

Ayn Rand's Literary Journey

By Stephen Cox

The Early Ayn Rand: A Selection from Her Unpublished Fiction, edited by Leonard Peikoff, New York: New American Library, 387 pp., \$16.95

The *Early Ayn Rand* is a book that one reads with a sense of regret. Author of the bestselling novels *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand was also a forceful voice for free-market individualism. This new book contains the last of Rand's imaginative writing that may ever appear in print. But most of it is greatly inferior in quality to the work published before her death in 1982. Yet, although the new book brings to light no hidden masterpiece, no long-awaited fifth novel, *The Early Ayn Rand* is an important—and a very interesting—record of Rand's literary and intellectual development.

In making his selections from Rand's manuscripts, Leonard Peikoff, her friend and the executor of her literary estate, has omitted such items as the stage version of her first novel, *We the Living*; her screen adaptations of other people's work, when she was working in Hollywood; and one early short story. He has included four stories from the late 1920s; a synopsis for a film that was never produced (*Red Pawn*, 1931-32); two plays, *Ideal* (1934) and *Think Twice* (1939); and a total of 49 pages cut from *We the Living* and *The Fountainhead*.

The best piece in the book is probably *Her Second Career* (1929), an amusing story that shows Rand developing the penetrating wit that was to make her one of the greatest political and social critics in American literature. With an assured command of concrete imagery, learned on the spot in Hollywood, Rand describes the sad adventures of a film star who has made herself famous through nepotism and "ballyhoo" but now wishes to prove that she can start all over again and succeed through merit alone. Another comic story, *Good Copy* (about 1927), is too slight and silly for the printed page; if it had been put to use in the movies, however, it might have been turned into a pretty good "screwball comedy," as un-Randian as that may sound.

Most of the other selections are not worth salvaging for their aesthetic contribution alone, and Peikoff is right in emphasizing their value in seeing Rand's gradual self-education as a writer. The earliest story in the book, *The Husband I*

Bought (1926), is as bad as bad can be—light-years away from what Rand scholar and philosopher Wallace Matson has called "the luminous and vigorous style" of Rand's mature writing.

Subsequent works in the collection show her struggling to give succinct and forceful portrayals of a series of diverse characters (*Ideal*); trying to combine suspense with philosophical exposition (*Think Twice*); working to intensify her imagery and turn concrete detail into tell-



Ayn Rand (1905-83): The novelist-philosopher's early works reveal her gradual self-education as a writer.

ing symbolism (*Red Pawn*). Her experiments often fail, but they always exhibit the drama of a determined mind confronting serious problems.

Several of the ruling ideas of Rand's mature writing take shape in these early works, although the shape is sometimes an ungainly one. Having escaped from the Soviet Union to a new but uncertain life in the United States, Rand shows an absorbing interest in the pursuit of happiness—a wild, heroic, non-rational, and even suicidal happiness. In *Red Pawn*, one of the heroes allows himself to be executed, deriving immense satisfaction from knowing that his lover can thereby escape to freedom. In *The Husband I Bought*, the heroine proudly sacrifices her life so that her husband can have a chance for happiness with another woman. The beneficiary of this sacrifice is an incompetent parasite,

but he somehow makes the heroine ecstatically happy, so rational standards are not allowed to interfere.

As late as the first edition of *We the Living* (1936), Rand had not, in fact, begun to place much emphasis on the value of reason, though in that book she does offer superb descriptions of the evil effects of political *unreason*. The emphasis on freedom, during her early years, is generally an emphasis on the freedom of certain exceptional people to pursue happiness in their own way. These people are the "few" who "want the highest possible" and are willing to fulfill what one of them calls "our duty to ourselves.... You *want* it. That's the highest of all reasons."

In *Ideal*, Rand's interest in the "few" takes a strange turn. The play's basic concept is a clever one: a great actress searches out her admirers, trying to discover whether they can bear to be confronted by their professed ideal. Only one of them can—a hero-worshipping nobody who achieves perfect happiness in dying (needlessly, as it turns out) in her defense. The act of allowing him to do so is described by Rand's heroine as "the kindest thing" she has "ever done." This is a striking way to end a play—but not, surely, a very inspiring way to do so.

Altruism becomes the major issue in *Think Twice*, a rather drab, plot-heavy work that still manages to give promise of better things to come. Here a secretive inventor—a blurry sketch for John Galt of the future *Atlas Shrugged*—does battle with a malignant partisan of "humanitarian" self-sacrifice; this latter character is a distant relation of the magnificently malignant Ellsworth Toohey, star villain of *The Fountainhead*, then in progress.

The Fountainhead (published in 1943) presents a powerful synthesis and a careful refinement of the views that Rand had been developing. Some of her problems at this stage are revealed, however, by a sequence of previously unpublished passages from the novel's manuscript.

The passages describe the affair of her hero, Howard Roark, with one Vesta Dunning, a lively and talented but imperfect character. Roark reacts to her with his normal egoism, although this time he carries it to an extreme of cold-blooded arrogance. Rand sympathizes, as elsewhere, with Roark—at least she does so officially—but she has Vesta deliver a vigorous, and rather impressive, rebuke of Roark for being "closed" and "finished" and blind to everything

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the book case

"gay and simple and pleasant."

The literary effect is confused, as if Rand were not entirely clear about what kind of person she wanted her hero to be. She certainly did well to suppress the offending passages. Yet perhaps she would have done better to retain the Vesta relationship and use it to improve Roark's understanding of the point at which purposeful autonomy deteriorates into gratuitous self-isolation.

For people who want to know more about Rand the person as well as Rand the thinker, Peikoff's introduction and notes provide valuable information. Though this information about Rand's life might be even more plentiful, it does illuminate some interesting sides of her many-faceted character.

To cite some examples: Rand loved mystery stories, yet she remarked realistically that she could never "write a series of mysteries, because everyone would know who the murderers were."

After finishing her last novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand wanted, as Peikoff says, "to write a pure adventure story without any deep philosophical theme"; she chose the hero's name, but she never wrote the story. Rand and her husband owned a pair of toy lions named Oscar and Oswald, and in their honor (and probably that of O. Henry), she signed some of her stories "O. O. Lyons."

Such anecdotes help to reveal a colorful personality too often hidden by the philosopher's mantle. One hopes that more of them will be brought forward by Rand's friends—and that the letters, journals, and lectures to which Peikoff refers in his introduction to this volume will join the list of her published works.

Stephen Cox is an associate professor of literature at the University of California, San Diego, and is the author of "The Stranger Within Thee": Concepts of the Self in Late-Eighteenth-Century Literature (University of Pittsburgh Press).

Lessons from the Great Energy Crisis

By Charles Maurice

Creating Abundance: America's Least-Cost Energy Strategy, by Roger Sant et al., edited by James Bishop, Jr., New York: McGraw-Hill, 166 pp., \$14.95

The energy crisis of the '70s is certainly over. Yet we continue to hear—from self-appointed consumer protection groups, environmentalists, many of the media, and lobbyists—statements such as the one cited in the postscript to *Creating Abundance*: "The Administration and the Congress must recognize that the nation's energy future is not just a matter of chance, determined by uncontrollable market forces, or unpredictable resource shortages.... What is needed most is a recognition by our national leaders that the important choices before us cannot be blindly left to the market place and that by planning wisely, we can safeguard the national interest while meeting our energy needs."

This conclusion, reached by 14 major environmental groups in their joint 1982 report on President Reagan's energy policies and programs, is arrant nonsense. Yet we are hearing many others saying essentially the same thing, at the same time that OPEC is struggling to buoy up sagging oil prices.

If they were not so dangerous, such silly conclusions and recommendations would merely be laughable. But many influential people still believe that the

government needs to "do something" about our energy supply. This is why *Creating Abundance* is so valuable.

In this excellent book the authors argue, quite convincingly, that government did not end the energy crisis of the '70s. If our government did anything, it prolonged the crisis and increased its severity. Consumers and businesses, acting in their own self-interest, were responsible for the present improved energy situation.

The guiding light of the book is that petroleum, natural gas, coal, and so on are demanded because they provide services, not merely because they provide energy. People do not want energy for its own sake. They want energy *services*—mobility, heat, coolness, and comfort. Energy by itself accounts for only a portion (sometimes a very small portion) of the total cost of these services. Thus the objective of people who consume these services is to minimize the *total cost* of the services, not simply their energy cost.

Since they want to minimize total cost, people respond to a higher price of energy in three separate but related ways: (1) they conserve on the services

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