

Hopeful dystopia



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

When it comes to dystopian stories, the conclusion is expected to be tragic due to the pessimistic nature of a dystopia. However, in *Anthem* by Ayn Rand and *Welcome to the Monkeyhouse* by Kurt Vonnegut, the authors go a different route because they have a promise of freedom and a bright future ahead. They are stories of liberation and hope despite being dystopian stories because both protagonists refuse to conform to corruption, become confident in their opinions, and acknowledge the potential for a better society.

Both protagonists stay true to their morals by refusing to conform to their society's crooked values, inspiring a spirit of resistance in a corrupt world. In *Anthem*, Equality claims to have many questions about the world, as he is just taught by the government that things simply are the way they are, without giving him the freedom to explore for himself or question anything. However, he says that he "must know that [he] may know," the answers to his many questions, which is what propels him to start learning (Rand, 24). This burning curiosity that Equality was born with is what sets him apart from everyone else and what drives him to rebel against society when they try to suppress his thirst for knowledge. His inquisitiveness tells him that there are answers out there and that he must get them in order to stop being in the dark. This is what leads to him opposing his society because he knows that he can't be ignorant like his brothers, and that society is in the wrong. The mere fact that Equality wants to go on a quest for knowledge defies society automatically, thus making him challenge society's values and stand out, even if society says he shouldn't. Furthermore, Billy the Poet in *Welcome to the Monkeyhouse* is essentially notorious for invoking fear upon the town

and being a nothinghead, “ a person who refused to take his ethical birth-control pills three times a day,” (Vonnegut, 30). Billy refused to take his birth-control pills despite society trying to sell them as a good thing because he questioned the expectations, something that was not normally seen in their society. He did not accept the fact that everyone just had to mindlessly swallow down some pills to suppress a natural thing. By sticking to his instinct and questioning the government, Billy is a leader, and he is living proof that one can have the option to be doubtful of things and not have to conform to what is the norm.

Additionally, by becoming confident in their opinions, the main characters acknowledge that their point of view is the morally correct one, and continue to fight for what they think is right. After having suffered from a collectivist society and how the government cast him out for trying to be his own person, Equality has an epiphany and comes to the root of the problem that each individual person needs attention, and being a collective does not benefit anyone. He comes to an agreement with himself and says,

“ the word ‘ We’ must never be spoken, save by one’s choice and as a second thought. This word must never be placed first within a man’s soul, else it becomes a monster, the root of all the evils on earth.... But I am done with this creed of corruption.... And now I see the face of god.... This god, this one word: ‘ I’,” (Rand, 96).

With all his pre-existing opinions of collectivism, Equality first experiences the joys and freedom of individuality and this freedom drives him to demolish all traces of collectivism so that every man will experience being

divine as an individual. Similarly, Billy the Poet explains his whole philosophy for wreaking havoc and says humans have an inherent sexuality embedded in them but are apprehensive when it comes to something so natural. He claims that people who have committed far greater crimes "have been absolutely disgusted and terrified by the natural sexuality of common men and women," (Vonnegut, 49). By calling this innate behavior "natural," he becomes something of a god for deciding what is natural or unnatural in his eyes. He sets himself above everyone else in a way that he takes matters into his own hands and spreads the message he knows is morally correct to him; while some might call this a God complex, to Billy, it is simply trying to fight for what he believes in because he is so confident in his own personal standing.

Finally, the protagonists see the full potential of their society and have a positive outlook of the future, which is what fuels their drive for betterment and staying hopeful. After discovering the forbidden word "I," Equality legitimizes his rebellion towards his society by no longer caring about rules and finally referring to himself as one man. He utters the words, "I am. I think. I will," and exudes confidence with the discovery of this newfound expression that sums up everything he has been feeling, (Rand, 94). He has hope for the future because he has enforced his belief that he is the only one that can will things into existence, and that the most important thing he has is himself, and no one can take that from him. Likewise, Billy thinks that the world should be indulgent and participate in activities that bring them pleasure because he does not see why society stigmatizes sex so much. He explains that his entire goal was to try to "restore a certain amount of

innocent pleasure to the world, which is poorer in pleasure than it needs to be," (Vonnegut, 49). His entire philosophy is to try to bring a new message to the world and change one person at a time. He thinks that society is not living up to their full potential by denying themselves the pleasures of life, so his determination to change the world is clear and evokes a message of hope despite all odds being against him.

In conclusion, both stories have a way of leaving the future open to interpretation so that it seems hopeful. Had they explicitly concluded the stories with a happy ending, the significance of a dystopia would be ruined as it serves to expose the faults of society. Ayn Rand was not happy with collectivism in Russia, Kurt Vonnegut wanted a society in which people were not censored, so their stories have social commentary about these important issues; yet their stories have protagonists that advocate for living freely, even when the world is against them.