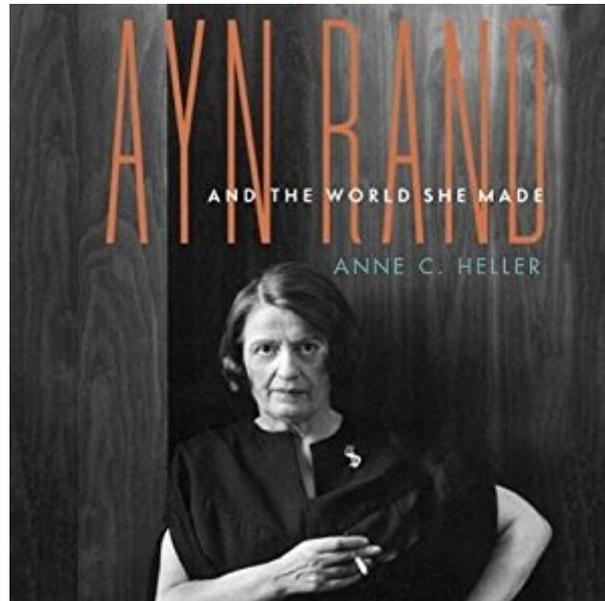


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# Ayn Rand And The World She Made



## Synopsis

Ayn Rand is the author of two phenomenally best-selling ideological novels, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, which have sold over 12 million copies in the United States alone. Through them, she built a right-wing cult following in the late 1950s and became the guiding light of Libertarianism and of White House economic policy in the 1960s and '70s. Her defenses of radical individualism and of selfishness as a "capitalist virtue" have permanently altered the American cultural landscape.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 19 hours and 36 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Blackstone Audio, Inc.

Audible.com Release Date: October 27, 2009

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B002ULA1Z6

Best Sellers Rank: #195 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Artists, Writers & Musicians #930 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Authors #2112 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > Women

## Customer Reviews

More than fair. Listening to this on audiobook while doing various domestic chores was a real treat. Having read *Anthem*, *Atlas*, *The Fountainhead* twice, and a number of Rand's essays, I have always been interested in her philosophy--not so much as an adherent but out of recognition that Rand's philosophical and political perspective merits consideration in its own right and as an ideological reality on the American political landscape. Heller weaves Rand's unique and impressive life story (horrified as a youngster at the brutality of the Soviet revolution she escapes to America to pursue the improbable dream of being a novelist) with her evolving formal philosophy celebrating the primacy of the individual, the virtue of enlightened selfishness, the inherent moral superiority of capitalism over collectivism, and the rejection of all forms of mysticism in favor of her Objectivist view of the world as real, knowable, and enjoyable by rational men and women of virtue. The biographical sketch also presents a picture that, while noxious to many of Rand's admirers (see below) does not surprise: Transfixed by her romantic vision of human potential and herself and her

work as its embodiment, Rand ultimately coped with the contradictions between her ideal world and reality (her limitations and irrational impulses, the failures of followers to conduct themselves according to her stringent standards of virtue, the inability to find in either husband Frank O'Connor or lover Nathaniel Brandon a genuine exemplar of the Ideal Man) with the self-delusion and blind hysteria to which I fear most hopeless and frustrated romantics eventually devolve.

\* "Atlas Shrugged" is Ayn Rand's doomsday novel of heroes, villains, love triangles and politics - set against a backdrop of an American economy in collapse, e.g., gifted innovators disappear, industries merge and close, millions of people are thrown out of work - while the federal government tries to help by issuing "greater good" directives which push the United States closer to socialism.\* So who was Ayn Rand and why is she still relevant today?\* In my view, what's most impressive - and what makes "Ayn Rand and the World She Made" feel like a book that will never go out of print - is author Anne C. Heller's even-handed (and easy-to-read) summaries of Rand's complex ideologies about American individualism, capitalism and democracy - along with synopses of ALL of Rand's books and lectures - explained in ways that are sometimes more lucid than Rand's original works.\* In addition, Ms. Heller's book has a story-telling momentum that's unusual compared to other biographies. With the help of researchers digging through archives in Russia and throughout the United States, the author brings Ayn Rand's childhood and adult years excitingly to life - making more clear to mainstream readers why Rand's experiences were critically important to understanding how her ideas against socialism and collectivism were formed - and how she refined them over time. Ms.

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 used him as an ideal whose outsider life and creativity became 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?

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