

Explaining the Evolution of Ayn Rand's Ideas Through the Second World War

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Abstract: As technological advancements update with each passing day, the employment of social medias in aiding people to obtain insights upon city news and historical events has become increasingly dominant. However, even though the employment of books in learning about social phenomenon within a specific time era has been gradually replaced by the Internet, literary novels have been consistently serving as an effective way to understand social phenomenon through lines of words. In this work, the paper first introduces how Ayn Rand's life shaped her perseverance in prompting individualism. Such thoughts pervaded into her two novels which are *Anthem* and *The Fountainhead* and by comparing the storyline, it has come to a conclusion that Rand's engagement in the Second World War had changed her standpoint: the traitors of their collectivism birthplace are unable to separate his entity from his community and ought to confront the problems in reality. Such finding can break some scholars' stereotypes in claiming Ayn Rand's philosophical ideas has not changed at all over the course of time.

Keywords: Ayn Rand, individualism, Second World War, confront reality

1. Introduction

As a Russian-born American writer and philosopher, the girl who was once frustrated by her ideas not obtaining wide acceptance among scholars had penned her lifetime into an epic in advocacy of defending rights for herself from the moment she changed a new name after moving to the United States. It can sometimes be perceived that her ideas did not change at all—she arrived at a kind of ultra-individualism in response to the Russian Revolution and spread those same ideals in each of her books. But in fact, Rand was influenced by history. Ayn Rand's World War II experience convinced her that the renegades she prized could not remain outside of society as the protagonist she once depicted in *Anthem*: they had to come back and try to solve the problems that were creating war.

1.1. Author's Background Information

Ayn Rand, born on February 5th in Russia, immigrated to the United States after graduating from the University of Petrograd. Immersion in the collectivism environment during her childhood nurtured her to focus on the voices of individuals. She went to Hollywood as a screenwriter after arriving at the Chicago in six months. She began her first novel, *We the Living*, in 1936 and wrote the dystopian

fiction *Anthem* in 1938. Her manuscripts were published after rejections from numerous publishers since her diffusion of individualism was not the prevailing thought during that time, until she embraced success in finishing her two bestsellers, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. From then on, her novels have become increasingly philosophical, which has helped her attract more people become devoted to her ideas [1].

1.1.1.Related Works

Multiple articles have studied Ayn Rand's attitude toward war. Edward Hudgins wrote in his article *Ayn Rand and the A-Bomb* that "the basic issue of the world is ... between an all-power government and free enterprise," in stressing that statism is the key to wiping out mutual consent between individuals [2]. Hudgins also states that Rand believed technological advancements could merely be trusted to people who sustain the exchange of free ideas through her interview with Oppenheimer and Gen. And in a column in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* published in June 8th, 2010, the author mainly talks about Ayn Rand's livelihood when she was living in the Soviet Union and how the environment of collectivism had impacted her to inspire her readers to demonstrate peculiarity and to place the human rights of individuals superior to the common good as a group. The author states, "Her novels inspire readers because they present heroes of unbroken integrity, heroes who lead colorful and remarkable lives and succeed not in spite of, but because of, their uncompromising virtue," in summarizing her consistent moral virtues that were presented between the lines [3]. Another author, Olivia B. Waxman, analyzes how Ayn Rand's works respond to the Second World War by transforming them from a parable about individual creativity to a more politicized discussion of the individual in the age of big government in one of her articles [4]. Hence, it may hint that Ayn Rand had turned her focus on creating more relevance with her contemporary societies by taking more realistic factors into account in her sentences.

1.1.2.Research Purpose

Ayn Rand's ideas have appealed to an increasingly large number of populations across a variety of locations on earth. However, many scholars have solely analyzed Ayn Rand's philosophical ideas in proposing individualism, thus creating the misconception that her ideas had not changed over the historical course of time via in-depth insights in one novel. In this paper, I will analyze the difference in the ideas between her fiction *Anthem* and another novel, *The Fountainhead*, and how the Second World War may have contributed to her transition of ideas.

1.1.2.1.Wander into the Lines

The first source we will explore is a fictional novel named *Anthem* that has not been published due to its advocacy towards individualism. It places its setting in a dystopian society where individuals were controlled by the government in many aspects under the name of contributing to the great "we". Instead of conforming to oppressive social principles, the main character, Equality 7-2521, transformed himself from a brainwashed and faceless drone into an innovative and self-sufficient man. Rand mentions that "It is the word by which the depraved steal the virtue of the good, by which the weak steal the might of the strong, by which the fools steal the wisdom of the sages," when speaking of the fact that individual goods should be sacrificed for the greater common good [5]. While he chose not to give in to the anti-individualist society, the protagonist employed his intellectual capabilities in inventing the light bulb, fell in love with the Golden One, and possessed his own name, all of these acts are legally banned in his world, led to the ultimate result of triggering the formation of his self-consciousness. Ayn Rand attempted to convey her rebellion against the community's suppression of individual uniqueness through the portrait of a bold and creative figure who eventually succeeds in

shattering numerous fetters. In *Anthem*, all of the depictions of Equality 7-2521 have focused on his process of disassociating himself from his living society.

1.1.2.2. Turning Point created by the Second World War

Then the Second World War took place soon after she completed her writing the *Anthem* in 1938. Due to her previous expertise in the field of screenwriting, she was asked to develop a script discussing the production of the atomic bomb. She found that such cutting-edge technological advancements in the field of military should be treated cautiously, and their usage depended greatly on their users' intentions, such as deciding whether such a weapon as a deterrent physical force would be suitable for oppression. It was the suppression delivered from the government upon individuals that generated the necessity of warfare and artillery fires, and the ongoing Second World War was in fact the sacrifice of the rights that ought to belong to countless individuals. After Rand realized the perilous effects of ammunition falling into the hands of the ill-minded, she concluded that atomic bombs should be handled by people who are supportive of free exchange, for those who are against the idea of utilizing technology as a strategy in forcing individuals minds and for those who are willing to contribute to harmony of the society through reciprocal agreement between men [6].

The experience of the Second World War changed Rand's perspectives, which can be seen in the different storyline in her other 1943 book, *The Fountainhead*. Though Ayn Rand continued her idea of encouraging more emergence in innovative individuals in *The Fountainhead*, she integrated more social context to blend in with the issues that the protagonist encounters. She depicts an architect named Howard Roark who faces expulsion from school for being reluctant to compromise with conventions in architectural designs. He is fired for refusing to accept other classical architectural styles numerous times while he was working under a famous architect called Henry Cameron. Howard Roark once said, "The buildings were not Classical; they were not Gothic, they were not Renaissance. They were only Howard Roark," implicitly criticizing those who remain clinging to the traditions [7]. Because of his perseverance in adhering to his own architectural skills, he has antagonized many classicists, including the famous architectural critic Ellsworth Toohey. He blows up the Cortlandt buildings after he discovers this project intriguing and finds out Peter Keating does not follow his design approach. He acquits himself on the trial after the destruction of this housing project through his promotion of individual happiness and artistic integrity and attempts to construct more innovative skyscrapers, signifying the limitless audacity of men's creativity [8].

1.2. Compare and Contrast

Although Ayn Rand's idea appears to be consistent in both of these novels since they both inject incentives into cultivating their awareness of individualism, Ayn Rand had become more conceded to reality as she realized that mutineers cannot jump out of their belonging societies. In the novel *Anthem*, the protagonist is capable of eventually utilizing his wisdom by writing down the word "I" without sinfulness and pursuing his love. However, Equality 7-2521 entirely distances himself from his former societies without giving back anything. In the book *The Fountainhead*, Roark has to adjust to society because of his need to make money after being rejected by different businesses. Despite the fact that Roark still persists in his incongruity with traditional conventions, he is incapable of living and satisfying his daily basic needs without a steady source of income. In contrast with Equality 7-2521, portrayed in *Anthem*, who is completely divorced from his birthplace, Roark sets out on a different path by choosing to give back to his society [9]. Even though he defends his integrity and his creativity after he wins the case of destroying Cortlandt houses, he is hired one more time and helps to build the Cortlandts properties one more time. In addition, he builds another skyscraper while attempting to use the height of this construction to remind people to test their potential while they

should be free to cast more innovative ideas under the limelight. Roark has opted to find solutions for influencing more people to accept his belief, which is unlike Equality 7-2521, who totally separates himself from the rest of the members of his neighborhood without trying to impact others to rouse their egos through his endeavor [10].

2. CONCLUSION

Though the propagation of individualism has been maintained coherently through her novels, Rand is inclined to admit that insurgents of collectivism faced more difficulties in breaking the yokes imposed by their belonging societies, and they held the responsibility to find solutions in fighting against the once restraining policies. This finding is significant: the augmentation of socially realistic factors inside the storyline in *The Fountainhead* is beneficial in inspiring readers to take actions in real life when they find their surroundings are hampering themselves in demonstrating uniqueness. In this sense, scholars can break their stereotype that Rand probably changed her thoughts in relation to the Second World War since Ayn Rand acknowledges will be unrealistic for people to live entirely outside of their societies, which is similar to the circumstances that ordinary citizens whom hate wars have to acknowledge the fact that wars are inevitable unless men abolish the doctrines that have been initiating brutal violence. Hence, the transition in her portrait of characters' behaviors strikes against what previous people's generalization of Rand's changeless individualism ideals. In addition, such findings also help us gain a better idea of how devotees of individualism perceive wars, which are still dominant in the 21st century. As Rand had written in her work *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, in explaining that it is men's tendency to use physical force for subjugation that causes conflicts when they can actually choose alternatives in preventing collision [11]. This may explain why wars have triggered Rand to blend more social features into her work, *The Fountainhead*. Although an ongoing warfare cannot be halted randomly, people should be involved in the search of solutions to impede the exacerbation of wars in tramping human rights while adopting the fact that wars are undeniably difficult to be diminished in a short term of time. Therefore, arduous efforts are required. For example, Lynn Hunt's *Inventing Human Rights* (2007) drew many scholars' attention to the ways that popular culture and literature can create human rights. Hunt, and most of her followers, individualist and conservative person can be analyzed with this approach. Hunt claims that the rejection of torture lays its foundations on the process of seeking truth while presenting how the portrayed characters within the lines can promote common empathy in spreading new ideologies that counter against the detestation towards rights [12]. In this way, readers will accept that literature works should be included as one of the most significant media in the diffusion of human rights concepts through the common emotions established between the readers and the protagonists in a diversity of novels, which is capable of attracting more people to analyze Ayn Rand's ideas in her novels. In essence, there remain a number of factors that await investigation in researching the transitions presented in different aspects through Rand's literary works.

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