme and complex enough to create a purposeful progression of events [i.e., a plot]."[9] By contrast, *Anthem*'s equivalent of a plot-theme is not an action conflict, but the premise of a man who lacks, and then discovers, the concept "ego." What facilitates the novel's integration of story and theme is a

psychological gimmick. This precludes the introduction of a central action conflict and a plot.[10] *Two* integrating premises is a contradiction—it is *dis*integration.

Ayn Rand has to maintain a careful balance in *Anthem.* She needs a coherent story, but she cannot let the elements of existential storytelling start to cohere on their own terms. In literature, physical action exerts a stronger claim on the reader's attention than introspective revelation, and any emergent *existential* basis of integration will wipe out a mental one. Therefore, to keep the focus on Equality's mental progression—to keep the "we" in his mind, and the eventual "I," from becoming mere stylistic garnish to an action drama—Ayn Rand downplays the existential conflict and makes a key turning point accidental.

Her stylistic treatment of the events serves the same purpose. It is Equality's *accidental* discovery of the tunnel that is dramatized across several pages, while his purposeful utilization of the tunnel to circumvent the collective—an action that follows logically from the preceding events—is merely synopsized in a few paragraphs.

Here, too, Ayn Rand demonstrates her grasp of what she is writing: a psychological fantasy.

Liberty 5-3000

"We do not know why we think of them," writes Equality of Liberty 5-3000. "We do not know why, when we think of them, we feel of a sudden that the earth is good and that it is not a burden to live" (41).

Equality's love for Liberty 5-3000 confronts him with new puzzles. For one thing, he has been taught that "all men must be alike" (19), but Liberty, and her response to him, prove that they are not. She tells him:

> "You are not one of our brothers, Equality 7-2521, for we do not wish you to be."
>
> We cannot say what they meant, for there are no words for their meaning, but we know it without words and we knew it then.
>
> "No," we answered, "nor are you one of our sisters." (43)

What makes Liberty differ from her sisters? "Their eyes were dark and hard and glowing, with no fear in them, no kindness and no guilt," Equality writes of his first sight of her. "They threw seeds from their hand as if they deigned to fling a scornful gift, and the earth was as a beggar under their feet" (39).

And what makes Equality differ from his brothers? "Your eyes are not like the eyes of any among men" (44), Liberty tells him in their first conversation. Later in the novel, she specifies:

> Your eyes are as a flame, but our brothers have neither hope nor fire. Your mouth is cut of granite, but our brothers are soft and humble. Your head is high, but our brothers cringe. You walk, but our brothers crawl. (82–83)

Equality and Liberty see in each other the exact same characteristic: an indomitable *pride.* It is a trait Equality has not yet consciously identified in himself. Yet his response to seeing such pride in Liberty is instantaneous: love at first sight. "And we stood still that we might not spill this pain more precious than pleasure" (39).

As Aristotle put it, in a passage that could have been written specifically about Equality,

> it is both a most difficult thing, as some of the sages have said, to attain a knowledge of oneself, and also a most pleasant thing. . . . And so, as when we wish to see our own face, we do so by looking into the mirror, in the same way when we wish to know ourselves we can obtain that knowledge by looking at the one we love. For the one we love is, as we say, another self. If, then, it is pleasant to contemplate oneself, and it is not possible to do this without having someone else whom one loves, the self-sufficient man *will* need someone to love.[11]

Equality is introspectively groping to conceptualize his self, but he is merely at the beginning of a long and torturous process. However, in Liberty he can perceive his self simply, directly, without groping, in an object of the external world.

His emotional response to this perception is no less intense for being, to him, mysterious. On the day when he first speaks to Liberty, he starts to sing without reason. "We are singing because we are happy," he tells the member of the Home Council who reprimands him. He is answered: "How else can men be when they live for their brothers?" (45).

Yet Equality can see that his brothers are not happy. "The heads of our brothers are bowed," he writes that night in his tunnel.

> The eyes of our brothers are dull, and never do they look one another in the eyes. The shoulders of our brothers are hunched, and their muscles are drawn, as if their bodies were shrinking and wished to shrink out of sight. And a word steals into our mind, as we look upon our brothers, and that word is fear. (46)

Clearly, his brothers are neither happy nor proud.

It is no literary coincidence that Equality meets Liberty after he has spent two years conducting research in his tunnel, i.e., after he has objectively earned the pride that is the bond between them. And it is probably no coincidence that his reflection on the state of his brothers occurs on the night after he has first spoken to Liberty. Through his relationship to her, he has gained a clearer sense of what he is, which has drawn his attention to the fact that "our brothers are not like us" (47).

For Equality, the evidence is accumulating. And it is precisely *as* evidence of Equality's ego that his and Liberty's love relate to the totality of the story. Observe that Ayn Rand abstains from turning the forbidden love into a melodramatic aspect of the conflict between Equality and the collective. To avoid detection, he and Liberty are forced to communicate partly by glances and gestures—but the subterfuge is elementary. By contrast, if Equality had stolen away in disguise at night for secret assignations with Liberty, the focus would have been displaced from his mental progression to the existential story. So Ayn Rand instead has him simply waiting for a fortuitous opportunity to speak to Liberty again.

When that opportunity comes, he gains another clue.

Equality and Liberty's love constitutes a celebration of their egos. This they do not explicitly understand, but at least Equality can name the emotional quality of what he experiences: it is a "pain more precious than pleasure" when he first sees Liberty, and "happiness" when he has first spoken with her. But in their next encounter, they both experience something he is unable to express directly in words.

The encounter takes place after Equality has discovered electricity, and thus has gained an even greater appreciation of his mental efficacy. He and Liberty exchange the names they have given each other in their thoughts: the Golden One and the Unconquered. At the end of

their encounter, the Golden One stands before Equality "as if their body were delivered in submission to our eyes" (56–57).

> Then they knelt by the moat, they gathered water in their two hands, they rose and they held the water out to our lips.
>
> We do not know if we drank that water. We only knew suddenly that their hands were empty, but we were still holding our lips to their hands, and that they knew it, but did not move.
>
> We raised our head and stepped back. For we did not understand what had made us do this, and we were afraid to understand it.
>
> And the Golden One stepped back, and stood looking upon their hands in wonder. Then the Golden One moved away, even though no others were coming, and they moved stepping back, as if they could not turn from us, their arms bent before them, as if they could not lower their hands. (57–58)

With its motif of submissive offering and exalted acceptance, this physical seal on Equality and the Golden One's love has the form of a religious rite, performed in reverence for the highest and most uplifted—but by worshipers who act like sleepwalkers, evoking the drugged trance of an Oriental ceremony. The scene is written as if Equality and the Golden One are the sacred vessels of something far beyond their conscious understanding.

And at this point, that is what they are.

The Power and the Light

"We, Equality 7-2521, have discovered a new power of nature. And we have discovered it alone, and we are alone to know it" (52).

Equality has rediscovered electricity—and it was not a lucky chance. Unknown to himself, he has duplicated the experiments of Galvani, Volta and Franklin. The nature of this research is related in a highly essentialized way, which keeps the focus on the meaning of his discovery for Equality's mental progression.

Equality is now able to draw two conscious conclusions. The first is that "the Council of Scholars is blind" and that the "secrets of this earth are not for all men to see, but only for those who will seek them" (52). The second conclusion is an even more profound overturn of everything Equality has been taught. "No single one can possess greater wisdom than the many Scholars who are elected by all men for their wisdom. Yet we can. We do" (54).

If this constitutes a puzzle for Equality, he does not dwell on it. Although "it frightens us that we are alone in our knowledge" (54), his main emotional reaction is one of assured confidence in his individual mental powers and of dismissive contempt for the Scholars. "So much is still to be learned! So long a road lies before us, and what care we if we must travel it alone!" (54).

When Equality reinvents the electric light, his attitude changes.

For one thing, he reacts to his own invention with a delirious excitement not in evidence when he discovered electricity. "We made it. We created it. We brought it forth from the night of the ages. We alone. Our hands. Our mind. Ours alone and only" (59). This change of tone reflects the difference between a scientific and a technological achievement. The discovery of electricity is a simple recognition of reality, and a testament to the *cognitive* efficacy of

Equality's mind; the invention of the electric light is an extension of himself into physical reality and a testament to his *creative* efficacy.

> We stretched our hands to the wire, and we saw our fingers in the red glow. We could not see our body nor feel it, and in that moment nothing existed save our two hands over a wire glowing in a black abyss. (60)

In the darkness of the tunnel, it is his own ego that Equality sees glowing.

The implications of his invention are immediately clear to Equality. The new power "can be made to do men's bidding" (60), he writes. "We can light our tunnel, and the City, and all the Cities of the world with nothing save metal and wires" (60). He realizes that his discoveries cannot be extended or applied on the scale they deserve—in a secret hole in the ground. While earlier he was content to travel the road of learning alone, he now decides to bring his secret "into the sight of men" (60). He will resolve the main conflict of the novel,[12] the conflict that has forced him into the role of an outcast. He will present his light to the World Council of Scholars. "They will see, understand and forgive," he thinks. "For our gift is greater than our transgression" (61).

Equality's decision to abandon the secrecy follows from his revolutionary *technological* invention. But since Ayn Rand is writing a psychological fantasy, not a plot story, Equality's diary entry on his invention does not end with a plan of action logically connected to the preceding events. Instead, the focus is brought back to Equality's mind.

> Men never see their own faces and never ask their brothers about it, for it is evil to have concern for their own faces or bodies. But tonight, for a reason we cannot fathom, we wish it were possible to us to know the likeness of our own person. (61–62)

After reinventing the electric light, and deciding to resolve the conflict that has shaped his entire life, Equality's concluding thought for the night is—the wish for a mirror. That this does not come across as vain or ludicrous, but as appropriate, inevitable, and moving, is a tribute to Ayn Rand's sustained focus on her novel's primary concern: Equality's mental struggle to grasp his ego.

The Whipping

"The first blow of the lash felt as if our spine had been cut in two," Equality remembers. "The second blow stopped the first, and for a second we felt nothing, then the pain struck us in our throat and fire ran in our lungs without air. But we did not cry out" (64).

Equality finds himself in the torture room of the Palace of Corrective Detention partly by accident. On the night when he invents the electric light, he forgets to watch the time and returns to the City Theatre too late to join the departing street sweepers. The World Council of Scholars will not meet for another month. If Equality hides in his tunnel, he and his light will be discovered by lesser representatives of the collective. So to protect his light from destruction, he turns himself in. He is lashed until he blacks out, but refuses to reveal where he has been. Then, on the night before the Council meets, he escapes from the Palace, runs back to his tunnel, and awaits the morning.

This whole sequence plays no role in the progression of the existential story of *Anthem.* At the end of chapter six (his diary entry on his torture), Equality is precisely where he was at the

end of chapter five: sitting in his tunnel with the resolution to show the scholars his light. In terms of his existential position, the only thing that has changed is the passage of time. Moreover, as noted, the whipping episode is set off from the rest of the story by arising from an accident. While it is logical that Equality would turn himself in *given* that he has forgotten the time, the forgetfulness itself is not determined by the previous events (although it is plausibly explained by Equality's emotional state at the time).

Also, while Equality's *escape* from the Palace does follow logically from his previous resolution to go to the scholars, the escape involves no melodrama. Just as it has been "easy to leave the Theatre" and run to the tunnel, so it is now

> easy to escape from the Palace of Corrective Detention. The locks are old on the doors and there are no guards about. There is no reason to have guards, for men have never defied the Councils so far as to escape from whatever place they were ordered to be. (66–67)

Equality's obstacle is not the collectivist state as such, but his lack of a concept of the ego. And the self-contained nature of the whipping episode stresses its real purpose: not to form a link in a melodramatic chain of events, but to demonstrate something about Equality's *mind.* That he gives himself up, presumably knowing that he may be lashed, and then resists the torture, proves to himself and to the reader the *intensity* with which Equality values his invention of electric light—the foremost product of his ego.

Ayn Rand once stated that her literary "concern with torture" came from the adventure story *The Mysterious Valley*, which profoundly influenced her as a child.[13] The hero of that novel, Cyrus Paltons, remains defiant when threatened with a whipping by an evil Hindu. Ayn Rand would include a torture scene not only in *Anthem*, but also in her greatest novel, *Atlas Shrugged.* And both of these scenes add an element of characterization that only the depiction of physical torture can accomplish.

As an aspect of consciousness, intensity of valuing cannot be measured by a general standard like inches or pounds. A story may show a character giving up one value for another and thus indicate their relative importance *to him*, as when Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead* turns down the Manhattan Bank Company commission to preserve his artistic integrity. He values his integrity more than the commission. But the intensity with which Roark values the commission is something the reader can estimate only approximately from the general context of the story.

Pain provides a more direct standard. As a *sensation*, it has the same quality and meaning for all men: it is self-evidently bad, and it can itself be measured in terms of intensity and duration. The reader can empathize directly with each racking blow that lands on Equality's back. Even if the reader himself has never been lashed, he can know by projection from his own experience of pain the strength of resolve that makes Equality refuse to speak. And he can know exactly what Equality feels when he regains consciousness in his cell, and smiles—"for we thought of the light and that we had not betrayed it" (66).

The literary use of torture to measure intensity of valuing can be appropriate in any kind of story, but it is particularly suited to a psychological fantasy like *Anthem.* Had Ayn Rand instead confronted Equality with a dramatic choice between two *existential* values—say, his light and the life of the Golden One—this would have displaced the story's focus from Equality's mind. In *Anthem*, the hero's commitment to his highest value is best measured against another phenomenon of his *consciousness*—the pain Equality triumphs over in the torture scene.

This does not mean that Equality's whipping is irrelevant to his later actions. On the contrary, after resisting physical torture, Equality will not abandon his light because of a prison door with an old lock, or any equivalent.

And he will soon have another opportunity to prove it.

The Scholars

"We saw a great painting on the wall over their heads, of the twenty illustrious men who had invented the candle" (68).

As Equality walks into the meeting of the World Council of Scholars, this painting symbolizes to him the reason why he is there. Earlier, he has condemned the scholars as "blind" and has concluded that he himself has "greater wisdom" than they do. But he still retains some respect for their powers of thought. After all, "the great modern inventions come from the Home of the Scholars, such as the newest one, which we found only a hundred years ago, of how to make candles from wax and string" (23–24). This is the technological precursor of Equality's own electric light, which may be why he thinks of "our brother Scholars" and wants "their wisdom joined to ours" (60). But when he demonstrates his new invention to them—when he closes the circuit and the wire glows—terror strikes the scholars. "They leapt to their feet, they ran from the table, and they stood pressed against the wall, huddled together, seeking the warmth of one another's bodies to give them courage" (70).[14]

Of the scholars, the first to move forward from the wall is Collective 0-0009. He asks Equality, "How dared you think that your mind held greater wisdom than the minds of your brothers?" (71). The "oldest and wisest of the Council" (69), and the closest Equality ever has to a personal antagonist, Collective is a complete cipher. His name may be Ayn Rand's private joke. In *We the Living*, the heroine responds to the idea that society is a "stupendous whole" by saying, "If you write a whole line of zeroes, it's still—nothing."[15] Ayn Rand could well have had this remark in mind when, in writing *Anthem*, she combined "Collective" with a string of zeroes (concluded by a "9," a digit visually close to a zero).

The other scholars follow Collective in moving from the wall—and in condemning Equality. He shall be burned at the stake, they say, or lashed. But Collective, appropriately, has the best grasp of proper collective decision making. "No such crime has ever been committed," he says, "and it is not for us to judge" (72). He passes the buck to a higher council.

Equality asks what will happen to his light.

"What is not thought by all men cannot be true" (73), says Collective—after he has *seen* the wire glow. "What is not done collectively cannot be good" (73), says another scholar. Many scholars "have had strange new ideas in the past," says yet another, "but when the majority of their brother Scholars voted against them, they abandoned their ideas, as all men must" (73).

In this scene, Equality can see first-hand the nature of the collective mind at its highest development. He can see what is *really* symbolized by the painting of the twenty men who invented the candle. And, probably, he can see the motive that makes Collective point to the box containing his invention and say, "This thing must be destroyed" (74).

But Equality does not yet have all the evidence required to understand fully what he has seen, nor the time to think about it. In this respect, compare him to John Galt in *Atlas Shrugged*, who is present at the *formation* of a collectivist society which claims him—and, by implication, his revolutionary new invention—as its property. When Galt stands up and says, "I will put an end to this, once and for all," his voice is "clear and without any feeling."[16] Galt knows exactly

what is wrong with collectivism; he has the intellectual basis for calm determination. Equality does not. He has only his rage. When the other scholars follow Collective's lead and cry, "It must be destroyed!" Equality, rage choking his voice, cries, "You fools! You fools! You thrice-damned fools!" (75). Then he swings his fist through the windowpane and escapes with his invention.

He runs to the Uncharted Forest, which "men never enter" (48). In doing so, Equality resolves the main conflict of the novel, although not in the way he had expected. He breaks unequivocally with the collective.

This is not a conscious decision, which would presuppose conclusions Equality has not yet drawn (and would make his escape too much of a plot event). Rather, Equality's escape is a *subconsciously* driven action. "We had not thought of coming here, but our legs had carried our wisdom, and our legs had brought us to the Uncharted Forest against our will" (75). However, after the fact Equality's action does give him conscious knowledge of something he had not been clear about previously. "We have not built [our] box for the good of our brothers. We built it for its own sake. It is above all our brothers to us, and its truth above their truth" (76).

Equality's confrontation with the scholars has not merely shown him the nature of the collective mind, but also taught him something crucial about his own.

The Forest

"The moss is soft and warm," writes Equality. "We shall sleep on this moss for many nights, till the beasts of the forest come to tear our body. We have no bed now, save the moss, and no future, save the beasts" (68).

Equality's first night in the forest is marked by tired resignation. Although glad to be away from his fellow men, he thinks he is doomed. And the reason for his resignation is not a fear of wild beasts.

At this point, Equality knows that he can *think* alone. He knows that he can *create* alone. What he does not yet know is that he can *be*, alone. He has learned the efficacy of his individual mental actions, but not the fact that he, as an individual, has metaphysical primacy over the collective. Consequently, Equality expects "the corruption to be found in solitude. We have torn ourselves from the truth which is our brother men, and there is no road back for us, and no redemption" (76).

Equality's sense of doom vanishes in the morning.

His first impulse on waking is "to leap to our feet, as we have had to leap every morning of our life" (78). But then he remembers that he is now free from the collective's regimentation. "We thought suddenly that we could lie thus as long as we wished, and we laughed aloud at the thought" (78). Then he leaps up and throws himself into an ecstatic frenzy of joyous motion—and "we heard suddenly that we were laughing, laughing aloud, laughing as if there were no power left in us save laughter" (79).

Humor, in Ayn Rand's words, "is the denial of metaphysical importance to that which you laugh at."[17] But Equality's laughter in this scene, while metaphysical, is not humor. It is what Robert Mayhew has called "a special kind of laughter which transcends humor: laughter in response to a benevolent universe."[18] Such laughter may imply a relief that one does not have to take the negative seriously—but the laugher's focus of attention is the positive.

Equality's sense of a benevolent universe—one auspicious to a being of his nature—is confirmed as he walks further into the forest that he had so recently thought menacing. "The

trees parted before us, calling us forward. The forest seemed to welcome us" (79). When Equality feels hungry, he proves his efficacy by killing and cooking a bird. He feels a "strange new pride in eating" (79). And later, it is precisely an impression of practical efficacy that strikes him when, on the surface of a stream, he sees his own likeness for the first time. His limbs are "straight and thin and hard and strong. And we thought that we could trust this being who looked upon us from the stream, and that we had nothing to fear with this being" (80).

Equality now has the evidence to conclude that he can survive on his own in the forest, and wider, that he is the kind of *being* that is fit for existence. He has the evidence—but not the concept that would facilitate the full, conscious conclusion. So he says that he cannot yet speak, "for we cannot understand" (80). But in his joyous laughter, his emotions speak for his implicit knowledge. And they speak as well when, at nightfall, "we remembered that we are the Damned. We remembered it, and we laughed" (80).

This time Equality's laughter *is* humorous. He is denying the metaphysical importance of an erroneous metaphysical viewpoint: that the individual cannot exist apart from the collective.

The Golden One

"We stood together for a long time. And we were frightened that we had lived for twenty-one years and had never known what joy is possible to men" (83).

Equality already knows that he can *survive* apart from the collective. When the Golden One joins him in the forest, he learns that he can be *happy* apart from it.

Early in *Anthem*, at the end of his first conversation with her, Equality had decided that he would never let the Golden One be sent to the Palace of Mating, the collective's breeding institution. But on the night of his escape from the city, he had put any thought of her aside, believing he was "one of the Damned" (77). So when the Golden One joins him, having heard of his escape, it is on her own initiative.

This is important for reasons of both genre and theme. First, for Equality to steal back into the city to "rescue" the Golden One would, qua melodrama, derail the psychological fantasy. Second, if the Golden One's escape is to be thematically congruent, she must make as independent a break with the collective as Equality has done. After all, what keeps her in the city is not guards or barbed wire, which Equality could help her defeat. The collective's hold on her is *mental.* To break it, she must assert her own ego by means of loyalty in action to a strong personal value. And she does. Just as Equality has his light, the Golden One has Equality. He escapes to protect his light, she to join the man she loves.

The Golden One's acting from love does not make her a dependent character. Like Equality, she lacks a concept of the ego. Given what she has (and has not) been taught, for her to break with the collective in the name of a personal value like love requires heroic independence. And in one sense, the Golden One's break is even more heroic than Equality's: it is a fully conscious action. Equality's legs "brought us to the Unchartered Forest against our will." The Golden One knows where she is going.

If Equality keeps his resolution to save the Golden One from the Palace of Mating, it is by the example he sets in escaping from the city. But she follows that example only because she is worthy of him.

It is no coincidence that Equality is reunited with the Golden One on his *second* day in the forest, not the first. Sex, in Ayn Rand's words, is "a celebration of [one]self and of existence."[19] In order to celebrate his self's efficacy in the universe, Equality must first possess

ample evidence of it, as he does after a day alone in the forest. “There is no danger in solitude,” he tells the Golden One. “It is our own world, Golden One, a strange, unknown world, but our own” (83–84).

On the basis of this knowledge does Equality go on to learn that “to hold the body of women in our arms is neither ugly nor shameful”—as it was in the collective’s breeding rooms—“but the one ecstasy granted to the race of men” (84).

In the following days, Equality thinks about the evidence he has gathered.

> There is no joy for men, save the joy shared with all their brothers. But the only things which taught us joy were the power we created in our wires, and the Golden One. And both these joys belong to us alone, they come from us alone, they bear no relation to our brothers, and they do not concern our brothers in any way. (86)

He concludes that there is some “frightful error in the thinking of men” (86).

He gets his next clue from the Golden One, who is struggling with the same issues from her own distinct perspective.

> Today, the Golden One stopped suddenly and said:
>
> “We love you.”
>
> But then they frowned and shook their head and looked at us helplessly.
>
> “No,” they whispered, “that is not what we wished to say.”
>
> They were silent, then they spoke slowly, and their words were halting, like the words of a child learning to speak for the first time:
>
> “We are one . . . alone . . . and only . . . and we love you who are one . . . alone . . . and only.”
>
> We looked into each other’s eyes and we knew that the breath of a miracle had touched us, and fled, and left us groping vainly.
>
> And we felt torn, torn for some word we could not find. (86–87)

In *The Fountainhead*, Howard Roark says, “To say ‘I love you’ one must know first how to say the ‘I.’”[20] The Golden One could not come closer without having the word.

In fact, she and Equality *do* here grasp everything essential to the concept “ego”—ephemerally. All they lack for a full conscious grasp is the material sound of a word to anchor this mental content and make it a constant in their minds.

Equality is clearly on the verge of forming the concept “ego.” He has the evidence he needs.

Yet there is one more event to come before he does form the concept—an event which provides evidence not primarily of the ego’s existence, but of its full meaning.

The House

“Never had we seen rooms so full of light,” writes Equality of the house he has found. “The sunrays danced upon colors, colors, more colors than we thought possible, we who had seen no houses save the white ones, the brown ones and the grey” (90).

Why does Equality find the old house from the Unmentionable Times? Earlier, he had planned to some day “stop and build a house, when we shall have gone far enough” (84–85). But

this proves unnecessary when he finds one ready-made. And as with the tunnel, he finds the house by accident. Would it not be a more individualistic action if he built a house himself?

There are several reasons, relating to style, theme, and genre, why Equality finds a house rather than builds one. The reason of style is the simplest: the books in the library of the old house will enable Equality to learn the word "I" in the language in which *Anthem* is written—as opposed to his coining a new word of his own, which would be stylistically awkward. The books also give Equality knowledge of history and mythology, which he refers to in the last chapter. But these matters could have been handled differently.

The thematic reason is a more profound one. A house that Equality built for himself could be only a frontiersman's cabin, which would not provide a good contrast to the primitive life in the collectivist city. Such a contrast has been hinted at in the old legend of "the towers which rose to the sky in those Unmentionable Times" (19), as against "the Home of the Leaders, which is the greatest house in the City, for it has three stories" (25). But to grasp the full meaning of man's ego, Equality must experience first-hand the difference between an individualist and a collectivist way of life.

Ayn Rand held that she could not have identified reason as man's means of survival without the evidence of the Industrial Revolution. Similarly, Equality has not yet had full proof that his box with glowing wires is more than just an interesting gadget, like the toy steam engines of Ancient Rome. The house from the Unmentionable Times gives him the proof. It is a concrete structure with Frank Lloyd Wright–like windows that continue straight around the corners, and with mirrors, printed books, crystal bottles, silk flowers, colors—and electric lighting. Such a house, Equality learns from the sleeping arrangements, was built for only two people.

Nothing could better concretize for him the scope of achievement and luxury made possible by man's ego.

At the age of twenty-one, Equality has rediscovered electricity and reinvented the electric light. He need not prove his self-reliance by building a log cabin. What he does need is what the house gives him: evidence that man's ego is not only his means of thought, creation, survival, and happiness—it is a cause of *splendor.*

The third reason why Equality finds a house, rather than builds one, follows from *Anthem*'s nature as a psychological fantasy. As we have seen, the core premise of *Anthem* is the device of showing a man who lacks the concept "ego"—and his mental journey toward its discovery. Throughout, Ayn Rand takes great care not to let the existential events dominate over Equality's mental progress as the locus of primary interest. Thus, in the novel's first two-thirds, she never lets the conflict between Equality and the collective develop into a plot structure of logically connected events.

After the resolution of this conflict and his escape from the city, Equality faces no existential obstacles whatever. There is no "rise to the climax" in *Anthem*, in the sense of a progressive intensification of existential conflict leading to a climactic resolution. Instead there is a complete cessation of conflict long before the novel's end. (One could say that Equality's traveling is motivated by the desire to avoid pursuit. But his primary motive is probably psychological rather than practical: "each day added to the chain of days between us and the City is like an added blessing" [84]. And even considered as a faint aftereffect of the main conflict, Equality's traveling has achieved its purpose by the time he discovers the house: "we knew that no men would ever follow our track nor reach us here" [88].)

Not only does Equality face no conflict after his escape from the city, his escape is followed by the systematic removal of any urgent existential need on his part. He easily learns

how to survive on his own in the forest. He is reunited with his beloved. And he finds a large, well-equipped house, providing him with material comfort and relieving him from any immediate practical effort.

For Equality to stop and *build* a house would be a fatal break with this pattern. Unlike the merely transitional act of traveling, building a house would constitute the existential inauguration of Equality's new life as an individualist. And by the nature of *Anthem*, Equality's new life—with all its attendant struggles and efforts—cannot start before its full *intellectual* inauguration: his discovery of the concept "ego."

That discovery is the essence of *Anthem*'s climax—of the final resolution of the hero's struggles.

Throughout the novel, Equality has been struggling to understand—to understand why he pursues a course he thinks is evil, why he feels no guilt, why he is successful and happy while his brothers are not. Implicitly, he has been struggling to know the existence and meaning of the ego. But so long as this mental struggle occurred in the context of conflict and existential effort, its resolution would have been diluted and anticlimactic. As a *mental* breakthrough, the climax of *Anthem* must be prepared for by the removal of all practical concerns and a concomitant intensification of focus on the hero's psychological need. Only then will the climax have its maximum effect.

As we get our last view of him before the climax, Equality—in an existential context of harmony, rest, and fulfillment—exclaims in his diary: "May knowledge come to us! What is the secret our heart has understood and yet will not reveal to us, although it seems to beat as if it were endeavoring to tell it?" (93).

His only longing now is mental.

ANTHEM AND *PEER GYNT*

The closest literary counterpart to *Anthem* is *Peer Gynt*.[21] Yet the mental road traveled by the protagonist of Ibsen's play leads in the opposite direction of Equality's: Peer Gynt starts by professing pride in his ego, but in the end discovers that an ego is precisely what he lacks.

Set in early nineteenth-century Norway, the play's first half presents Peer as a penniless country boy—with enormous aspirations. He has what people colloquially describe as "a big ego."

> Just you wait, I'll take in hand
> Something—something really grand! . . .
> I'll become a king, an emperor.[22]

Yet Peer pursues no goals beyond dreaming elaborate daydreams and spinning fantastic tales about invented exploits. He is a complete whim-worshiper. At a wedding party, he falls in love with Solveig, an innocent young girl; but moments later, on a whim, he runs off to the mountains with the bride—whom he discards the next morning, remembering Solveig. He is declared an outlaw, and Solveig, breaking with her Pietist family, joins him at his cabin in the woods (much as the Golden One joins Equality). But Peer tells Solveig he is going out on an errand—and instead of coming back, he leaves the country.

This is the realistic business of the first three acts—but the telling is far from realistic. Not only do Peer's reveries and tall tales have scant basis in fact; the dramatic action itself consists partly of fantastic scenes of introspective symbolism, conveyed by figures of Norwegian

folklore. One such scene—a feverish dream of Peer's—takes place in the hall of the Mountain King. Peer is bargaining about terms for marrying the troll king's daughter, who has aroused his lust. He agrees to everything, including the demand that he let himself be turned into a troll—but he balks when told that he can never go back to being human. He says to the Mountain King:

> To be like a mountain troll all of one's days,
> Forever cut off from retreat to old ways—
> *This* is a point which is close to your heart,
> Whereas for me it's the cue to depart.

By contrast, when Solveig joins Peer in the woods, she tells him, "That road I have stepped on never turns back."

Solveig's line is realistic (though metaphorical); Peer's encounter with the Mountain King is decidedly not. This indicates the pattern of the first half of *Peer Gynt*: a fairly coherent, realistic progression of events—broken up by fantasy sequences exploring Peer's psychology. Why does Ibsen shatter the realism? Because he is writing a psychological fantasy.

This becomes fully apparent in act four, where any semblance of logical story progression is abandoned. Peer is now introduced as a middle-aged bon vivant and former slave trader—on his way to assist, for profit, the Turks in their war against Greek independence. His goal, he tells some acquaintances on the coast of Morocco, is to become emperor of the world by means of his riches. In pursuing his old ambition, he is, as he sees it, being true to himself. And when asked, What *is* the Gyntian self? he answers:

> The Gyntian *self*, it's that entire
> Array of whims and feelings of desire—
> The Gyntian self, it is that land
> Of impulse, appetite, demand—
> To cut it short, it's all the things which give
> *My* lungs their breath, so I, qua me, can live.

The Turkish affair falls apart. For a while, Peer dreams of founding a colony in Morocco—"Gyntiana," with the capital "Peeropolis." He forgets about this when he is embraced as a prophet by a tribe of Arabs. The role of prophet soon bores him, and, attracted to a Bedouin chief's daughter, he fancies himself a great lover. But when the girl flees with all of his valuables, he decides to become a great historian. At the end of the fourth act, Peer is crowned "emperor of the self" in a madhouse in Cairo.

In act five, he returns to Norway an old man. Looking back on his life, he starts peeling a wild onion, each layer representing one of his "selfs": historian, prophet, bon vivant, slave-trader, etc.

> What a lot of layers!
> Won't the core soon come to light?
> No, damn, all the way it's
> Only layers, growing slight.

With the remark "Nature is witty!" Peer throws away the onion. But soon he is staggering through the wilderness, confronting his lack of a firm self through symbolic conversations with an array of fantasy figures from national and religious folklore, or purely of Ibsen's making.

Foremost among these is the Button-Molder, who has come from “the Master” to collect Peer’s crippled soul for the “metal value.” Peer’s spirit is to be melted into the mass from which new souls are molded like buttons. He reacts with horror.

> This molding transaction, this Gyntish cessation,
> Fills my innermost soul with acute perturbation.

Peer does not want to give up his self. The Button-Molder answers that Peer has never had one. He has a spirit; but by never remaining loyal to any personal value, he has failed to give his spirit a definite, lasting *identity*.

The basic *message* of *Peer Gynt*—that loyalty to external values is the key to personal identity—is obviously consonant with *Anthem*’s. In *Anthem*, Equality’s journey toward a concept of the ego depends on an intransigent loyalty to his values (his research and his light). Equality’s constancy is what gives his ego the firm identity which in turn allows him to grasp that ego conceptually—and such constancy is precisely what Peer defaults on, leaving him with no sense of a distinct self.

When Peer visits the madhouse in Cairo, he states that he is “myself in everything,” whereas, he presumes, the inmates have lost their selves. The madhouse director replies that Peer is wrong; in the madhouse, everyone is “himself and nothing else.”

> All lock themselves up in the casks of self
> And stop the bungholes with the bungs of self;
> They swell the wooden lining of the wells
> Of self, then climb down all the rungs of self.

The inmates live completely within their own minds; their thoughts, desires, and actions have no basis in the external world. This is what makes them insane. And it is what makes them similar to Peer, whose tall tales and daydreams have no foundation in reality, whose extravagant ambitions are not pursued in reality, and who acts on the random whims of his consciousness. Peer is not mad; but he is, like madmen, an implicit exponent of what Ayn Rand called the “primacy of consciousness”—the idea that consciousness has metaphysical primacy over existence and that existence is a derivative phenomenon.[23] To Peer, if he *thinks* he will do great things, then he will; he need not actually *do* anything. If he *thinks* he is a prophet, a lover, a historian, then he is; he need not pursue these vocations in action across time. If he *thinks* he has an ego, then he does.

But in fact he doesn’t, as Ibsen shows.

Leaving Ibsen’s own view aside for a moment, what Peer’s fate demonstrates is the mistakenness of the primacy of consciousness. The true principle is the “primacy of existence”: existence exists, and consciousness is simply the faculty of perceiving it. Apart from its awareness of reality, consciousness is nothing—and thus it is no wonder that a mind like Peer’s, which divorces itself from reality, fails to develop a distinct ego.

Nor is it any wonder that, in *Anthem*, Equality *does* develop an ego—by consistently perceiving reality, forming reality-based values, and pursuing these *in* reality. Ironically, Equality gains his firm sense of self from his implicit refusal ever to regard his own mind—or any mind—as the metaphysical primary.[24] Observe that the councils in *Anthem* uphold the primacy of consciousness—“What is not thought by all men cannot be true”—but they think that the *collective* mind has primacy over both reality and the individual mind. Unable even to conceive of the primacy of existence, the councils in effect regard Equality as a kind of Peer

Gynt. But in fact Equality's opposition to the collective is never a subjective rebellion; he is always guided by reality. And his vocation—science—is especially suited to demonstrating his reality-orientation. (The point would have required more elaboration if Equality had been, say, an artist like Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead*.)

While *Peer Gynt* demonstrates the corruption of upholding one's own mind's metaphysical primacy, Ibsen does not ultimately share Ayn Rand's primacy-of-existence premise. The scenes with the Button-Molder imply that Peer's ultimate default is a failure to have intuited, and then acted on, the purpose that "the Master" had in mind for him. In other words (and whether the Master represents God or Hegel's *Geist*), Peer's real treason is not to existence, but to the one supreme consciousness that *really* has primacy. However, this philosophical difference with *Anthem* is not stressed in *Peer Gynt* to the point of negating the overall thematic consonance of the two works.

In terms of *genre*, *Peer Gynt* and *Anthem* are not merely consonant, but identical. The link between the theme and the events of *Peer Gynt* is a mental premise: a man who believes he has an ego discovers that he does not. As in *Anthem*, this kind of central premise leads to a psychological fantasy, in which the focus is kept on the mental progression through the lack of a strongly coherent existential story—and, in *Peer Gynt*, through introspective fantasy segments. Moreover, the elements of conventional story progression in *Peer Gynt* diminish in the build-up to the climax—or, rather, they vanish abruptly, the last two acts being entirely episodic and/or fantastic. As in *Anthem*, there is a "rise of the mental" as the exclusive focus of interest—in preparation for a special kind of climax.

The crux of that climax is simple: although Peer has no distinct ego, Solveig does. Having remained flawlessly loyal in her love, she is still waiting for Peer at the cabin. When Peer discovers this, he concludes, "*Here* was my empire!"—an empire he went his whole life without gaining. But to Peer's desperate, tormented question, Solveig has an answer:

PEER GYNT
Where was I, as myself, as the whole and the true?
Where was I, with God's stamp on my forehead?
SOLVEIG
Why, you
Were in my faith, in my hope and in my love.

Solveig's constancy—combined with Peer's final acknowledgment of his own default—opens the way for Peer's potential redemption. Peer is saved from the Button-Molder, who warns that he will be back at "the final crossroads"—"and *then* we shall see."

As a psychological fantasy—the story of a mental progression—*Peer Gynt* needs a mental resolution, and has one. Peer's ultimate fate will be up to himself (and will depend on his mode of existential action). However, in the context of the story, his predicament has been resolved—primarily by an act not of his own mind, but of Solveig's.

THE CLIMAX OF *ANTHEM*

The theme of an Ayn Rand novel is never left opaque, a mystery for literary scholars to divine. Typically, the abstract meaning of the events is expounded in a speech near the novel's end. A good example is *The Fountainhead* and Howard Roark's courtroom speech. The theme of *The Fountainhead* is "individualism versus collectivism, not in politics, but in man's soul"[25]—and

Roark goes straight to the essence when he says: "the mind is an attribute of the individual. There is no such thing as a collective brain. There is no such thing as a collective thought."[26]

Ayn Rand wrote *Anthem* in the summer of 1937, as a break from her work on *The Fountainhead.* But *Anthem*, while admittedly much shorter than *The Fountainhead*, has the same theme. Why, then, write it at all?

The key to the answer lies in the concluding abstract expositions of the two novels. Consider these two quotes from Roark's courtroom speech:

> The first right on earth is the right of the ego. Man's first duty is to himself. His moral law is never to place his prime goal within the persons of others. His moral obligation is to do what he wishes, provided his wish does not depend *primarily* upon other men. This includes the whole sphere of his creative faculty, his thinking, his work. But it does not include the sphere of the gangster, the altruist and the dictator.[27]
>
> Men have been taught that their first concern is to relieve the suffering of others. But suffering is a disease. Should one come upon it, one tries to give relief and assistance. To make that the highest test of virtue is to make suffering the most important part of life. Then man must wish to see others suffer—in order that he may be virtuous. Such is the nature of altruism.[28]

Observe that Roark is impersonal, arguing his case in general terms (in fact, he never uses the pronoun "I" until the last section of his speech, which deals with the specific charges against him). His wording is abstract ("right," "duty," "moral law," "obligation"), and he is methodical in relating his abstractions to one another in a structured argument. He is didactic: he argues his case in strictly literal language without metaphors; and in the first quote, he carefully delineates the scope of his main generalization. He is polemical: in the second quote, he points out a logical absurdity in the contrary position.

Compare Roark's style with the following two passages from Equality's statement in chapter eleven of *Anthem.*

> I stand here on the summit of the mountain. I lift my head and I spread my arms. This, my body and spirit, this is the end of the quest. I wished to know the meaning of things. I am the meaning. I wished to find a warrant for being. I need no warrant for being, and no word of sanction upon my being. I am the warrant and the sanction. (94)
>
> Neither am I the means to any end others may wish to accomplish. I am not a tool for their use. I am not a servant of their needs. I am not a bandage for their wounds. I am not a sacrifice on their altars. (95)

Equality is saying the same things that Roark says. But whereas Roark is impersonal, Equality refers to himself in every sentence. His wording is concrete where Roark's is abstract; he is metaphorical where Roark is literal. His structure is broadly thematic where Roark's is intellectually involved. He is unconcerned with polemics. He asserts where Roark argues.

Whereas Roark is rhetorical, Equality is *poetic.*

Now consider the opening of Roark's speech:

> Thousands of years ago, the first man discovered how to make fire. He was probably burned at the stake he had taught his brothers to light. He was

> considered an evildoer who had dealt with a demon mankind dreaded. But thereafter men had fire to keep them warm, to cook their food, to light their caves. He had left them a gift they had not conceived and he had lifted darkness off the earth.[29]

Roark shows a strong consciousness of struggle, suffering, and injustice. He begins by discussing a martyr to the cause of the ego, as quoted above, then follows this example with three others: the inventor of the wheel, Prometheus and Adam. (This use of examples from history and legend is another indication of his didactic approach.)

Compare Roark's opening with Equality's:

> I am. I think. I will.
> My hands . . . My spirit . . . My sky . . . My forest . . . This earth of mine. . . . (94)

There is no consciousness here of struggle or suffering. Instead, Equality's words represent pure exaltation. They are the opening words of a hymn—of an *anthem.*

A hymn is a song of praise, glorification, and worship of the highest value to which a man dedicates himself. Traditionally, that value is God or one's country. But Equality's hymn is unique: its object is the ego.

The Hymn of the Collective Spirit, which Equality had been forced to sing for most of his life, was a travesty. What deserves a hymn, he has learned, is not a nonexistent collective spirit, but the only spirit there is and thus the true source of everything exalted: man's individual mind.

Those thoughts, desires, and actions which Equality had thought were evil because they came from "one" and not from "the many"—those were good, he now understands, because they came from *the one* and not from *many.* Being metaphysically an attribute of the individual, man's mind performs its proper function only when it is exercised independently. Then and only then can man achieve truth, goodness, success, happiness, and splendor.

What is actually aberrant, impotent, evil, and loathsome is not the individual mind, but the idea of collective thought, and what follows from such an idea. The word "we," Equality now knows, "must never be placed first within man's soul, else it becomes a monster, the root of all the evils on earth, the root of man's torture by men, and of an unspeakable lie" (96–97).

He knows this, but he does not say it at the beginning of his statement. A hymn evokes the emotion of contemplating the most sacred and perfect, and cannot focus on the negative. Equality's statement therefore opens with and maintains an ecstatic focus on his own exalted ego. Only toward the end does he deal with "the monster of 'We'" (97), dismissing it with the words "But I am done with this creed of corruption" (97).

An opening like Roark's, which dwelt on struggle and suffering, would be totally wrong for a hymn. Conversely, an opening like Equality's would be inappropriate for Roark's speech. Even if Roark *could* experience a state of rapture in the courtroom, it would be a presumption for him to display that emotion to the jury. Roark's speech is by its nature a forensic exercise: he is aiming to convince an audience. Therefore, his style is rhetorical as opposed to poetic. Befitting a hymn, Equality's style is just the opposite. A hymn cannot argue, only affirm.

The nature of Roark's and Equality's concluding statements is determined by the contexts. In *The Fountainhead*, Roark is on trial. The jury's verdict will resolve, one way or the other, the conflict between him and society, and his speech is his attempt to influence this outcome. In other words, Roark's speech, qua physical action, forms an integral part of the novel's climax.

This is no coincidence. A speech given *before* the climax could not expound on the abstract meaning of the novel as a whole, but only on some delimited part or aspect (as does Francisco d'Anconia's "money speech" in *Atlas Shrugged*). More importantly, a speech given *after* the climax would not be an event of the story. Suppose Roark refused to testify at his trial, were acquitted on a technicality, and *then* gave his speech, say, to a convention of architects. The speech would be mere philosophical commentary on the novel's events, read for its abstract content alone. Roark would have turned literary scholar. To be more than just commentary—to serve a function in the resolution of the novel's conflicts, and thus in the plot—Roark's speech must be delivered before those conflicts are fully resolved.

The fact that Roark gives his speech in the context of conflict is what makes him stress the aspect of struggle and injustice, as illustrated by the martyrdom of Prometheus, Adam, and mankind's great inventors. The fate of these figures is a live issue for Roark, and their suffering an appropriate topic for his opening remarks—since he *himself* is still struggling and still a victim of the injustice inflicted on all men of independent mind. (He is on trial for an act of integrity and independence.)

Roark could not at this point deliver a hymn like Equality's: one does not experience an unmixed exaltation in the midst of a conflict situation.[30] Observe that Ayn Rand usually evokes such exaltation only in brief vignettes *after* the climax:[31] in *The Fountainhead*, when Dominique rises to Roark at the top of the Wynand Building; in *Atlas Shrugged*, when Galt stands with Dagny "on the highest accessible ledge of a mountain,"[32] declaring their return to the world. Similarly, when Equality formulates an exalted hymn, it is after—long after—all conflict has ceased. His hymn is the emotional summing up of a firmly established record of success, happiness, and splendor, and thus presupposes the post-conflict chapters dealing with his efficacy in the forest, his reunion with the Golden One, and his discovery of the house. Equality's hymn does constitute the resolution of a struggle—but that struggle is precisely his quest to understand the *cause* of his success and happiness.

Equality's hymn is a peculiar literary phenomenon. As exaltation, it follows, as it must, the end of conflict; as expository statement, it does not follow the climax, as it cannot (or it would be a mere appendage to the story). Rather, Equality's hymn *is* the climax.

What kind of climax can *follow*, rather than constitute, the end of existential conflict? A *mental* one. Equality's discovery of the concept "ego," and the hymn that is his statement about his discovery, are the mental resolution of his mental struggle.

Equality's hymn is not a diary entry; his words are words in his mind—they are *thoughts.* Observe that no immediate physical context is provided for the statement, beyond the words "I stand here on the summit of the mountain. I lift my head and I spread my arms" (94). This minimal "stage direction" has the same ascent motif as the concluding vignettes of Ayn Rand's two major novels, a motif congruent with the projection of exaltation. But the main function of the stage direction is to mark a break with the diary form of the novel, i.e., to remove any implication that Equality's words are now physically written down. If he spreads his arms, he is not writing.

The most striking feature of Equality's hymn is of course the word "I." What was startling at the novel's beginning—Equality's use of the "singular 'we'"—has long since become familiar to the reader, just as a king's use of the royal "we" would become familiar. Now it is Equality's use of "I" that is startling.

But it is the hymn that is presented directly to the reader, not Equality's initial grasp of the word "I." This has taken place some time earlier. (At the beginning of chapter twelve,

Equality relates that he saw the word in a book, and "when I understood this word, the book fell from my hands, and I wept" [98]—i.e., he did not immediately formulate an exalted hymn.)

Merely to show Equality grasping the word "I" would have been an inadequate resolution to his mental struggle. A Tarzan-like "Me Equality, you Golden One" would not have gone far enough beyond the Golden One's earlier statement that "We are one . . . alone . . . and only . . . and we love you who are one . . . alone . . . and only." And the climax has to involve much more than this. *Anthem* is not the story of a man who corrects a pronominal deficiency; it is the story of a man who discovers the true meaning of man's ego.

Observe that when Equality first uses the word "I," he does so to make a statement: "I am. I think. I will." This is just another way of saying, "It is *I* who am. It is *I* who think. It is *I* who will." The mind is an individual possession, and—as Equality goes on to identify—the glories of the human spirit flow from this ego, which is entitled to reverence.

By the nature of Equality's struggle, he must come to do exactly what he does: formulate a hymn to the ego. And by the nature of *Anthem* as a psychological fantasy, that hymn must be a mental event: *the ego identifying itself and its own glory.*

Anthem does not end purely in Equality's mind; the twelfth and last chapter reintroduces the existential context.

Equality first narrates how he discovered the word "I." He then explains this word to the Golden One, and she is finally able to tell him, "I love you." This resolves the last piece of unfinished business from the previous story.

Equality and the Golden One choose new names: Prometheus and Gaea—an act which serves as their official baptism as explicit individualists. (Their action has only this symbolic function in the novel, since nothing more is done with their new names, except that Equality (or Prometheus) uses "Gaea" in his one further reference to the Golden One. One might ask why they need the new names, since they have already given each other personal names—the Unconquered and the Golden One—to replace the collectivist tags they were known by in the city. But these latter are nicknames too personal to share with the world; they pertain only to the intimate context of mutual love. Having discovered the concept and meaning of "ego," Equality is ready to demarcate the spheres of public and private.)

Equality then turns to his future plans—he will "rebuild the achievements of the past and open the way to carry them further" (99)—and his tone now regains much of the hymnal quality of the penultimate chapter. Although his content is somewhat less spiritual and abstract, he is continuing his hymn to the ego. (Ayn Rand once said about *Anthem* that "The last two chapters are the actual anthem."[33])

When Equality reflects on human history and on how men came to lose the word "I" (he has learned about the past from the books in his library), his tone has at times a touch of bitterness, in keeping with the facts. But in the spirit of an anthem, his fundamental tone is triumphant and exalted—and when future conflict is projected, it is with assurance of victory: "And the day will come when I shall break all the chains of the earth, and raze the cities of the enslaved, and my home will become the capital of a world where each man will be free to exist for his own sake" (104).

Appropriately for a psychological fantasy written on the primacy-of-existence premise, *Anthem* ends with physical action—projected by the hero's mind. Having discovered the concept and meaning of man's ego, Equality plans to translate his new worship of "I" into material existence, practically and symbolically.

He will establish a new world based on individualism. And just as the creed of collectivism was cut in marble over the portals of the Palace of the World Council, so Equality will cut in stone over the portals of his home "the word which is to be my beacon and my banner" (104): EGO.

ANTHEM AS A POEM

Anthem, Ayn Rand once wrote in a letter, "has the same relation to *The Fountainhead* as the preliminary sketches which artists draw for their future big canvases. I wrote it while working on *The Fountainhead*—it has the same theme, spirit and intention, although in quite a different form."[34]

The essential difference between a sketch and a "big canvas" is the former's freedom from a concern with *detail.*[35] In this regard, consider Ayn Rand's definition of art as "a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value-judgments."[36] For instance, every aspect of a painting, from choice of theme and subject to the last strand of every brushstroke, is selected by the artist to express his view of man's relation to the universe. (Even when the artist does *not* fully control his brushstrokes, as with Rembrandt or Van Gogh, *that* is a means of expressing his view.) But there are certain forms of art which are anomalous: they present not a full, but only a partial, re-creation of reality. A sketch is one example—it has no brushstrokes.

Neither does *Anthem.* As Leonard Peikoff puts it, the novel shows "relatively little attempt to re-create perceptual, conversational, or psychological detail."[37]

Compare the scene where Equality confronts the scholars with the scene in the first chapter of *The Fountainhead* where Roark meets with the Dean. First the openings of the two scenes, starting with *Anthem*:

> We saw nothing as we entered, save the sky in the great windows, blue and glowing. Then we saw the Scholars who sat around a long table; they were as shapeless clouds huddled at the rise of the great sky. There were men whose famous names we knew, and others from distant lands whose names we had not heard. We saw a great painting on the wall over their heads, of the twenty illustrious men who had invented the candle.
>
> All the heads of the Council turned to us as we entered. These great and wise of the earth did not know what to think of us, and they looked upon us with wonder and curiosity, as if we were a miracle. (68–69)

> The Dean's office looked like a chapel, a pool of dreamy twilight fed by one tall window of stained glass. The twilight flowed in through the garments of stiff saints, their arms contorted at the elbows. A red spot of light and a purple one rested respectively upon two genuine gargoyles squatting at the corners of a fireplace that had never been used. A green spot stood in the center of a picture of the Parthenon, suspended over the fireplace.
>
> When Roark entered the office, the outlines of the Dean's figure swam dimly behind his desk, which was carved like a confessional. He was a short, plumpish gentleman whose spreading flesh was held in check by an indomitable dignity.
>
> "Ah, yes, Roark," he smiled. "Do sit down, please."

> Roark sat down. The Dean entwined his fingers on his stomach and waited for the plea he expected. No plea came. The Dean cleared his throat.[38]

In one passage, a room has "great windows," a "long table," and a painting on a wall. In the other, a room has "a tall window of stained glass," with curtains representing the garments of stiff, decorative saints, which have "arms contorted at the elbows;" there is a desk "carved like a confessional," and, beneath a picture, an unused fireplace flanked by squatting gargoyles. The first room is lighted by the blue and glowing sky in the windows. In the second room, twilight flows in through the stained glass and the saints' garments—and in addition there is a "red spot of light and a purple one" resting on the gargoyles, and a green spot on the picture.

In other words, the Roark passage, while only slightly longer than the Equality one, provides much more detail.

Equality's scholars are described only metaphorically—"they were as shapeless clouds huddled at the rise of the great sky"—and their elevated status is merely asserted: "men whose famous names we knew." By contrast, Roark's Dean is short and plumpish, his figure appears to swim dimly in the twilight, his spreading flesh is "held in check by an indomitable dignity." The last touch also indicates (and undercuts) his elevated status, as does his pompous greeting—"Ah, yes, Roark"—and the action of his hands: "The Dean entwined his fingers on his stomach and waited for the plea he expected."

As a function of the greater amount of detail, the sentences in the Roark passage are more closely integrated in terms of their material content than the sentences in the Equality passage. For instance, when the Dean's figure "swam dimly," this builds on the "pool of dreamy twilight" entering the room through the stained glass. Similarly, when the scholars "were as shapeless clouds huddled at the rise of the great sky," this builds on "the sky in the great windows, blue and glowing." But in the first case, the connection is concrete; in the second, metaphorical and abstract.

The Dean and the scholars are equally baffled by the hero. But the Dean's bafflement is conveyed by a physical detail: he "cleared his throat." The implication of this—that Roark acts unlike what the Dean expects and thus brings him out of balance—depends on previous detail: "The Dean entwined his fingers on his stomach and waited for the plea he expected. No plea came." And here again, the implication of a self-satisfied mediocrity who would enjoy the supplications of an ostensible inferior depends on the previous detail about "a short, plumpish gentleman whose spreading flesh was held in check by an indomitable dignity," and on the pompous "Ah, yes, Roark." In other words, as an indication of his bafflement, the Dean's throat clearing is woven into a rich tapestry of concrete, material detail.

By contrast, the scholars' bafflement is first simply asserted—"These great and wise of the earth did not know what to think of us"—then described in general terms—"and they looked upon us with wonder and curiosity"—followed by a metaphor unconnected to the material description—"as if we were a miracle."

Now compare the following passages from later in the same two scenes, first from *The Fountainhead*, then from *Anthem.*

> [The Dean speaking:] "There is a treasure mine in every style of the past. We can only choose from the great masters. Who are we to improve upon them? We can only attempt, respectfully, to repeat."
>
> "Why?" asked Howard Roark.

No, thought the Dean, no, he hasn't said anything else; it's a perfectly innocent word; he's not threatening me.

"But it's self-evident!" said the Dean.[39]

"You have worked on this alone?" asked International 1-5537.

"Yes," we answered.

"What is not done collectively cannot be good," said International 1-5537. (73)

The Dean and the scholar make essentially the same point.[40] But whereas the scholar goes straight to the essence in a short line of dialogue, the Dean argues at length (and the full conversation goes on for pages).

The Dean's fear at Roark's simple "Why?"—the fear of a man who has never looked at reality directly and who senses that his mind would now be impotent to do so—is equivalent to the scholars' terror of Equality's light in the scene from *Anthem* (see above, page 94). But while their running from the table is a naked, violent dramatization of the issue, the Dean's evasive "But it's self-evident!" is simply one conversational detail among many.

Anthem has no such details. As a psychological fantasy, it *cannot* have them.

Had *Anthem* presented a full re-creation of reality, the sheer force of accumulated material information would have displaced the focus from the hero's mind. To keep the *mental* focus, a psychological fantasy can re-create reality only in terms of bare essentials. Ayn Rand therefore has to build her edifice of bricks, but not with mortar.

The counterpart to *Anthem* is again *Peer Gynt*, which Ibsen tellingly called "a dramatic poem." Like a sketch, a poem is not a full re-creation of reality; it does not even have to tell a story (although it can); in Ayn Rand's words, "its basic attributes are theme and style."[41] For Ibsen, the poetic means of avoiding full-fledged realism were readily at hand: he was writing in rhymed verse.[42] Ayn Rand had to achieve the same sketch-like effect in prose; she had to present (to use her own description of *Anthem*) "a long series of incidents—in an abbreviated, essentialized, almost 'impressionistic' form."[43]

Anthem, as Ayn Rand herself said, is a prose poem.[44]

And also of interest, for the 1946 American edition of *Anthem*, Ayn Rand introduced the unconventional typographic device of putting a blank line between the paragraphs. (I have dispensed with these lines in quoting the novel.) This visual cue makes the paragraphs appear less as integral parts of a continuous fabric of representation and more as thematically separated units—precisely like the stanzas of a poem.

CONCLUSION

In 1946, answering a fan letter about *Anthem*, Ayn Rand wrote: "I don't really think that you knew, while reading the book, how 'it would turn out' after the escape of the protagonists. Are you sure that you know it now? Read Chapter XI again."[45]

Presumably the fan had foreseen merely that Equality would in the end learn the word "I." But anyone would guess as much. We all know the *word* "I"; and Ayn Rand did not write *Anthem* just to remind us that it exists. She wrote the book to tell us that man's ego is sacred.

Writes Leonard Peikoff:

> There have been plenty of egoists in human history, and there have been plenty of worshipers, too. The egoists were generally cynical "realists" (a la Hobbes), who despised morality; the worshipers, by their own statement, were out of this world. . . . Ayn Rand's concept of an "anthem to the ego" throws out this vicious dichotomy. Her Objectivist philosophy integrates facts with values—in this instance, the actual nature of man with an exalted and secular admiration for it.[46]

This is the intellectual genius of *Anthem.*

Early in *Anthem*, Equality recalls an incident from when he was ten years old: the execution by burning of a man who had found and spoken the Unspeakable Word.

> There was a thin thread of blood running from the corner of their mouth, but their lips were smiling. And a monstrous thought came to us then, which has never left us. We had heard of Saints. There are the Saints of Labor, and the Saints of the Councils, and the Saints of the Great Rebirth. But we had never seen a Saint nor what the likeness of a Saint should be. And we thought then, standing in the square, that the likeness of a Saint was the face we saw before us in the flames, the face of the Transgressor of the Unspeakable Word. (50)

The word "saint" conveys an exalted moral perfection; and this incident is the first indication Equality gets (in the novel) that the true source of man's highest values is different from what he has been taught. But even at the age of ten, Equality must have had some implicit grasp of this fact, for him to see the likeness of a saint in the face of the transgressor. And the transgressor must have recognized this grasp in the young boy's face, to choose Equality as his heir.

> Perhaps it had only seemed to us. But it seemed to us that the eyes of the Transgressor had chosen us from the crowd and were looking straight upon us. . . . And it seemed as if these eyes were trying to tell us something through the flames, to send into our eyes some word without sound. And it seemed as if these eyes were begging us to gather that word and not to let it go from us and from the earth. (51)

In Russia, at the age of ten or less, Ayn Rand read a children's biography of Catherine the Great, and one scene in particular impressed her. The young Catherine attends a party given for the girls of the German nobility. The hostess brings in a fortune teller, points to the reigning favorite among the girls, a prominent young princess, and asks, "Can you foretell her future? Do you see a crown on her brow?" The fortune teller looks at the girl and says "No," then turns to the obscure Catherine and says, "But on this girl's forehead I see the mark of two crowns."

Ayn Rand did not need a fortune teller or the saint of the pyre to tell her she was a child of destiny. She later remembered thinking, "I am like Catherine. My forehead is marked in the same way, only they don't see it."[47]

We can see it now.

Like Equality, Ayn Rand escaped to freedom from a collectivist hell.

Like Equality, she discovered, and told the world, the meaning and glory of man's ego.

And like Equality, she told us in *Anthem*.[48]

NOTES

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1. Some have speculated about possible sources of inspiration for this idea of Ayn Rand's. The most likely source is the standard communist slogans of Soviet Russia in Ayn Rand's youth. In her first novel, *We the Living*, which accurately portrays life in early post-revolutionary Russia, a villain delivers a cliche-studded propaganda speech in which he says: "What, then, are the standards of our new humanity? The first and basic one is that we have lost a word from our language, the most dangerous, the most insidious, the most evil of human words: the word 'I.' We have outgrown it. 'We' is the slogan of the future. The Collective stands in our hearts where that old monster—'self'—had stood." Ayn Rand, *We the Living* (New York: Signet sixtieth anniversary paperback edition, 1996), 436.

2. Ayn Rand, *The Art of Fiction: A Guide for Writer's and Readers*, ed. Tore Boeckmann (New York: Plume, 2000), 37.

3. On the collective's function being to explain the hero's predicament, see Rand, *Art of Fiction*, 37.

4. Leonard Peikoff, introduction to fiftieth anniversary American edition to *Anthem*, by Ayn Rand (New York: Signet fiftieth anniversary paperback edition, 1995), v.

5. I do not mean that the average person finds it hard to associate the word "I" with his own body and mental processes, as distinct from other people's. But this is not the same as forming a conceptual grasp of one's mind as an autonomous mental entity. Observe that many people lack even the inner *experience* of an enduring, autonomous self, which leads them to "identity crises." (If they do have an explicit concept of the ego, in the deeper meaning of the term, it is mainly because they have been told about the phenomenon.) A more superficial knowledge of one's own individuality—the kind which Equality is shown to possess from the start—*would* suffice for some kind of use of the word "I." But this would not constitute a grasp of everything implied by that concept—which is what Equality reaches when he does learn the word in the climax of *Anthem.* To say that he *could have* learned the word more easily, with a more superficial understanding, is not to pose a valid objection against the novel's superior dramatic structure.

6. Ayn Rand, *For the New Intellectual* (New York: Random House, 1961; Signet paperback edition, 1963), 64.

7. Rand, *We the Living*, 89.

8. The paragraph is a compressed stylization of the depiction of life in Soviet Russia provided in *We the Living* and based on Ayn Rand's first-hand experience. See also Dina Garmong, "*We the Living* and the Rosenbaum Family Letters," and Tara Smith, "Forbidding Life to Those Still Living" in *Essays on Ayn Rand's* We the Living, ed. Robert Mayhew (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004).

9. Ayn Rand, "Basic Principles of Literature," in her *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*, revised edition (New York: Signet, 1975), 85.

10. On *Anthem* as plotless, see Rand, *Art of Fiction*, 36–37.

11. Aristotle [?], *Magna Moralia*, Book II, ch. 15, 1213al3–26. (Translation is from Jonathan Barnes, ed. *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. 2 [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984], 1920.) I owe this quote to Allan Gotthelf's lecture "Love and Philosophy: Aristotelian vs. Platonic" (audio cassettes, Second Renaissance, 1998). Gotthelf's excellent discussion contains much that is relevant for understanding Equality and Liberty's love relationship, and any love relationship.

12. I call it the "main" rather than "only" conflict, since in chapter one there is a brief dispute between Equality and his friend International 4-8818 about whether to tell the councils about the tunnel. This dispute is resolved on the spot in Equality's favor.

13. Quoted in Harry Binswanger, "Introduction," in *The Mysterious Valley*, by Maurice Champagne (Lafayette, CO: The Atlantean Press, 1994), xii.

14. The scholars are here reminiscent of the real-life scholars who refused to look through Galileo's telescope.

15. Rand, *We the Living*, 42.

16. Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: Random House, 1957; Signet thirty-fifth anniversary paperback edition, 1992), 619.

17. From the question period (in which Ayn Rand took part) following lecture 11 of Leonard Peikoff's 1976 "Philosophy of Objectivism" course. See also Rand, *Art of Fiction*, 165; Ayn Rand, *The Art of Nonfiction: A Guide for Writers and Readers*, Robert Mayhew, ed. (New York: Plume, 2001), 126; and Robert Mayhew, "Kira Argounova Laughed: Humor and Joy in *We the Living*" in Mayhew, *Essays on* We the Living.

18. Mayhew, "Kira Argounova Laughed," 308.

19. Ayn Rand, "Of Living Death," in her *The Voice of Reason: Essays in Objectivist Thought*, ed. Leonard Peikoff (New York: New American Library, 1989; Meridian paperback edition, 1990), 54. The phrase is italicized in the original.

20. Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943; Signet fiftieth anniversary paperback edition, 1993), 377.

21. I am not implying that in writing *Anthem* Ayn Rand was influenced by *Peer Gynt.* But the comparison is nevertheless instructive.

22. My translation, as are all further quotes from *Peer Gynt.*

23. For a discussion of the primacy of consciousness—and its opposite, the primacy of existence—see Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1991), 17–23. On the connection between the primacy of consciousness and insanity, see Leonard Peikoff, "Madness and Modernism," *The Intellectual Activist* 8, no. 6 (November 1994): 1–15.

24. In Equality's statement in chapter eleven of *Anthem*, some lines could be taken to imply a primacy-of-consciousness premise, especially the following: "Whatever road I take, the guiding star is within me; the guiding star and the loadstone which point the way. They point in but one direction. They point to me" (95). In 1961, when Ayn Rand included Equality's statement in *For the New Intellectual*, these and some similar lines were omitted. Rand, *New Intellectual*, 64–65. However, the present discussion concerns how Equality's ego has been shaped by his *actions* in the novel—and in these, there is no hint of the primacy of consciousness.

25. Ayn Rand, *New Intellectual*, 68. The word "versus" is italicized in the original.

26. Rand, *Fountainhead*, 680.

27. Rand, *Fountainhead*, 683.

28. Rand, *Fountainhead*, 682.

29. Rand, *Fountainhead*, 679.

30. Or at least an Ayn Rand hero would not. The case might be different for someone whose metaphysical worldview celebrates conflict as such.

31. There are exceptions to this rule. For instance, in *The Fountainhead*, Ayn Rand describes Howard Roark and Dominique Francon's sexual encounters, which culminate in moments that "swept into a denial of all suffering, into its antithesis, into ecstasy." Later, Gail Wynand talks to Dominique about Steven Mallory's statue of her, and says, "It's startling to see the same elements used in two compositions with opposite themes. Everything about you in that statue is the theme of exaltation. But your own theme is suffering." Rand, *Fountainhead*, 283, 438–39. However, sex and art are by their nature metaphysical; they relate man to all of existence. Thus, the emotional content of a sex act or a sculpture is independent of any particular existential context. One may celebrate a benevolent universe through sex, or contemplate it in art, even in the midst of struggle. In fact, that is part of the purpose of sex and art.

32. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 1073.

33. Michael S. Berliner, ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 336.

34. Berliner, *Letters*, 314.

35. Thus Ayn Rand wrote in a letter: "Everything I said in *The Fountainhead* is in *Anthem*, though in a briefer, less detailed form." Berliner, *Letters*, 276.

36. Ayn Rand, “The Psycho-Epistemology of Art,” *Romantic Manifesto*, 19.

37. Peikoff, “Introduction,” viii.

38. Rand, *Fountainhead*, 20.

39. Rand, *Fountainhead*, 23.

40. Later in the Roark-Dean conversation, the Dean appeals even more directly to collectivism: “The proper creative process is a slow, gradual, anonymous, collective one, in which each man collaborates with all the others and subordinates himself to the standards of the majority.” Rand, *Fountainhead*, 24.

41. Rand, “Basic Principles of Literature,” 81.

42. The *scenography* of any production of *Peer Gynt* must similarly avoid a distracting realism. Before one production, at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, the scenographer said that *Peer Gynt* had to be “a journey through Norway,” to which the director correctly replied, “*Peer Gynt* is no journey through Norway, but a journey through a man’s mind.” See Hans Jacob Nilsen, “*Peer Gynt*—eit anti-romantisk verk,” in *Omkring* Peer Gynt, Otto Hageberg, ed. (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1967), 118.

43. Rand, *Art of Fiction*, 44.

44. Question period following the last lecture of Ayn Rand’s 1969 course on nonfiction writing (transcripts of which are in the Ayn Rand Archives). Much earlier, in a 1946 letter to Rose Wilder Lane, Ayn Rand classified *Anthem* straightforwardly as “a poem.” She did the same in a 1947 letter to Richard Mealand. Berliner, *Letters*, 293, 372.

45. Berliner, *Letters*, 351.

46. Peikoff, “Introduction,” vii.

47. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

48. I wish to thank Robert Mayhew, Dina Schein Garmong, and Kristi Hall for their comments on earlier drafts of this chapter, and Michael Berliner of the Ayn Rand Archives for providing helpful information.