

Essays on Ayn Rand's Fiction

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Essays on Ayn Rand's Anthem
Edited by Robert Mayhew
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xiii + 337 pp., index

Essays on Ayn Rand's We the Living
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I. Ayn Rand's Hymn to Individualism

In the summer of 1937, Ayn Rand had already enjoyed a Broadway success with *The Night of January 16th* (1935), published one novel, *We the Living* (1936), and started her second novel, *The Fountainhead* (1943). That summer she had accompanied husband Frank O'Connor to Connecticut, where he worked in summer stock, and she worked on *The Fountainhead* (see Cox 2003). However, she took time off from the novel to write a story at first intended for magazine distribution. The story was quite different from the novels for which Rand eventually became known—it was not only shorter but a different genre. Originally, it was called “Ego,” and it fit in with those other books that might be classified as fantasy of the anti-utopian kind. The story ended up as a novella, published in book form in England as *Anthem* (1938).

Although it had been sent to three American publishers, the book did not find a publisher here until 1946, when Pamphleteers, Inc., under the auspices of Leonard Read and William Mullendore, published 5,000 copies of a revised version. In its June 1953 issue, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* published an illustrated novelette version of *Anthem*, along with Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Robert E.

Howard's *Worms of Earth*.¹ Ayn Rand permitted this publication once she ascertained that the magazine was legitimate, although she had previously lost interest in an American edition of *Anthem*. A pulp fiction magazine, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* featured *Anthem* in the cover illustration, advertising it as a "classic" by the author of *The Fountainhead* (which had been published in 1943). Like the plethora of pulps in its day, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* often published full-length novels and novelettes, as well as short stories. The issue that contained *Anthem* sold for 25 cents.

The cover illustration in color shows a bare-chested man with broken chains on each wrist, and a left hand clutching thunderbolts. Behind him on one side is a scantily clad blond woman and on the other two men still chained. All of them are standing in a forest, and upon closer inspection, what appears to be low bushes are really throngs of human beings who have presumably followed Equality 7-2521 and Liberty 5-3000 into the forest. The cover artist is simply listed as Lawrence; the inside illustrations as Finlay and Lawrence. The black pen and ink inside illustrations are three, and they are in keeping with both the fantasy genre and the serious and romantic nature of Rand's work. One seems to refer to the miracle of light, one full-page illustration depicts the hero and heroine in the forest to which they have escaped, and one depicts the shock of the Council when Equality 7-2521 reveals the electric light to them. In November 1953, the Caxton hardcover edition of *Anthem* became the first United States edition by a regular publisher.

A scant 88 pages in its current incarnation,² *Anthem* was rewritten and shortened from the original edition (it was reduced from a 23,424 word original down to 19,190 words), and readers can compare the two in the 50th anniversary edition, which includes a facsimile of the edited manuscript. Robert Mayhew, editor of *Essays on Ayn Rand's Anthem*, notes in his preface that other anti-utopian novels, such as Zamyatin's *We* (1921), or Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), or even Orwell's *1984* (1949), have warranted scholarly review, but *Anthem* has been the subject of scholarly neglect. Mayhew has fashioned this collection with the idea of remedying this situation.

The book is divided into two parts, "Part I: The History of *Anthem*" contains six chapters devoted to the background of the novel, its production, editions, and reception. "Part II: *Anthem* as

Literature and Philosophy,” contains eight chapters and an appreciation. This is the part of the book that concentrates on interpretations of the work itself. There is also an appendix designed to help teachers. Like *Essays on Ayn Rand's We the Living* (reviewed below), this volume is a welcome addition. Most of its essays are informative. Since its writers have had access to the Ayn Rand Archives, they provide some new and interesting details about Rand's life.

Shoshana Milgram (“*Anthem* in Manuscript: Finding the Words” and “*Anthem* in the Context of Related Literary Works: ‘We are not like our brothers’”) begins the volume with a factual piece about how Rand came to write *Anthem*. We are provided with a copy of Rand's one-page plan for the novel, taken through the process of turning her plan into the first version, and treated to an explanation of some of the sources of Rand's words. In many ways, *Anthem* presages the treatment of heroes that will follow in *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. As Milgram points out, “Ayn Rand decided to conclude *Anthem* in a spirit not of martyrdom and anxiety, but with the hero's solemn, self-dedicated nobility, suspended between the heroism of Kira's death in action and the heroism of Roark's and Galt's triumphs. Prometheus would have been willing to die, but he expects to live, as a man. . . . Like Roark and Galt, he stands, after much struggle, with the woman he loves, and at a height” (in Mayhew 2005a, 21). She does not mention, however, that *Anthem* shifts the focal point from woman to man, a focus that remains fixed in the last two novels.³ It is in this brief story, *Anthem*, that Rand establishes man as the discoverer and leader and woman as the acolyte or follower.

Richard E. Ralston (“Publishing *Anthem*”) relates that Rand's agent had no success in selling the manuscript in the United States as a book. He surmises that this failure had something to do with the aura of communism that prevailed in the 1930s and found sympathy among many literary folk of the day. Rand was accused by publishers of not understanding socialism, even though she had come out of that very system and had lived under it during its most crucial/formative years. American proponents of the Soviet experiment had not yet admitted the perfidy of Joseph Stalin and still made excuses for him. (But note that George Orwell was not fooled. Witness *Animal Farm*, 1945.)⁴ In spite of all this, *Anthem* was successfully published in England.

Following the publication of *The Fountainhead* in 1943, Ralston tells us, Rand had lost interest in finding an American publisher for *Anthem*. But Leonard Read and William Mullendore, upon discovering the novel, published it as a pamphlet (25). The Pamphleteers printed 5,000 copies initially plus an additional 1,500. It was carried by 175 bookstores as of 1946. *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* published the illustrated version in June 1953, followed by the Caxton edition. As usual, Rand played an active role in the advertising of her work with suggestions for how to promote it. Rand's fiction never depended on external validation from the literary community for its existence, only on the tastes of readers, as long as her books were kept in print long enough for readers to discover them.

Robert Mayhew ("Anthem: '38 and '46"), editor of the volume, undertakes an explanation of the changes that Rand made from the earlier to the later version of the book. As in her revisions to the later edition of *We the Living*, Rand claimed to have made only stylistic changes in the text. But Mayhew tells us that there are areas in which the changes might be substantive rather than merely editorial. Rand did make corrections for editorial reasons, such as excising biblical language that characterized the earlier version. However, she also eliminated passages that Mayhew refers to as "Nietzschean." The influence is stylistic, according to Mayhew, most often passages resembling *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, which Rand admired. Mayhew thinks that the excised passages reflected Rand's distaste for Nietzsche's relativism and other irrational aspects of his philosophy. The same remains true of the passages changed to depict Liberty 5-3000 as too dependent, as a priestess or an acolyte—images that Rand used often in her later writing.

Michael S. Berliner ("Reviews of *Anthem*") informs us that the British version of *Anthem* received positive reviews in the *Sunday Times*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *Birmingham Post*, and *Daily Telegraph*. The novel was appreciated as a cry against the collectivism so prevalent at the time and was regarded as "a grisly forecast of the future" by critic Malcolm Muggeridge (56). Almost all of the reviews recognized Rand's achievement to a greater or lesser extent. However, the later American edition received fewer reviews in major newspapers. It was taken up by small politically conservative sources. The Caxton edition received only one major review.

Jeff Britting (“Adapting *Anthem*: Projects That Were and Might Have Been” and “*Anthem* and ‘The Individualist Manifesto’”) talks about film, radio, opera, ballet projects that never came to fruition, including one unauthorized borrowing of lines in “Prelude,” a song included in a record album. Of more interest is Britting’s comparison of *Anthem* with “The Individualist Manifesto” (1941). Britting calls the Manifesto “Rand’s first extended nonfiction essay in English” (70). Evidence suggests that between 1937 and 1946 Rand consolidated her thoughts about individualism in these two works and *The Fountainhead*. “Ayn Rand once referred to *The Fountainhead* as the child of *Anthem*. If so, the manifesto might be best described as *Anthem*’s nonfiction twin brother” (70).

Unfortunately, “The Individualist Manifesto” was never published. It might have been nice to include it here as an appendix so that readers could actually see the similarities in the two works. Its absence is one of those annoying omissions that make it difficult for scholars to assess the essay for themselves. Even though Britting does a good job of describing its contents in detail, readers need to be able to read the manifesto themselves in order to judge the adequacy of his analysis. Furthermore, Britting does not place either of these works in their full historical context. For example, from where was Rand getting her ideas about individualism? We know from other works that Rand was heavily influenced by Isabel Paterson, author of *The God of the Machine* (1943), yet this relationship is never mentioned.⁵ It is almost as if we are expected to believe that Rand developed her ideas in complete isolation from all of her contemporaries—that she herself did not have teachers. This illusion is maintained because none of these essays ever mentions anyone in Rand’s life who also had an active intellectual life. Although her association with conservatives is mentioned, we are led to believe that the failure of this piece to have an impact must be due to the inconsistency of conservatives of the time rather than to the fact that much of the language quoted by Britting implies that the manifesto might have seemed a familiar rehash of basic American ideas and ideals. But how can we tell, since we are not given the opportunity to read the thing itself?

The eight essays in Part II, which treat *Anthem* as philosophy and literature, sometimes overstate their cases but are, on the whole, useful to the reader exploring *Anthem* and Rand’s work for the first

time. The three literary essays are the most compelling.

Tore Boeckmann (“*Anthem* as a Psychological Fantasy”) does a good job of explicating the text of *Anthem* as literature. Boeckmann analyzes each aspect of the novel with a deft hand for pointing out interesting details in Rand’s technique. For example, he notes that Rand uses torture in both *Anthem* and *Atlas Shrugged* as a means of providing a standard of value that all people can relate to. He tells us: “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” (93). Tidbits such as these help to further characterize Rand herself, both as a writer and a person.

Boeckmann analyzes the relationship between Equality 7-2521 and Liberty 5-3000 in the light of the overall theme of individualism and independence. However, he does not note that their relationship also represents a basic gender dichotomy that Rand seemed to buy into in this and her later novels—that, as Barbara Branden has said of Rand’s position, “man is defined by his relationship to reality; woman—by her relationship to man” (Branden 1986, 18), a principle that Boeckmann states clearly in his own words—“He escapes to protect his light, she to join the man she loves” (Mayhew 2005a, 97). Nor does he comment on the fact that Liberty 5-3000, the Golden One renamed Gaea, is peremptorily excluded from his future plans as Equality 7-2521, the Unconquered renamed Prometheus, speaks only of his sons and his friends. In naming her Gaea, which means “mother of the earth,” Rand fixes her identity and forgets her, except in her capacity to produce sons but not daughters to help Prometheus build his future. In other words, Boeckmann misses the psychological implications of the gender roles laid out by Rand in this novel and the sudden absence of woman as a motive force. He does not examine the very mind that is at the center of this fiction in terms of its masculine assumptions or mark this as a characteristic of Rand’s own fantasies about men.

Boeckmann does provide the reader with a fascinating comparison between *Anthem* and Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*. While *Anthem* is about the discovery of the self, *Peer Gynt* is about the discovery of the lack of self. These two psychological fantasies are also about the distinction between objectivism and subjectivism—the primacy of existence over the primacy of consciousness.

Shoshana Milgram (“*Anthem* in the Context of Related Literary Works: ‘We are not like our brothers’”) has written an essay that truly shines. She has produced what in my opinion is the best essay in the book, because it contextualizes *Anthem* literarily in a way none of the other essays does. Because so much of the writing that is done about Rand’s fiction, including some of Rand’s own essays, is self-referential, one confronts an almost solipsistic attitude that suggests that Rand was not a part of this world and was never influenced by it. In such a circumstance in which all examples lead back to *The Fountainhead* or *Atlas Shrugged*, literary claustrophobia sets in. In this essay, however, we are treated to discussions of the work of Stephen Vincent Benét, H. G. Wells, John W. Campbell, Forster, Zamyatin, Dostoevsky, Huxley, and Orwell—all in one way or the other involved in fantasy, science fiction, or the art of dystopia.

When Rand discovered that mainstream magazines published fantasy fiction, she decided to write *Anthem*, then called “Ego”, for a magazine. It was probably a story by Stephen Vincent Benét, “The Place of the Gods” (121) that inspired her. Although she had the *Saturday Evening Post* in mind, her story did not end up there.

There are similarities to specific aspects of *Anthem* in the works of each of these writers, primarily because they were dealing with common themes and worlds of the future—sometimes imagined utopias gone wrong. As Milgram parses it, *Anthem* is a novel of dystopia, belonging to the anti-utopia category. Milgram compares and contrasts the stories of these authors with that of *Anthem* in such a way that the meaning of Rand’s work and the clarity of her thought is more cleverly exposed. A long and thorough examination of similarities and differences between *Anthem* and *We* is particularly well done. Milgram’s concluding section on *Anthem* comparing it to Rand’s other novels is too long and need not have been included in this essay, since so much of it is covered in other essays in this volume. What is fresh and exhilarating is the emergence of Rand’s work within the broader literary context.

John Lewis (“‘Sacrilege toward the Individual’: The Anti-Pride of Thomas More’s *Utopia* and *Anthem*’s Radical Alternative”) wrote the third of the literary essays in this volume. His essay explores the similarities between the two worlds created in Thomas More’s classic, *Utopia*, and *Anthem*. Whereas More presents *Utopia* as an ideal place,

Rand “takes this idea to its logical conclusion: there is no truth except that discovered by the collective, and no justice except that proclaimed by the group” (178). *Anthem* constitutes the horrific outcome of More’s ideal.

Darryl Wright (“Needs of the *Psyche* in Ayn Rand’s Early Ethical Thought”), Onkar Ghate (“Breaking the Metaphysical Chains of Dictatorship in *Anthem*”), Gregory Salmieri (“Prometheus’ Discovery: Individualism and the Meaning of the Concept ‘I’ in *Anthem*”), Amy Peikoff (“Freedom of Disassociation in *Anthem*”), and Andrew Bernstein (“*Anthem* and Collectivist Regression into Primitivism”) all write serviceable essays examining the philosophical implications of *Anthem*. But these are all ideas that you have heard before if you’ve read Rand’s nonfiction, and even though some of the chapters are highly readable, they seem to place a burden on the thin volume of *Anthem* that it can hardly bear.

Harry Binswanger’s appreciation includes a discussion of *Anthem* as a response to Plato’s “Myth of the Cave,” which he says one of his students suggested in a philosophy course. This is a fascinating idea: the tunnel in which Equality 7-2521 finds enlightenment and from which he brings light to those above is the reverse of Plato’s parable. This was a connection that I had not thought of before (and apparently Binswanger hadn’t either, until his student asked about it), and I wished he had written an entire article on this topic.

Lindsay Joseph provides a guide for teachers as an Appendix. It should also be mentioned that both Cliff Notes and Spark Notes have issued study guides on *Anthem*.

Despite an overall good showing, some of the essays in the second part of the book constitute examples of over-interpretation and even misinterpretation. Instead of viewing *Anthem* as an interesting and poignant piece of anti-utopian writing in its own right, they interpret it in terms of what Rand’s outlook would come to be. There are, perhaps, too many philosophers and not enough literary practitioners who serve as authors of the essays. Thus, what is essentially fiction, becomes promoted primarily as a philosophical text, although Rand herself said that her forays into philosophy were meant to support her fiction, and not the other way around. However, the editor has hit the mark in designating *Anthem* as a book that would be appropriately assigned to students, especially high school

students, and it makes an excellent companion piece to any of its more widely taught counterparts, *Animal Farm* by George Orwell in particular.

Anthem is a literary gem, an homage to the importance of the individual. More than three and a half million copies of *Anthem* are in print, and the book sells more than 100,000 copies each year. Over the past decade, studies of Rand's novels have grown, but there is still very little written about *Anthem*, as Mayhew points out, and this collection of essays constitutes a foundational volume for its scholarly assessment.

This volume is the second in a series elaborating upon all of Rand's novels (a third on *The Fountainhead* is due in 2006; the first volume, on *We the Living*, is reviewed below). More important than anything, however, is the portrait of Rand as a writer that emerges as the essayists (especially in the first part of these volumes) go through their paces of describing the process by which Rand set about the writing and rewriting of these novels. There is more illumination of the process of creation here than in Rand's own pedestrian volumes on writing.⁶ When completed, this series promises to be a master class on fiction writing that not even Rand herself could have imagined.

II. Facts and Fictions: Ayn Rand's *We the Living*

When I discovered Ayn Rand, I read her novels in the reverse order from which they were written: *Atlas Shrugged*, *The Fountainhead*, and *We the Living*. Although I had loved *Atlas Shrugged* for its magnificent heroine, Dagny Taggart, I found that *We the Living* soon became my favorite of all Rand's novels. Why was this? After all, Rand had not yet developed her philosophy of Objectivism. Her championing of the individual against the collective was personal but not the reasoned individualism that she would later advance. Yet, *We the Living* had a certain immediacy and intimacy that her later novels did not have—an intimacy that grew out of Rand's own experience.

Although *We the Living* was quirky—Rand's language halting, some of her characters flat or poorly drawn, sometimes blatantly ideological and sadomasochistic—it was also drawn from Rand's own anger and passion about the world she had been deprived of when she was a young woman like Kira. *We the Living* also revealed Rand's

mastery of plot long before she wrote about it in *The Romantic Manifesto* (1970), and it is her only woman-centered novel and her only tragedy. So, although *We the Living* has minor shortcomings, it is the closest Rand came to revealing aspects of herself, and it was the harbinger of her later mastery.

Today, 24 years after her death, we live in an age rich with Ayn Rand scholarship. Rand studies have never enjoyed a healthier moment than the present. Not only are all of her novels in print in multiple editions, along with a trilogy of her plays and all of her nonfiction writing, but more scholars than ever are writing about Rand, and there is a journal devoted to her ideas. Only four years after Rand's death, Barbara Branden produced a biographical masterpiece, *The Passion of Ayn Rand* (1986), that integrated the personal and the intellectual sides of Rand. Chris Matthew Sciabarra's book, *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical* (1995), and his work on Rand's college transcripts (1999 and 2005) revealed new information about Rand's life in Russia, especially her college years, intellectual influences, and the cultural context in which she lived.

Ayn Rand did not come to the United States until 1926. This country represented Rand's maturity as a woman, as a writer, and as a thinker. But Russia represented Rand's childhood, adolescence, and development into young womanhood. Although Rand wrote *We the Living* in the United States 10 years after her arrival, finally seeing its publication in 1936, its roots lay in Russia.

Ironically, 1936 was also the year when Rand's communication with her family in Russia ceased. *Essays on Ayn Rand's We the Living*, edited by philosopher Robert Mayhew, provides this and other insights into her life through an examination of this first novel. Mayhew and other contributors to this volume have had access to the Ayn Rand Archives and have made the most of it. These essays explore from many angles the creation of Rand's first novel. They provide us with new information about Rand's process of creation and the relationship of the novel to Rand's family and life in the Soviet Union. They explore how the novel was reviewed; they inventory the music that Rand loved and referred to in the novel. They take on its publication, its adaptation into a Broadway play and into an Italian film. While this volume is more informational than critical in its delivery, it must take its place on the shelf of any serious

Rand scholar. Its sixteen chapters, divided into a history of the novel itself (chapters 1-9) and into essays on the novel as literature and philosophy (chapters 10-16), provide a baseline for future studies of *We the Living*.

Shoshana Milgram, who provides two chapters for the collection (“From *Airtight* to *We the Living*: The Drafts of Ayn Rand’s First Novel” and “*We the Living* and Victor Hugo: Ayn Rand’s First Novel and the Novelist She Ranked First”) does a yeoman’s job of acquainting us with the painstaking process of writing and revision, and she takes us through it step by step in such a way that we begin to understand the processes at work in Rand’s mind and to appreciate the effort and the thought that went into the writing of this first novel. Milgram’s subsequent analysis of the similarities and differences between Rand’s first novel and the novels of Victor Hugo (“Part II: *We the Living* as Literature and as Philosophy”) allows us to appreciate the way in which Rand learned about the craft of novel writing from a writer she admired, while avoiding some of the pitfalls present in Hugo’s own approach. Rand is definitely an original, but she was also capable of learning from those that she considered the best. Milgram painstakingly demonstrates both from the text of *We the Living* and Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, *Notre Dame de Paris*, and *Ninety-Three* how Rand learned from Hugo to use history and heroism. Both novelists cast their epic stories against historic backgrounds, both emphasized theme and plot, and both had a regard for the greatness of human beings as illustrated in the sense of life of their protagonists and antagonists. And at least in her first novel, Rand had in common with Hugo the tragic outcome.

Of equal note are those chapters that allow us to see the influence of Rand’s family and her life in Russia on this first novel. “Parallel Lives: Models and Inspirations for Characters in *We the Living*” by Scott McConnell contains fascinating sections on Kira and Ayn Rand, Leo and Lev Bekkerman, Vasili Dunaev and Rand’s father Zinovy Rosenbaum, and Galina Argounova and Rand’s mother Anna Rosenbaum. We find out, for example, that Rand used her own experiences when creating the character of Kira Argounova, including the experience of being purged from the university on December 12, 1923, only to be reinstated, while Kira was not (Mayhew 2005b, 47–52). Even more fascinating is the discussion of the model for Leo

Kovalensky, Lev Bekkerman, a good looking, flirtatious young man to whom Rand was romantically attracted. An engineering student who was linguistically talented, Lev Bekkerman was eventually arrested, tried, and shot to death in 1937 during one of Stalin's purges (52–56). McConnell's only misstep is to refer to the anarchist Nestor Makhno, mentioned by Rand in the novel, as "little known" (61).⁷

Much of the material used in this chapter comes from biographical interviews. Oddly enough, these interviews are not attributed to anyone. In a bibliographical note (xiii), the editor simply tells us that these were done in 1960–61, but by whom and under what circumstances? The provenance of these interviews is important to substantiate their validity, yet these interviews are cited throughout the volume. Could these be interviews conducted by Barbara Branden for the biography in *Who Is Ayn Rand?* (Branden and Branden 1962)? If so, they should be so attributed (see Branden 1986, xii).

Dina Schein Garmong ("We the Living and the Rosenbaum Family Letters"), who is in the process of translating 900 letters from Rand's family members, uses that knowledge to acquaint the reader with the connection between those letters and the novel and as proof that Rand did not exaggerate the conditions she had left behind in Russia (which some had accused her of in reviews of the novel). Poor housing, starvation, poverty, unemployment, and other disastrous conditions are verified by the content of these letters. While it is clear that Rand was able to use the information in these letters to supplement her firsthand knowledge of conditions in the Soviet Union, Garmong seems to find it necessary to make sure that we do not take these real-life sources of information as evidence that Rand had fallen into "naturalism." The concern about whether Rand's use of her knowledge about the Soviet Union constituted naturalism as opposed to romanticism is a naive interpretation of naturalism as a literary school and something Garmong should not have worried about in this particular context.⁸ All novelists must use something of reality to fashion their stories, or their work would be incomprehensible to other human beings. It is Rand's actual experience in Russia with the consequences of its revolution that lends *We the Living* its authority and authenticity. This, combined with Rand's extraordinary plotting ability is what makes the novel worth reading. The ability of an author to convey a sense of reality to the reader should not be

confused with a naturalistic approach, which differs in the assumption of a deterministic element. I eagerly await Garmong's translation and publication of Rand's family letters, which I am sure can only add to our knowledge of Ayn Rand as a person. In the meantime, her chapter offers a variety of insights that we would not otherwise have.

John Ridpath, "Russian Revolutionary Ideology and *We the Living*," writes a fascinating narrative of Russian history and the early revolutionaries who populated it. He provides a deep historical context for the eventual revolution that shook the world and makes you want to further investigate the circumstances behind this brutal event. He does a nice job of examining the Hegelian and Marxist philosophies and their development in Russia. I enjoyed Ridpath's chapter for its sheer readability and organization of knowledge. However, since his biographical statement notes that he is interested in Nietzsche, one wonders why he did not contribute a chapter about the possible influence of Nietzsche on Rand and especially how Nietzsche might or might not have influenced *We the Living*.

Michael S. Berliner ("The Music of *We the Living*" and "Reviews of *We the Living*") takes us on a tour of the music that Rand refers to in her novel. *We the Living* is Rand's only novel to make extensive use of music (although *Atlas Shrugged* does use music as a part of its mystery plot). Only one piece of music that Rand mentions is fictional, Berliner informs us, the "Song of Broken Glass." Berliner provides an interesting analysis of this song. He also makes reference to Rand's "My Musical Biography," which he says is "a list of the seventeen songs from 1911 to 1959 that were her favorite ones at various ages" (Mayhew 2005b, 118). It would have been nice to list these songs for the reader in a footnote, since this document is only available in the Archives. In his other chapter, Berliner tells us that the reviews of any book serve as a "cultural barometer of the times in which the book is published" (145). Drawing on the 125 reviews of *We the Living* and other materials collected by Rand, he notes that although reviews were often complimentary on the one hand, reviewers often felt on the other that Rand's depiction of the Soviet Union in 1925 was probably not true of the Soviet Union of 1936. And while there were positive reviews, many reviewers accused Rand of bias against the Soviet Union. The book did better in Great Britain than in the United States. Berliner also includes information about

reviews of the movie version of 1942 made in Italy.

Richard E. Ralston (“Publishing *We the Living*”) recounts the publication history of the novel and Rand’s involvement in the process. He discusses the difficulty of finding a publisher, marketing of the book, and the unfortunate and premature destruction of the plates by Macmillan in violation of their contract with Rand, in spite of the fact that the first printing sold out completely. From the 3,000 copies in the first edition to the three million copies sold since the 1959 edition came out, *We the Living* benefitted from Rand’s later fame as a novelist, and the novel was finally published in Rand’s native Russia in 1993.

Jeff Britting (“Adapting *We the Living*”) explores the fate of the novel idea as both a 1940 play on Broadway (*The Unconquered*) and as a two-part theatrical film made in Italy (*Noi Vivi* and *Addio Kira*). There is a good deal of irony in both stories and an even bigger dose of insight into the politics of the theater and the Italian movie industry under Mussolini. It was producer Jerome Mayer who, in 1936, suggested that *We the Living* be turned into a play, one that was ultimately titled *The Unconquered*. But the production faced repeated delays for financial reasons and due to casting problems, and because it represented an anti-Communist viewpoint at a time when communism was an intellectual fancy in the United States. Eventually, Mayer’s option lapsed, and it wasn’t until 1939 that George Abbott undertook its production. But the play received poor reviews in Baltimore and closed quickly in 1940 after receiving more bad reviews in New York.

The Italian film version of *We the Living* was made during the height of fascism in Italy. The novel was published in Italian in 1937 and went into a second edition. *Noi Vivi*, a three-hour, fifty-minute film, premiered at the Venice Film Festival in 1942, winning the Best Actor award and a standing ovation. The film became an Italian hit, but Mussolini and the Nazis eventually caused its withdrawal from the market.

Britting’s chapter is an absorbing read, primarily because it brings to life Ayn Rand’s struggle to control her creative products, even in the face of adversity. In the end, Rand did manage to control the work that she produced, and she had a keen and often objective sense of its value.

All in all, Part I of this volume provides a satisfying store of knowledge about Rand and her first novel. However, the final chapter in this first part raises a number of intellectually challenging questions about the nature of Rand scholarship, its interpretation, and about academic practices generally. In Chapter 9, “*We the Living* ’36 and ’59,” Robert Mayhew undertakes to provide the reader with a comparison between the first edition of Rand’s first novel (1936) and the revised edition (1959) that appeared only after she experienced success with *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957). Since a number of differences characterize these two editions, and since these differences have been the object of discussion among Rand scholars, this chapter would appear to be one of the more important ones in the collection. It will certainly be the most controversial.

The controversy over *We the Living* was precipitated by Rand herself because of the nature of the foreword she wrote to the 1959 edition. Specifically, Rand stated: “In brief, all the changes are merely editorial line-changes. The novel remains what and as it was” (Rand 1959, xvii). But there are three specific categories of change mentioned by Mayhew that contradict Rand’s statement, because they are substantive in nature: (1) changes related to sex and gender, (2) changes related to capitalism, and (3) changes related to the Nietzschean influence exhibited in the novel. Mayhew begins his chapter by going through all of the minor changes involving spelling, punctuation, and grammar before getting to the larger changes. Other scholars, examining the 1959 edition of the novel, have found Rand’s foreword misleading, and Mayhew’s accounting of the changes seem to support their contention, even though in the end he denies this.

First of all, Rand changed the substance of some of the love scenes in the novel in order to bring them into line with her 1959 sensibilities about male-female relationships. Mayhew reports: “In every case, in the original, the two parties are equal or the woman is in control, whereas in the revised version, the man does the kissing” (Mayhew 2005b, 202). To anyone interested in Rand’s approach to gender, as I am, these changes represent crucial evidence that Rand did not always hold the same views—that her initial impulse was to put Kira at the center of the novel and to make her an active participant in her romantic relationships with both Leo and Andrei, even initiating the action. After Rand’s perspective changed, and she

developed her notions of hero worship that elevated man above woman, she went back and rewrote parts of *We the Living*. Tracing these shifts in her fiction helps to explain how Rand later runs into trouble with both the rape scene in *The Fountainhead* and her views on women and the presidency, in which she takes a counter-intuitive position about the fitness of women to hold the highest office in the land—a position Rand would neither satisfactorily defend nor ever change. These controversies, then, derive from Rand's shifting views of gender—a shift she does not acknowledge. Given Rand's vitriolic treatment of the women's movement and her self-proclaimed male chauvinism (see Rand 2005, 106), these changes are significant to anyone studying the gender element in her fiction and philosophy. To describe them as editorial line changes is disingenuous. Anyone doing a critical assessment would consider these substantial changes from one edition to the next, and while I think it was not a change for the better, it nevertheless illustrates that Rand thought about gender relations over time and changed her mind enough to warrant updating *We the Living* to her new 1959 way of viewing things. Yet there is not one chapter in this book that analyzes this change and its implications.

The same is true of changes regarding capitalism, although these may be less controversial. Mayhew states that these changes “*might* be taken as evidence that Ayn Rand's conception of capitalism changed between 1936 and 1959” (Mayhew 2005b, 203; emphasis in text). Might? They are evidence that Rand was not only grappling with the English language but with ideas as well. Rand learned a great deal about capitalism between 1936 and 1959, largely because of her acquaintance with Isabel Paterson and others, who effectively tutored her on the topic (Cox 2004, 218–22). And while Rand later became an even more effective thinker and articulate spokesperson for capitalism than many of her teachers, the changes in *We the Living* illustrate that she and her knowledge did not come full blown out of the head of Zeus; rather they evolved over time.

Finally, Mayhew (2005b, 205) considers the “Nietzsche” parts of *We the Living*. He discusses parts of the novel “that might imply that Ayn Rand held the Nietzschean view that we are born to be the kind of people we are—to have the characters we have.” However, after presenting examples of what Rand eliminated from the 1959 edition, he cautions the reader: “We should not conclude too quickly that

these passages are strong evidence of an earlier Nietzschean phase in Ayn Rand's development, because such language can be strictly metaphorical (even if the result of an early interest in Nietzsche)" (205). Then Mayhew gives an example of Rand's responses to a question at a 1974 lecture on the subject of Dominique's rape by Howard Roark. The response that Mayhew reports only serves to illustrate Rand's own way of challenging questions and readers who challenged her; thus Mayhew makes the case himself that Rand was unlikely to "retreat" from any of her positions. But this is precisely the point. Rand denied that her changes were of any substance when they were. Such a refusal to retreat is simply a denial that there was anything to retreat from. But this is exactly the bone of contention, and Mayhew knows it. Why else would he insert into an essay on *We the Living* the controversy surrounding the question of rape in *The Fountainhead*? Mayhew passes off Rand's missteps as mere exaggerated forms of expression meant to be dramatic, and acceptable within the context of the novel as a whole. Mayhew becomes an apologist for Rand's denials of change and smooths over the fact that Rand herself saw the error of her ways and corrected them.

Later on, in the notes to his chapter (218–19), Mayhew makes the following points. In Note 10, he states that "what is needed to understand fully the sources and nature of these 'Nietzschean' passages is a detailed and scholarly account of Ayn Rand's early intellectual development, which cannot be undertaken here" (218). But such an account exists. Mayhew simply fails to cite it and to take it into consideration. In *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*, Sciabarra (1995, 31–35) writes of the influence of Nietzsche on Russian intellectuals and how Rand eventually rejected this influence. Sciabarra also considers an argument about the Nietzschean influence by Ronald Merrill in his *The Ideas of Ayn Rand* (1991) and a review of the book by Stephen Hicks (1992), who disagrees with Merrill, and Sciabarra speaks of the evidence against such a view (100–3). In addition, John Ridpath, a contributor to this volume, could have provided an essay with such an argument in the second part of the book, given his reputation as a Nietzsche scholar. Instead, Mayhew chose not to cite any of the above scholars on the subject. The reader who does not know about these sources already will never discover them in this book. This is an academic *faux pas* if ever there was one.

In Note 27, Mayhew (2005b, 219) states: “There is no contradiction in saying that the novel was, in essence, unchanged, though parts of the novel were changed. . . . To think otherwise is to commit what in logic is called the Fallacy of Division: what is true of the whole must be true of all of the parts” I consider this pure evasion. Concerns over the changes are not about logic but about the substance of the changes—whether they constituted major changes in points of view or not. Mayhew is a master of distraction, preemptively accusing those who take issue with Rand’s self-serving description of her changes as failed logicians. But Mayhew himself provides the evidence that the changes were substantive.

Anyone doing a critical assessment of this novel would necessarily think that such a major shift in focus represents an issue to be commented on and explored. For one thing, it means that Rand’s personal assessment of the relationship between women and men changed in the twenty years between publications—that they changed in the context of United States culture. One might wonder what happened to bring about such a change. Why did Rand feel it necessary to “update” her novel? Likewise, the love scenes that Rand altered involve what some might consider substantive issues, such as removing language that contains the slave/master idiom and provides evidence of a long-standing sadomasochistic tendency in Rand’s fiction. Mayhew does not confront issues but simply stirs the pot.

The philosophical and literary essays in this volume (“Part II: *We the Living* as Literature and Philosophy”) are not quite as satisfying as the historical ones, but they still offer a good deal to the reader. Jena Trammell (“*Red Pawn*: Ayn Rand’s Other Story of Soviet Russia”) tells the story of Rand’s screenplay, *Red Pawn*, and its fate—purchased by Universal Pictures in 1932 and then shelved; the rights later moved to Paramount Pictures but the movie failed to materialize. Trammell spends a good part of the chapter showing how Rand’s literary aesthetics developed and held their consistency over time. This is a chapter rich with information and once again calls our attention to the unfair treatment in Hollywood of those who expressed anti-Communist sentiments.

Trammell points out that the character Tania in *Red Pawn* was renamed Joan, after Joan of Arc, a woman whom Rand considered heroic and tragic. Rand used Joan of Arc as an example in her

explanation of why a woman should not be president of the United States—an opinion that seems to have emanated from Rand's feelings about her own position in life. Yet, there is no essay or extended discussion in the volume of this view and its possible connection to Kira Argounova's tragic end and Rand's later retreat into hero worship. Trammell is the only one who even comes close to examining this issue when she notes: "Every Rand heroine, from Joan Harding and Kira to Dominique Francon and Dagny Taggart, displays an affinity with Joan of Arc's spiritual isolation and unrelenting devotion to ideals. Yet, in *We the Living* and *Red Pawn*, the parallels with Joan of Arc's tragedy are most pervasively developed" (271). Trammell identifies the motive behind Rand's views—"the absence of any heroic man that she might admire and be protected by" (272), and while this does not remove the lack of logic behind Rand's position on the presidency (being Joan of Arc and being a U.S. president are not equivalent), it does identify her motive as deeply personal and resonant throughout her work in the portrayal of her heroines (see Brown 1999).

Andrew Bernstein ("The Integration of Plot and Theme in *We the Living*"), John Lewis ("Kira's Family"), Tara Smith ("Forbidding Life to Those Still Living"), Robert Mayhew in his second chapter ("Kira Argounova Laughed: Humor and Joy in *We the Living*"), and Onkar Ghate ("The Death Premise in *We the Living* and *Atlas Shrugged*") all write serviceable chapters that will be of interest to those encountering *We the Living* and Rand's philosophy for the first time.

* * *

The shortcomings of the edited volumes on *Anthem* and *We the Living* lie in the failure of its authors to cite the work of other scholars who have dealt with some of the issues involved here, and their dogged persistence in conveying the notion that Ayn Rand made changes but never really changed her mind about anything. There is no attempt to show the same kind of philosophic growth in Rand's perspective that is clearly illustrated in her literary growth. That the original edition of *We the Living*, for example, was far more female friendly—that it supported an active rather than passive heroine who was equal to the man she loved and the man who loved her—

constitutes a substantial change in my book but apparently not in Rand's. There is also an overall failure to relate Rand and her work to any larger literary or philosophical context. These, however, are not severe shortcomings, for the volumes on *Anthem* and *We the Living* are otherwise strong ones, and the eager reader will overlook some of their flaws in favor of their greater contribution to Ayn Rand studies.

Ayn Rand was a great novelist and, as Stephen Cox recently pointed out to me, only one of four great novelists writing in English who managed to reach this literary status in a language not her own.⁹ Because of her passion for life, the individual, and liberty wrapped up in her unique personality, Ayn Rand is worth serious study and exploration both as a novelist and as a philosopher. But in order for Rand's legacy to flourish, her writings and her ideas must be open to critique, the papers and other information concerning her life and work must be open to *all* scholars and not just a select few, and there must be open exchange of ideas and arguments between scholars of various perspectives and acknowledgment of the work of others.

Some of this has been accomplished: Ayn Rand's novel manuscripts are available for scrutiny at the Library of Congress (where I myself read the drafts of *We the Living*),¹⁰ all of her books are in print and the various editions available to scholars, her letters and journals have become generally available, and many scholars have begun to write about and publish work on all aspects of Rand's life and achievements. This is a good thing. But whatever remains unpublished, untranslated, and unavailable to scholars generally represents untapped resources that should be exploited on behalf of Rand and her legacy.

Rand's life and work are not without their controversies, but so be it. She was a great woman with a great personality and a great body of work, the exploration of which makes all our lives richer in every sense of the word. The essays on Rand's *Anthem* and *We the Living* open the legacy partially. Let us now go all the way.

Notes

1. *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* combined with *Fantastic Novels Magazine*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (June 1953).

2. All references to *Anthem* refer to the 50th Anniversary Edition (Rand 1995).

3. Although Dagny Taggart is the protagonist of *Atlas Shrugged* and Rand's strongest female character, it is John Galt who is the prime mover and the teacher

of Dagny.

4. In a later essay (Mayhew 2005a, 153), Milgram points out that Rand did not like *Animal Farm*. However, it too is a literary gem.

5. See Cox 2004, for the relationship between Ayn Rand and Isabel Paterson. For further contextualization, see Campbell 2006.

6. See Rand 2000 and Rand 2001. While these guides contain useful information for aspiring writers, they are not as complete and well informed as many other such volumes available on the market.

7. Nestor Makhno was an anarchist from the Ukraine who participated in the Russian revolution and narrowly escaped being captured and shot by Leon Trotsky. He is fairly well known among scholars of anarchism and those familiar with Ukrainian or Russian history.

8. Rand (1970, 81) made the distinction between romanticism and naturalism on the basis of volition, which romanticism affirmed and naturalism—with its premise of determinism—denied.

9. The others were Joseph Conrad, Vladimir Nabokov, and Jerzy Kosinski.

10. I also read the 1937 British version of *We the Living* at the British Library in London.

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