



## **Ayn Rand and the World She Made**

*Anne C. Heller*

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Ayn Rand is best known as the author of the perennially bestselling novels *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. Altogether, more than 12 million copies of the two novels have been sold in the United States. The books have attracted three generations of readers, shaped the foundation of the Libertarian movement, and influenced White House economic policies throughout the Reagan years and beyond. A passionate advocate of laissez-faire capitalism and individual rights, Rand remains a powerful force in the political perceptions of Americans today. Yet twenty-five years after her death, her readers know little about her life.

In this seminal biography, Anne C. Heller traces the controversial author's life from her childhood in Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution to her years as a screenwriter in Hollywood, the publication of her blockbuster novels, and the rise and fall of the cult that formed around her in the 1950s and 1960s. Throughout, Heller reveals previously unknown facts about Rand's history and looks at Rand with new research and a fresh perspective.

Based on original research in Russia, dozens of interviews with Rand's acquaintances and former acolytes, and previously unexamined archives of tapes and letters, *AYN RAND AND THE WORLD SHE MADE* is a comprehensive and eye-opening portrait of one of the most significant and improbable figures of the twentieth century.

## **Ayn Rand and the World She Made Details**

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# From Reader Review Ayn Rand and the World She Made for online ebook

**Bonnie says**

**"Winning an Argument with Ayn Rand: the Grim Impossibility"**

*The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity  
-Yeats*

Heller has written a detailed account of Ayn Rand's life from her beginnings in Russia, to her death in America. The most striking thing is not the distance between these events, but the distance between Rand's prescription for man's happiness, and how miserable she actually was.

Yet Rand had an absolute conviction of her own rightness in all things - including which movie, painting, music, book or flavour of ice cream is correct. Because of this, in later years when she acquired the same power as a leader of a cult, a sort of "Stalinization" set in amongst her following. The individualism that is the Rand mantra was strictly defined by her rules, her policies, her ideas. The slightest transgression and you would be forever shunned from the inner party, and other members would be forbidden to have anything to do with you, on pain of the same penalty.

I don't want to give the impression that Heller has written an attack. She is (for the most part) neutral. And she is not pro-objectivist, and was denied access to AR's papers and documents held by the Ayn Rand Institute. In spite of that, through extensive research, she has put forth the known, verified events of Ayn Rand's life with a minimum of speculation or commentary.

Rand-haters will have to admit there is much to admire in Ayn Rand - but - Rand's converts might want to "check their premises".

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**Maciek says**

Who was Ayn Rand?

Irregardless if you agree with her philosophy or not, you cannot deny Rand one fact: she was a phenomenon. Born in Russia, Rand emigrated to the U.S. in 1925, when she was just 21. Seeing the skyline of Manhattan for the very first time in her life, she cried. That skyline emphasized everything she believed in and dedicated her life to: the strenght of man's spirit and will of the gifted individual.

An incredibly driven woman, Rand decided that she will become famous - and did. A self proclaimed non-advocate of Rand's ideas, Anne Heller offers what is probably the most unbiased chronicle of her life. In a 1991 poll, readers named Rand's most famous work, *Atlas Shrugged* as the book that influenced them most after the Bible. Another poll, from 1998, has shown that readers named *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead* as numbers one and two on a list of the 100 greatest novels of the 20th century, with Rand's

two other novels being not far behind. Decades after their first publication her works are still in print, still read, still discussed, still loathed and still loved. *Atlas Shrugged* is still a bestseller which seems to only gain popularity with age, as politicians, commentators and even judges cite its influence on their lives and name it as one of their favorite novels, if not the favorite.

Heller does a great job at conveying Rand's life and all its twists and turns, writing a book which despite its non-fiction status has almost a page-turning quality of a thriller. The tale of Rand's life, from her Russian upbringing and the birth of a hatred for the oppressive regime, through emigration and adaptation to the U.S. and the freedom it offered, her early work at Hollywood, and her rise to fame and the development of her cult. In a way, Rand was an ideal American - she decided that she'd become famous, and to do so decided to go to the U.S. to pursue her American Dream. There, through almost grotesque turn of luck she met Cecil B. DeMille, who hired her as a screenwriter. Through almost inhuman determination she pursued her ambition and passion, which is reflected in her literary creations such as John Galt and Howard Roark. She achieved everything she wanted; to this day her works are read and discussed, and an institute was formed and named in her honor. However, at the same time, she was the embodiment of human tragedy; even though she developed a huge following as years progressed she felt growing solitude and detachment from those around her. She pushed away her husband, and only when he died realized what she had done to him; she died in her apartment in New York in 1982, alone.

Heller takes up the role of a historian; this is not a commentary of Rand's ideas or analysis of them. She wants to know what made the woman tick; how Alisa Rosenbaum became Ayn Rand, and why. Irregardless if you like Rand or not, agree or disagree with her ideas, read or burn her books, she had a fascinating life which is well documented here. Both despised and admired, ridiculed and worshipped, Ayn Rand was and remains a phenomenon and one of America's most influential women. This biography provides an insight into the life of a woman who proclaimed selfishness as a virtue and got away with it.

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### **Sara says**

I picked this book up at the library, thinking I'd skim it, but ended up reading it cover to cover in just a few days. I found her entire story fascinating, particularly her childhood in Russia and her extremely limited communication with her family in Russia once she got to the US. Her world view and relationships with husband, friends and followers are all very interesting. Definitely recommend this for anyone the least bit interested in Ayn Rand.

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### **Matt Howard says**

For me, *Anthem*, *Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* are three of the best and most important books ever written. The political movement, Libertarianism, that arose under the prodding of Rand's views of politics and philosophy, has been my political home since 1973. This biography makes it clear that we must separate the work from the person. Just as Henry Ford was a half-mad bigot, but established mass production on a moving assembly line as an industrial norm, and Linus Pauling was a brilliant chemist and activist who went over the edge in his proselytizing for Vitamin C, we learn of Rand's mental and emotional problems. She was sexually obsessed by a man years younger than herself, unable to be faithful to a husband she claimed to love, and was vindictive and paranoid in her relationships with everyone. Who cares now? Her work remains

sublime.

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## Marlowe says

I had a Libertarian friend in high school. While I was firmly in camp Nader, she was a Bush supporter, and even went so far as to buy me a gloating ice cream sandwich when Bush won the presidency. In the course of that friendship, I was convinced to pick up a copy of *The Fountainhead*.

I tend to find passion infectious. While I found the book itself a tedious and poorly-written slog, the excitement it showed for architecture really spoke to me. I gave up on the book fairly early - I'm not even sure that I made it a quarter of the way through - but I started looking up information on architecture and even considered pursuing it as a career. As it happened, however, my talking about architecture infected my mom, who picked it as her second career (an excellent fit, as she's always had a keen eye for shapes). Once she enrolled in an architecture program, I had to pick something else to avoid falling on the wrong side of her competitive streak, and that's how I ended up with my BA in English Literature.

The point of all of this being that Ayn Rand has had a fairly profound and wide-reaching cultural influence - even on those of us who had almost no interest in her work and found her writing unbearable. Whatever one thinks of her, or her philosophy, there's no denying that she's one of the last century's Notable People.

Rand popped into my Active Interest slot again when I came across an *Atlas Shrugged* read-along series on Daylight Atheism. It's a great series that I definitely recommend. Adam Lee does a great job of thinking through the implications of the book and, as Rand would love to say, "checking the premises."

One of the sources Lee cites frequently is Heller's *Ayn Rand and the World She Made*. Since, once again, passion is infectious, I took the book out of the library.

A month ago, I couldn't have told you anything about Ayn Rand except that she'd written *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, she was a woman, she is somehow related to the Libertarian movement, and she's dead. So I came to *The World She Made* a fairly blank slate. Because of this, I can't say how groundbreaking the research of the book is, and I see from other reviews that maybe there isn't so much that is new here. But as a starting point, it's perfect.

Heller moves methodically through Rand's life - from her childhood in revolutionary Russia, to her death in New York. At each stage, Rand is the centre focus, but Heller explores the broader context of who Rand was meeting, what her living situation was like, what ideas was she exposed to...

On Rand herself, the book didn't much improve my perception of her. In her early life, it's easy to feel some sympathy towards her, but so much of her suffering seems to have been entirely self-inflicted. Worse, her life is, itself, the most damning argument against her philosophy.

Worse, she strikes me as a shallow thinker. I'm sure that she was a fantastic arguer, and probably quite quick and witty. She must have bowled over people in person (even if only by virtue of her stamina for argument). But it doesn't take much thinking through to realize that her philosophy is immature at best. Over and over again, *The World She Made* makes reference to Rand's popularity among teenagers and young adults, as opposed to more mature readers. This isn't surprising.

On her emphasis on individuality, I was reminded of the ubiquity of the self-esteem movement during my childhood, and how - as a thoroughly weird kid - offensive I found it. Everywhere I turned, every school program, every TV show, every fast food ad campaign was telling kids to "just be yourself." And yet, the message I heard over and over again was "no, not like that." And that's Rand in a nutshell - her whole philosophy is wrapped around the idea of individuality and personal freedom, and yet she required that her followers only listen to certain types of music, only thought certain types of thoughts.

I was both surprised and not surprised by the cult that sprang up around Rand. While I had never heard Objectivism described as a cult, its ideas - and the reverential way in which Rand is so often talked about - certainly smell of cult.

But enough about the subject, what about the book? It's good! It's very readable, and it's a great introduction to Rand and to her ideas.

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## **Bakunin says**

A very good biography of Ayn Rand.

I have been interested in her ideas for a while and this book certainly provides a good overview of who she was - her childhood in Russia, her coming to America and becoming a famous writer. The most important question I learned to ask is whether a free society requires an autonomous individual to sustain itself. I am not quite sure whether it's true or not but I am certain that those who succeed in business are certainly those who make rational decisions.

I have personally always favored variation in lifestyles and always liked to engage in conversations with unique individuals. This view of individualism is perhaps more inspired by JS Mill than Rand.

Regardless of what one thinks of Rand and the cult she created around herself, she remains a champion of freedom and therefore a source of inspiration. To express one's values clearly (and to fight for them) is a character trait often missing in people today.

"[the corresponding values were needed to achieve a life of independence:] rationality (knowing that nothing can alter the facts), productiveness (the means by which thought and work sustain life), and pride (seeking to earn the right to hold oneself as one's most important value" (p. 319)

Another issue I have with Rand is her belief that one can reach the truth by pure reasoning. Although using reason as a means of pursuing is valuable, I still find that true science is more concerned with finding good explanations which are universally applicable (a view which I learned from David Deutsch). Trying to understand the world without empirically studying it can lead one to erroneous conclusions as the world is often 'queerer than we can suppose'.

Having said that I would like to have been part of Rand's collective for one day just to see what it was like. I have often longed to be part of an intellectual group which pursues truth and which stays up late discussing ideas (this was alas not my experience at college). I will therefore end with a quote from Rand which inspires me to stand more firmly for my own beliefs:

"I will swear by my life and my love of it that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine".

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## **Jared Della Rocca says**

This was one of the best books I've read in the past year. It presents a fascinating look at an author whose works have been an inspiration to generations of readers. Heller isn't a Rand loyalist, and thus while that meant she was denied access to many primary sources located at the Rand Institute, it also allowed her to provide a clearer and truer view of Rand. This biography, stripped of legend, provides insights into not only Rand, but the worlds and characters she created. Reading this work allowed me to better understand both *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, and view objectivism not as a stand-alone theory, but rather as a response to the horrors Rand witnessed in her childhood in Russia. For any that have read Rand's seminal works, whether you agree with them or not, I highly recommend reading this work in order to understand them better.

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## **Lynn says**

I enjoyed this book. The reader is left to make their own conclusions about what made Ayn Rand tick, or what label could be put on her to explain her odd behavior. It was obvious to me she was a narcissist, but the author only used that term once and she also mentioned Albert Ellis made the same assessment. It is likely her narcissism ended up influencing her philosophy, but I don't think every Objectivist should automatically be labeled a narcissist. The book would have been better if the author had explored her psychology a little more, but the author is an historian and not a psychologist. Anyone familiar with the narcissistic personality disorder would find the life of Ayn Rand fascinating. She was totally oblivious to the thoughts and feelings of those around her, lacking empathy for even those closest to her. Although she was undoubtedly a genius, she always had an extreme sense of self-importance, exaggerating her own influence and achievements. She required excessive loyalty and created enemies of anyone who criticized her or refused to express the kind of admiration she thought she deserved. She formed a cult of loyal followers who worshipped her, and also agreed to make enemies of her enemies. She was a classic narcissist.

She is also an unbelievably driven woman and had more influence on American political thought than any woman in history. This is the world she made, not the Randian cult which still survives.

It is ironic that you will never hear a word about Ayn Rand in any Women's Study course. If social scientists were even somewhat familiar with her personality, most of them would enjoy making her a case study in narcissism.

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## **David Johnston says**

True Individualism v.s. Objectivism  
(an incomplete review of Ayn Rand and the World She Made)

I just got through reading the new thought provoking and highly readable biography about Ayn Rand by Anne C. Heller, *Ayn Rand and the World She Made*. An excellent book and a fair one I think. It has cured me from wanting to read or reread *Atlas Shrugged* or *The Fountainhead*. (I vaguely remember reading *Atlas Shrugged* in my misspent youth). In her own idiosyncratic way Ayn Rand was deeply influenced by Nietzsche

and believed in the power of will and the doctrine of the Superman (or Supergirl in her case). Her saving grace, in my opinion, which prevented her from descending into crankdom, was an appreciation of Aristotle and his logic. She despised Plato and viewed him as being infested with mystical cooties and as being a proto-Communist. She was a narcissist who related to others only as objects to be manipulated and who had meaning only as they reflected her ideas and desires back to herself. (Thus she also despised Kant with his pesky Categorical Imperative and who said “Always recognize that human individuals are ends, and do not use them as means to your end.”) She was the supreme individualist and nonconformist who created a cult of sycophants whose inner circle had to give up their own individualism and conform to her views in every way or be threatened with excommunication and banishment to the outer darkness with anathemas rained down upon their heads.

She described herself as a man worshipper, but she, apparently, was the only man worthy of such an apotheosis. A few exceptional runners-up were her own mythic creations, Howard Roark, the hero in *The Fountainhead*, Hank Reardon and John Galt in *Atlas Shrugged* who threatened to stop the motor of the world and, perhaps, Equality 7-2521, the re-discoverer of light, in the dystopic novella, *Anthem*, which is a retelling of the durable myth of Prometheus. The flesh and blood men she let into her life were submissively effeminate and easily dominated by her, at least. Her husband, Frank O’Connor, appears to have genuinely loved her and always put her perceived needs ahead of his own. He had undoubted talents of his own as a painter, actor and entrepreneur, but was dominated by his strong-willed wife who forced him into cuckold-hood and broke his will and robbed him of whatever remnants of self-worth he might have had and did not notice his slow vanishing act as he disappeared into a bottle. In her eyes he was the perfect wife and her rubber-stamp of a younger lover, Nathaniel Branden, was the perfect mistress. In facebook terms her personal profile status would be described as marriage: open; interested in male/female sycophants and relationship: its complicated. It was complicated indeed. Nathaniel was married and Ayn insisted that they tell O’Connor and Nathaniel’s wife of their planned affair and got their spouse’s stamps of approval for what started out as twice a week trysts. Frank would absent himself for a few hours so the younger man could service the Apostle of Individualism’s body. I am sure it was great and anything but Platonic, but Nathaniel often expressed the wish that his aging paramour would bathe more frequently. He even asked his wife to suggest to the Great Mind that personal hygiene was not a sign of weakness or a concession to conformity; a dangerous thing to do if you wanted to inhabit the world of Ayn Rand. If you agreed with and accepted her views, you were a genius and a moral person, but if you didn’t, you were an idiot and an evil part of the Collective to boot.

The roots of her atheism reached back to her experiences as a Jewish child in pre-revolutionary Russia when it was dangerous to be a Jew. Her mother was observant and her father was a secularist, but went along for the sake of harmony in the family. The Russian Orthodox Church was vehemently and famously anti-Semitic as was the corrupt Russian government at the time. There was a history of frequent pogroms and Jews were second-class citizens who had to live under special laws even in cosmopolitan St. Petersburg (Leningrad after the Bolshevik revolution). In 1905 alone, when Alissa Zinoviena Rosenbaum (Rand’s birth name) was almost one year old, 3,000 Jews were murdered in various pogroms fueled by vodka and the religious bigotry of illiterate Russian Orthodox mobs, egged on by the weak czarist government. Her family and friends sacrificed to allow Alyssa to escape the Soviet Union and emigrate to the U.S. She managed to leave during a slender window of opportunity before the Soviets lowered the Iron Curtain with a resounding clang which made her former home a virtual prison. She was the only one of her immediate family able to escape the totalitarian nightmare.

Another reason, I think, for her atheism is that there was room for only one Supreme Being; one I Am, and that was her own Ego (read the end of *Anthem* to see what I mean). ““In the pride of your heart you say, “I am a god; I sit on the throne of God in the heart of the seas.” But you are a mere mortal and not a god,



though you think you are as wise as God.” Ezekiel 28:2. The God of the Bible is the ultimate rival and iconoclast to our pet idolatries. He has such bourgeois and narrow mind.

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### **Jhfrancis01 says**

The irony of Ayn Rand is that in espousing a rigid doctrine of selfishness she ended up re-creating the very thought system she railed against - namely -- all is black and white; the self-anointed and self-aggrandized are superior solely because they believe it so not because they possess any truly redemptive qualities; those without wealth or sanctioned creative talent are inferior and thus have no right to live; paranoia is synonymous with faith; manipulation is a substitute for love; the mandate of society and government is to impose the will of the rulers; rationality is king even if it is irrational...

You get the point. Rand was one very bright and very misguided individual. She believed strongly in her ideas, so strongly in fact that she, personally, had great trouble crossing the line into reality preferring instead the loneliness of her very stark and narrow belief system. Some of her ideas were brilliant, some downright nuts but all were presented in and by an iron clad will that would have done Rasputin proud.

Sadly, far too many of our government figures have signed on to some of the most untenable of her ideas and like Rand herself believe so strongly in their righteousness that they fail to see how selfishness does little to create a society in which the rational can flourish.

Heller presented a very balanced portrait of Rand based on materials, including journals, that Rand herself wrote and on conversations, writings and recollections of those who knew her best. It was a fascinating look at a magnetic individual who had a wide reaching impact on our world. I highly recommend it.

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### **Gina says**

This new Ayn Rand biography didn't have anything really new or surprising in it. I'm a big fan of biographies, particularly those of larger than life personalities- whether they are obnoxious or admirable (or both) - whether I agree with their ideas, politics, etc., or not. Ayn Rand has always fascinated me. I remember reading "The Fountainhead" and "Atlas Shrugged"- two huge books, in only a few days. The books consciously repelled me, and yet strangely they drew me into their convoluted plots, with pages and pages of boring, unrealistic dialog and speeches, which served to espouse Rand's philosophy of "Objectivism." I remember laughing at how contrived the characters were, and how preachy the books were, yet I was not able to put them down. I guess they are consistently listed in the top 100 books ever written (based on number of sales per year, I think, but also on other "top" type lists)...so I guess I am not alone. Rand's writing, although better than that of John Grisham or that Stephanie chick who writes the hugely popular Twilight Vampire tripe, is no great literature, in form or function.

But I admit her ideas were (and still are) radical, and somewhat original, and she tried to live by them. Mainly, Objectivism is individualism, with a morality of acting within one's "rational" self-interest, anti-altruistic, pro- "morality" (of the black and white sort), for an objective reality that exists outside our minds

and that we can comprehend and understand with our senses. That man "has no instincts" like the animals do; he has to learn, use his senses and reason, and that the world is real. Her basic axiom was the tautology "existence exists," and I cannot understand her reasoning for that one.

Although Rand claimed, and I believe, she really did think she "invented" this totally original philosophy, it seems to me that borrowed a lot of Nietzsche- she outright believed that survival of the individual, and not the species or common humanity, was the aim of her morality. That man was an end in itself, not a means to some other value (especially NOT for the purpose of procreation-and she had no children). She seemed like she identified with Nietzsche's "Overman"- she despised the "herd" mentality of the majority and she turned traditional morality on its head. She upheld selfishness, greed, and any values that helped one preserve and maintain the individual at the expense of anyone else. She differed from Nietzsche in that she was, somewhat paradoxically to most of us, a moral absolutist. She just made traditional vices into virtues, and vice versa. She despised compassion, altruism, helping the weak, etc., just as much as Nietzsche did. But aside from the fact that Nietzsche was a great genius of a thinker, with a much more systematic, prophetic philosophy, not to mention, how his ideas have been justified, somewhat, by modern science, he did not believe that morality existed. That "morality" was just a cognitive explanation of reality, not a cause of anything, and nothing but an illusion, to simplify it. He thought that nature was amoral, and therefore so is humanity, etc. etc...anyway, I am running on too long here- my main point is that although she adopted much of his thought, she radically veered away from him by claiming an absolutist, black and white morality, applicable to all people at all times, achievable by all people through reason and ability. That absolutist morality is inverted from what religions teach, and from what most people espouse, but it is a morality none the less. For Rand, her atheism did not seem to pose any type of problem with or contradiction with her absolutist morality system. Indeed, she does have many good arguments about how one does not need to be a theist in order to believe in, and act within, moral absolutes, or to have a grounding for that morality.

She also espoused a radical, unfettered capitalism as the only moral economic philosophy. That was (and is) not much outside mainstream Republicanism. An interesting aside is how Alan Greenspan was one of her "protégés" who attended her meetings and discussions at her house and was completely influenced by her- and he put those ideas into practice at the Fed, as much as he could.

(Rand did, however, collect Social Security benefits, but only because she paid into the system, she said.)

There was something about Rand that impacted history greatly. Even though many think that she wasn't really all that intelligent, and had studied little philosophy (she seemed to know practically nothing about Kant yet she criticized him relentlessly, blaming him for everything from Communism to relativism to the glorification of the weak- and that his philosophy alone has been responsible for the near downfall of society).

Well, perhaps she wasn't that bright, but she possessed an intelligence that allowed her to create her own cult of personality - there's no denying that. And a cult it was.

This biography describes her minions and lapdogs- mostly well-off college students in the '50s and '60s, who treated her like a rock star, read her books incessantly and obsessively. Another of her protégés, Nathaniel Branden, who is currently a psychologist in California, having been excommunicated from Objectivism by Rand herself, had read "Atlas Shrugged," with like 800 pages, over forty times as a teenager, and had memorized the whole thing.

For being such a hardcore atheist, Rand sure liked being a god herself to these people. They'd sit around her apartment several nights per week, sometimes literally all night, discussing her book characters as though they were real people. (Anyone remember "Who is John Galt?") Galt, of course, being the objectivist

prototype- the perfect specimen, the embodiment, of Rand's philosophy, even though he was just a book character. These people tried to actually copy the characters, in belief, in actions and in petty things such as taste in music, etc. To become one of her perfect characters was an actual goal. And those perfect characters lived only for themselves- as John stated in his pages long manifesto radio speech in "Atlas Shrugged" - "I swear by my life, and my love of it, that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine." (or something like that!)

Basically, her "groupies" were obsessively concerned with this fantastical philosophy and this highly charismatic woman. But her charisma was often more like that of a tyrant, with her yelling at people, bossing them around, dictating the only acceptable beliefs and actions they could have and still be one of "hers," even projecting her morality onto things of strictly personal taste. For example, she dropped a supposedly good friend like a hot potato for the "sin" of liking Monet's art. And that was her big thing. Not only would she stop being friendly to a person who had offended her in some manner, that person would be outcast from the "cult." And if anyone else happened to talk to that outcast, or even to just try to remain neutral, he or she too was ousted as a traitor to Rand. Simply disagreeing with her, on practically any matter, or of course, challenging her at all, was grounds for becoming a persona non grata. Objectivism was HER philosophy, like she had a copyright on it, and she could ban people from writing about it or giving speeches about it, or presenting it, if she wanted to. To this day some of her still existing band of worshipers, on internet sites, debate whether it is possible to disagree with Rand on ANYTHING and still label oneself an objectivist.

What's interesting is she wasn't always like that. Early on she enjoyed debate and cordial argument, as long as the disagreement was supportable by logic, etc. She seemed to relish great conversation about ideas, and to tolerate others' ideas, even though she was never shy about her own beliefs and never one to step away from an argument until she had convinced the other person she was right, if only because she exhausted the person into caving in!

As she got older she seemed to have become more and more paranoid (perhaps not unlike Nietzsche towards his end), and believing that she alone was the genius, the one who must suffer betrayal and ostracization from the others, because she was "too much for them," too rational, too consistent, too threatening with her grandiose belief in her own intelligence.

Anyway, the book is interesting but shed no new light on anything. No special or shocking revelations, nothing that hasn't already been written about Rand and her group, both her personal life and her philosophy. If you're a fan of hers you already know everything in the book. But then again, as a fan you probably want to read everything about her. And I can recommend the book as interesting, etc., but it just doesn't add anything to what's already out there.

The worst (or best, depending on your belief) parts in the book are when the author attributes much of Rand's dictatorial personality and impossibly high standards in friendships to the insecurity she suffered as a child growing up in Communist Russia. Rand admitted she always felt like an outsider, but she attributed that to the bad behavior of others. People were always disappointing her, failing her in some way, not being good enough for her.

As is well known, there was a scandal in the group wherein Rand had an affair with Branden, one of her earliest worshipers, who was something like 30 years younger than Rand. He, like Rand, was married to someone else, but the two of them, consistent with their morality, told their spouses in a group meeting that they intended to start an affair. They justified it that it was only rational, logical, and inevitable that two people so consistent with Objectivism and devoted to it religiously, would HAVE to be together for at least part of the time. It was rare for two people (Rand and Branden) to find each other, therefore, the affair was

practically mandated by reason. And then they laid it on thick by saying that if anyone could handle this arrangement, it was the four of them, since they were all so rational, mature, unemotional, acting according to the dictates of their philosophy, purely logical- what a joke!

(Another odd thing is her marriage which lasted for several decades- to a man who pretty much a milk-toast-just the opposite of the "John Galt" god that Rand so much idolized. It seems they did really love each other, but he was completely controlled by her, and inasmuch as he was usually an unemployed actor, florist, or artist/painter, she did bring in the money and controlled everything. He seemed ok with it, but again, who knows? It seems pretty preposterous that he was ok with the affair- I'm sure he was bullied into agreeing to it, because he knew, with Ayn, there was no choice- it was her way or the highway.)

When Branden then started cheating on Rand with a young woman in her early 20's,(he was still married too) it took months for Rand to realize his lies and she then kicked him out of the group and out of the philosophy altogether. Her journals from this time seem to show her being IRRATIONAL, by rationalizing Branden's hurtful behavior through conducting arduous over analysis of his philosophy, etc.

The author portrays Rand as the old woman scorned, who then sought to make Branden's life hell- not out of any adherence to logical philosophy but out of pure egotism, humiliation, and insecurity. Not to mention revenge. She tried to stop the publishing of some of his work, insinuated to others that the reason she had to kick him out of the Nathaniel Branden Institute (they were business partners in it) was because he was stealing funds, and the whole thing was settled only through lawsuit threats and basically, a payoff to Branden to get the heck out of her life and give up his partnership rights in the business, and give up all rights to some of his own copyrighted material, as well as being prohibited from even mentioning that he EVER was associated with Objectivism. She justified this based on her conclusion that Branden was a total faker, a manipulator who never really was "John Galt" after all, but rather one of the spineless, useless parasite characters in her books instead, and he had been living a lie, pretending to be an Objectivist when he really never was one. (That seems very odd to me.) She said she pitied him- that he could not handle her.

Indeed, few people could handle her, that was true, but probably because she was a bitch!

Was she let down by people because they were so defective and unworthy poseurs, or was it that she was impossible to please- unforgiving and downright mean sometimes? Who used her supposed rationalism as a defense mechanism? She was too smart, too logical, etc., she either believed or tried to believe, and that was the reason for her many failed relationships with many varied people, men and women both. Was it just easier to believe that than to face the fact that perhaps she WAS actually the wrong one, - was it easier to cut people out of her life immediately rather than wait for them to cut her out- and was she too insecure to handle rejection, that she had to reject someone at the slightest hint of their possible disloyalty?

When the writer, as many biographers do, attempts to psychoanalyze their subjects, I quickly lose interest. Not in the subject, it is intriguing. But in those authors who think they know one's REAL motives, reasons, etc., behind the actions. That there is always some insecurity, some defense mechanism, some childhood trauma being relived or something, that explains the questionable behavior. Of course, Rand could have been insecure (although aren't most people to some extent?). She could have been using a defense mechanism, but maybe she really did believe in her own intellectual superiority, and found it hard to get and keep intellectual companionship, so finally she just gave up and decided to be her own hardcore self, take her or leave her. Who knows. Is every jerk really just an insecure little child inside, misunderstood, unloved, etc., or are there just some people who are just outright jerks and secure about it, and don't care what people think?

She was a force to be reckoned with, if nothing else, love her or hate her. And her story is one of hard work

and success- she came from nothing. Even if her philosophy was maybe unoriginal and simplistic, it never went away, as evidenced to this day by this biography so many years later. And the existence of the Ayn Rand Institute- still going strong, still with a lot of obsessed fans debating on the internet.

Her books, of course, will keep her alive forever. She made an impact- she was a woman who never once complained of discrimination, and strangely, she did not seem to be discriminated against. It was not an issue, as far as I can tell. She was loved or hated for her ideas and/or personality, not for her gender.

That about wraps it up!

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## **Louise says**

Anne Heller's work, talent, insight and dedication have resulted in a book I could hardly put down. She has tackled a very complex subject. It's been three days since I finished it and realize that it may take months to digest it. The book is so huge I can only write impressions and thoughts.

The first thing to pop out at me relates to Frank Lloyd Wright. Early on, Rand saw his outsider life and creativity which may have become the model for Howard Roark. After visiting Taliesin she commented that Wright did not pay his assistants, but did she realize that his "Fellowship" was a collectivist operation? Wright's 3rd wife, Olgivanna, who like Rand was a Russian émigré, developed this cult-like following on his behalf. Wright's fellowship engrossed the full lives and careers of its closest followers who designed buildings, planted crops and did construction and maintenance work for their "Fellowship". "Fellowship, The: The Untold Story of Frank Lloyd Wright and the Taliesin Fellowship". He and his lifestyle were the antithesis of Howard Roark.

The next impressions are about Rand's family. What of Frank O'Connor? Was this love? Friendship? Fear? Awe? Inertia? 50's values? The Chicago relatives are not re-imbursed for their help in Rand's resettlement in the US (neither are those left behind in Russia). Is this a cognitive demonstration of selfishness or a representation of Rand, herself, for which she built an elaborate philosophy to justify? What should be made of the sister from Russia whose comparative contentment with her life essentially mocks Rand's life work?

I was surprised at the involvement of Alan Greenspan. I knew his name was associated with Rand, but a lot of people went to the lectures. I didn't know how plugged in he was and how long he stayed with it.

Aside from the above associations which may or may not be micro-issues, I'm digesting the person of Rand herself. First, you have to consider her tremendous accomplishments. She wrote and debated in a second language. She achieved fame as an intellectual totally defying entrenched stereotypes of and expectations for both women and immigrants. She developed her following, not as Olgivanna Wright did through her husband nor economic necessity (the Wrights "needed" their followers, Rand, essentially didn't), but on her own independent power.

There is the issue of the role of her philosophy in her own life. Did she walk her talk? How did selfishness work out for her? The strength she speaks of was not there when she needed it. She behaved worse than most when her romantic world shattered and health waned. It makes Bertha Krantz's observation about fear a logical explanation for this person who can't seem to handle even small dissent or criticism.

Anne Heller has done a tremendous job with this book. I highly recommend it for anyone with an interest in

Ayn Rand.

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### **Sheila says**

What a marvelous horror was Ayn Rand.

A perfect storm of fearsome intelligence and narcissism in the form of a small, dark-eyed, russian/jewish emigree who arrived in America, alone, in 1926 and set out to conquer the dreams denied to her in Communist Russia.

She hammered out her philosophy of Objectivism and created heroes in books that gradually inspired a cult following (literally) that included, among others, former Chairman of The Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan; and then gathered that following to populate the physical world around her - she *became* the hero-gods she had described in her stories. A tyrannical god over all who personally submitted to the magic of her mind.

Heller's book paints an amazing picture of Rand and all of her facets through the years, admirable and distasteful; writer, philosopher, wife, lover. Creator. Judge and jury. Beleaguered saint of the capitalist cause and evangelist of the virtues of individual selfishness.

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### **Bethany says**

I love Ayn Rand's fiction. The first time I ever picked up Atlas Shrugged, I was head over heels in love. Growing up conservative, I had never read anyone who had apologetics for my political beliefs (more or less) without it being a religious thing. Here were these characters who were so black and white, so unquestionably certain of what they believed and it was made so clear why. I often seek out shades of gray, I think it's important for me to keep myself from being too extreme one way or another but sometimes I find it incredibly refreshing to see someone with such purity of belief and purpose. As I read her other 3 novels, I continued to feel this. There was such a refreshing feeling in jumping into such a stark world. But. Her characters always struck me as somewhat cold. Sort of purified by ice and fire but never 100% human. In this biography of her life, I found that hers was a life that ultimately reflected all the worst outcomes of unbending convictions with no grace or room for any kind of compromise or understanding. A fascinating read about a complex and brutal woman with an amazing gift for writing and little for compassion. I would definitely recommend it for anyone with an interest in this dynamic woman.

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### **Elizabeth Cárdenas says**

A hideous woman with a wide-reaching "philosophy" "Why do they always teach us that it's easy and evil to do what we want and that we need discipline to restrain ourselves? It's the hardest thing in the world--to do what we want. And it takes the greatest kind of courage. I mean, what we really want." ? Ayn Rand There are people I dislike at a visceral level but after reading a biography or memoir I at least understand them. I may even discover redeeming qualities in them. Not so with Ayn Rand - she was a hideously heartless human

being. A Russian immigrant, she came to the United States as the best hope her family had for immigrating after she succeeded in making a comfortable life for herself. Her father's favorite, she was intelligent and well educated. Every member of her family sacrificed their own aspirations in order for her to complete her education and to immigrate. She did not repay their sacrifices. Instead she rationalized that, as a superior person, she deserved what she received. Furthermore, she rejected anyone who did anything against their own interest as inferior. Not one member of her family immigrated to the U.S. after her. Throughout her life this scenario repeated itself. She accepted help from American relatives, took advantage of friend's offers, and used her meek husband to achieve her goals. Ultimately, she used, abused and abandoned admirers and followers without even blinking an eye. Hers was an ego so large that there was no room for a conscience. Self aggrandisement and a hatred for communism colored her world view. Incomprehensibly, she did have charisma. Her followers adored her and hung on her every word. A great many influential conservative men - Alan Greenspan and William F. Buckley among them - were not only "acolytes" but went on to give her "philosophy" credence. I say "philosophy" because she never actually wrote any academic works delineating her beliefs. She is best known for her early screenplays and fiction - Atlas Shrugged and The Fountainhead, for example. She also self-published non-fiction and essays and gave speeches in favor of conservative candidates. It is from these that her admirers have cobbled her philosophy of Objectivism - objective self interest. It is now variously misinterpreted by the Tea Party, many conservative Republicans and Libertarians. Interestingly, she would have rejected all of her current admirers. In fact. in more than one occasion she talked and wrote that she despised Libertarians and rejected anyone who believed in religion as inferior. While the content of the book was interesting, the writing itself was gossipy, tedious and repetitive. Good editing would have cut the size of this book by a third. Three stars.

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