



We the Living

Ayn Rand, Leonard Peikoff (Introduction)

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We the Living Details

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From Reader Review We the Living for online ebook

Rob says

This book helped clear up some of Rand's religious philosophy. At one point, the Heroine asks a friend if he believes in God. When the friend answers no, she says that was the right answer, because if you believe in God then you don't believe in life. She goes on to explain that when people believe in God they believe in something higher than themselves that they can never achieve, and she doesn't want to believe that there is something she can never achieve. I found her reason for being an atheist ironic.

Oliver says

Here's the thing: this book is fucking awesome. I'm a big fan of this theme - the whole "individual vs. the state" story. I think most of the books I've read in this vein were descended from "1984", but this is without doubt my favorite execution of the familiar thematic focus. This book was just so evocative for me; it did an incredible job of capturing the crushing force of living under a sociopolitical regime that cares not for the wants or needs of the individual. I found something incredibly uplifting about this tale of unrelenting downward pressure. It was simply...beautiful.

I've recommended it to i-don't-know-how-many people, and very few people I've ever met have read it, but this book is one of my top 3, no doubt. I've never even read any of Ayn Rand's other books, which I guess makes me weird, but if I had to choose one book to keep me company while I was tossed into some super maximum security prison in the depths of the belly of the beast, it would be this one.

Lo says

I'm going to kind of branch out here and do a different review and talk just what I felt strongly about in this book. If you would like a brief summary, wikipedia does an excellent job.

Anyways, this book was one of the most devastatingly beautiful books I've ever read. The scene between Irina and Sascha broke my heart - it's one of the moments where, in typical Rand fashion, she weaves her characters into such real but horrendously tragic situations you just weep. I would recommend this book to some who is either (a) lacking motivation in their life (b) wants to know more from a fictional perspective what communism is like to live in (c) has had their heart broken by an ideal (d) Rand lovers.

I want to focus on the love triangle of Andrei-Kira-Leo here. What this book gets at is three types of love and the chaos that descends from them. For Andrei, it's infatuation. Oh Andrei, he's wonderful. The more the book progresses, the more you just want to remove him from the story line and rescue him from the horrors contained in this book. He's the dashing communist who falls in love with the revolutionary Kira, a woman of pure passion and ideals. He fights it, but his infatuation for this woman who encompasses everything he has ever wanted in a woman takes over and turns him into her pawn. Eventually, he breaks free, giving the ultimate sacrifice to Kira to show his "unending" (re: completely obsessive) love for her. Ultimately he (well, spoiler) loses, he takes his own life unable to bear to live without Kira. Weak.

So, Kira; Yes, our strong female lead, modelled after Rand herself. She's beautiful, talented, intelligent, and most importantly she wants to live and experience more than anything. The fight and drive of this girl is incredible and truly inspirational. What's her flaw? While posing as a hooker one night, she "meets her one"

Leo. She does everything for Leo on his command. At first, things are beautiful between them - they are each other's halves. They don't do things based on other's opinions, they act according to their passion (which is primarily for each other). Kira loves Leo, even after his transformation (going to Crimea), where Leo changes drastically. Although carrying on a passionate affair with Andrei, she is loyal (I know, it's a paradox) to Leo always and that is the one ember that keeps her going, this all encompassing love. Even when Leo breaks her heart, she takes it (and takes it out on other people) and continues to passionately love him. Really weak. Kira, starting out promising, ends up being the most disappointing female Rand character yet. Her strength < her idealistic obsession with Leo. Ugh.

And Leo. He starts out wonderful, as I said, Kira's other half. However, he gives up on everything at one point. He may have loved Kira at one point, but he never loves her above himself. I think the ending here with Leo was a little farfetched, but essentially, Leo is an entirely selfish being. I give Kira this, the point Rand is trying to make is that without communism, Leo would have been the man for Kira, the one she first met. However, after he loses all hope, he becomes an alcoholic and mentally abusive towards Kira (especially in his frustration over her being the breadwinner). Leo becomes a character towards the end that you shake your head at and wonder how someone could be so ungrateful and so miserable.

If only Kira had gone abroad with Andrei to live happily forever. But that isn't the way Rand wanted it; she wanted to show two things. One, obviously, communism is evil (duh, it's a Rand book) and (2) blinding love will destroy who you are. I think she tries to redeem Kira in the end there, but Kira's failure to pursue the life of her dreams is a total failure in my mind, and she sacrificed all her opportunities for a glimmer of the Leo she first new. That is not solid advice to offer the younger generations Miss Rand, but at least in my mind, she conveys this solidarity in true love (Irina and Sascha) vs the destructive love (Andrei, Kira).

Read if you get a chance; The Fountainhead and Atlas Shrugged have better defined characters, yet as Rand's first novel, We the Living leaves its mark on the reader.

sologdin says

Part VIII of a multi-part review series.

Anti-communists in early Soviet Russia very astonishingly come to bad end.

Introduced by Peikoff, who claims that Rand's first novel was, instead of this one, almost "set in an airship orbiting the earth" (v) which would've been kinda cool, except now we have Against the Day, which likely would've embarrassed Rand's hypothetical effort as much as Solzhenitsyn humiliates this one.

Rand's own forward contains the normal cacogogic posturing. For instance:

"Writers are made, not born. To be exact, writers are self-made" (xiii);

Neo-spenglerianism: "The rapid epistemological degeneration of our present age" (xiv);

"The Naturalist school of writing consists of substituting statistics for one's standard of value" (id.);

A nice admission regarding the maturity of her ideas: "I am still a little astonished at times, that too many adult Americans do not understand the nature of the fight against Communism as clearly as I understood it at the age of twelve: they continue to believe that only Communist methods are evil, while Communist ideals are noble" (xv);

To support her juvenile contention that the soviet system is unable to produce anything, she answers Sputnik and the Soviet nuclear program with “Read the story of ‘Project X’ in *Atlas Shrugged*” (xvi). So, even here, in her first novel, we do not escape the constant refrain of spurious John Galt glossings.

She concludes the forward with “The specific events of [protagonist’s] life were not mine; her ideas, her convictions, her values were and are” (xvii). This statement is stunning in two respects: the first discredits any and all “events” recorded in the novel--I was initially willing to give her the benefit of the doubt, as a Russian ex-pat, that some of the events described may have a factual basis. But she has thrown the “events” of the novel under the train. It accordingly lacks credibility as a document reflecting historicity.

The second respect is that, even while distancing herself from the events described, she adopts protagonist’s ideology. Protagonist goes on to record the following observations, which should be considered as incorporated by reference *in extenso* to author’s ideology:

Defining the relevant class position: protagonist’s family once owned a textile factory, which was nationalized (21), and protagonist once lived in a “vast mansion” and “had an English governess” (45);

“From somewhere in the aristocratic Middle Ages, [protagonist] had inherited the conviction that labor and effort were ignoble” (49);

Regarding the Russian Revolution: protagonist did depose and state that “It is an old and ugly fact that the masses exist and make their existence felt. This is a time when they make it felt with particular ugliness” (58) (my only question is how the Evil Bolsheviks held off on shooting her until page 460?);

Affirmed that protagonist believes in “miracles” (61);

Regarding the “Internationale”: “She tried not to listen to the words. The words spoke of the damned, the hungry, the slaves, of those who had been nothing and shall be all; in the magnificent goblet of the music, the words were not intoxicating as wine; they were not terrifying as blood; they were gray as dish water” (73);

Protagonist adopts Rand’s comment from the preface regarding the distinction between methods and ideals: “I loathe your ideals” (89), said to a GPU agent, which inexplicably does not get her shot in this Evil Empire tale;

Reveals herself to be a real peach: “Can you sacrifice the few? When those few are the best? Deny the best its right to the top--and you have no best left. What are your masses but millions of dull, shriveled, stagnant souls that have no thoughts of their own, no dreams of their own, no will of their own, who eat and sleep and chew helplessly the words others put into their brains? And for those who would sacrifice the few who know life, who are life? I loathe your ideals because I know no worse injustice than the giving of the undeserved. Because men are not equal in ability and one can’t treat them as if they were. And because I loathe most of them” (90)--we should compare Mussolini’s comments from a 1922 article (anthologized in Italian Fascisms From Pareto to Gentile): “The sun of the Russian myth has already set. Light is no longer shining from the East, where terrible news of death and famine is coming out of Russia; we are receiving desperate appeals by socialists and anarchists in Petrograd against Lenin’s reactionary policies. Professor Ulianov is now a Tsar scrupulously following the internal and external policies of the Romanovs. The former Basle professor did not perhaps imagine that he would end up as a reactionary; but obviously governments have to suit themselves to those they govern and the enormous human army of Russians--patient, resigned, fatalistic and oriental--is incapable of living in freedom; they need a tyrant; now more than ever, they, like every other people in fact, even those in the West, are anxiously looking for something solid in their institutions, ideas,

and men, havens where they can cast anchor for a while and rest their souls, tired out with much wandering.” Coupled with Mussolini’s concept that fascism is managed inequality, with rule by the elite, the triumph of the few over quantity, it is readily apparent that Rand’s politics are one-part fascistic, at least in their assumptions, if not in their overall policy preferences. She may rant about individualism, whereas fascism specifically opposes individualism, but conceptually the misanthropy is substantially identical, as is the basis for the opposition to left economics;

In the midst of world historical occurrences, protagonist laments the lack of compliments for “her new dress” (98), obsesses over “lipstick and silk stockings” (119), and files a civil case over some converted home furnishings (180), which case is lost;

She resents “novels by foreign authors in which a poor, honest worker was always sent to jail for stealing a loaf of bread to feed the starving mother of his pretty young wife who had been raped by a capitalist and committed suicide thereafter, for which the all-powerful capitalist fired her husband from the factory, so that their child had to beg on the streets and was run over by the capitalist’s limousine with sparkling fenders and a chauffeur in uniform” (136-37) (does that book actually exist?);

She is very proud of herself “that she was actually corrupting a stern Communist. She regretted that the corruption could go no further” (157);

And on and on. There’re egregiously annoying bits on protagonist throughout, but do I need to report any more? Safe to conclude, rather, that she’s horrible (and that conclusion has nothing to do with maintaining two separate sexual relationships simultaneously), and that her ideas and convictions are author’s ideas and convictions, as stated in the forward, the misanthropic ideas and fascistic convictions. Good job!

Novel otherwise has a number of amusing defects:

The NEP is noted to be a “temporary compromise,” which appears to me to misstate the relationship between so-called war communism and the new economic policy (32) (and again at 308-09);

Predicts with hope the fascist invasion of Russia: “Do you think Europe is blind? Watch Europe. She hasn’t said her last word yet. The day will come--soon--when these bloody assassins, these foul scoundrels, that Communist scum” (38);

It is asserted that “Czar Alexander II had magnanimously freed” the Russian serfs (48);

And so on. There’s plenty to criticize, and I lack the energy. Suffice it to say that the criticism of left policy here is less about its proper function (as alleged in *Atlas Shrugged*) and more about the deviation from policy, as noted in a “breach of party discipline” (104) and in a litany of abuses of non-doctrinal nature (321-22), and again in communist apparatchik conspiracy with aristocrat boyfriend later (394 ff.);

Slavophile philosopher proclaims at one point that Russia “has lost [its future] in materialistic pursuits. Russia’s destiny has ever been of the spirit. Holy Russia has lost her God and her Soul” (154);

Protagonist’s boyfriend tells her other boyfriend that “I’m studying philosophy [...] because it’s a science that the proletariat of the RSFSR does not need at the moment” (155);

A fairly dismissive attitude toward human suffering: “Petrograd had known sweeping epidemics of cholera; it had known epidemics of typhus, which were worse; the worst of its epidemics was that of ‘John Gray,’”

which is apparently some form of popular dance (id.)—I'd've thought that the human suffering should be the point of an anti-communist writing;

One of protagonist's boyfriends alleges “the essential immutability of human nature,” a comical conceit (302);

Has communists expressing their “idealism” (309), which is not a Marxist doctrine, of course (we could be charitable and assume that the commies doing the expressing are incorrect doctrinally, I suppose—but then that weakens the *Atlas Shrugged* critique that the failures of communism arise from its correct implementation);

Novel misunderstands or misrepresents the Leninist theory of democratic centralism in such comments as “why do you think you are entitled to your own thoughts? Against those of the majority of your collective?” (311)—leninist centralism is not necessarily something that I'd endorse, but this is a bogus caricature;

Protagonist's second boyfriend crumbles ideologically for no apparent reason, just up and throws in the towel, presumably after pre-reading *Atlas Shrugged*, considering that he has adopted part of Galt's rant: “We were to raise men to our own level. But they don't rise, the men we're ruling, they don't grow [this, merely in 1925!], they're shrinking. They're shrinking to a level no human creatures ever reached before [!!!]. And we're sliding slowly down into their ranks. We're crumbling, like a wall, one by one. Kira, I've never been afraid. I'm afraid, now. It's a strange feeling. I'm afraid to think. Because...because I think, at times, that perhaps our ideals have had no other result” (334), which is a line of revelation not earned by any preparatory work in the novel whatsoever. Didn't Rand state that she abhors the undeserved? This character reversal and recantation is one of the most undeserved that I can recall.

Anyway: a more or less dull, tendentious, below average novel, made horrible by author's marginal contributions. Full of laments from dispossessed Russian aristocrats, which we are apparently to take seriously--protagonist's primary boyfriend is a dispossessed aristocrat. Presentations of Soviet propaganda items falls flat, insofar as they are not typically manifestly insane, but sound in the same register as any other state's propaganda, which normally ranges from boringly true (“Just Say No to Drugs!”) to blatantly self-serving and thus readily identifiable and disregardable (“The Leader is Good!”). Problem is that the tendentious anti-communist conclusion is not well supported by the facts of the novel, which records deviations from communist party discipline and reinforces the communist propaganda that saboteurs, traitors, and speculators were fucking up the economy. That kind of inconsistency is less than persuasive.

Recommended for those who miss their priceless pieces of antique porcelain, readers who smuggle human flesh out of this wolf trap, and Sir Galahads of the blackmail sword.

Jennifer says

The one great benefit of reading *We the Living* is that it encapsulates pretty exactly what Rand spends many hundreds more pages doing in *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*: mainly, hating on the collective, venerating capitalism, and (God help us all) describing how free-thinking women shouldn't be slaves to anyone except their capitalist sexual partners.

I find Rand's philosophy beyond problematic, but to my mind *We the Living* helps explain just how she

arrived at the ideas she entertained and became the person she did. It's not precisely an autobiography (only, as she demurs, "in the intellectual sense") but her descriptions of life in Soviet Russia are drawn from personal experience, and it's not difficult to see how that kind of traumatic personal experience could drive someone to the opposite philosophical extreme. I offer no theories whatsoever on what makes her romantic relationships so ridiculously rape-tastic. (Because that way lies madness.)

Frankly, your mileage may vary with Rand depending on your political beliefs, but if you have to read something just to be able to engage in a conversation about her, I'd say start here. It's an early work, but I can promise from painful experience that her writing style never improves, so you might as well go for the short one. (And avoid *Anthem*. For the love of all that's holy, avoid *Anthem*!)

Kendra Kettelhut says

I just finished this book. My soul has never been so pained by a novel. Very few books affect me like this one did. I cannot explain other than it was so beautifully horrific. I knew very little about Communism or what the USSR was like. It caused so much anger and frustration in me, but the pain comes from the truths that it enlightens about humanity. We are creatures of pain and suffering and joy and triumph. And no matter what pain we are dealt...we still have the capacity within ourselves to find the beauty and will that makes us go on; life. This is the first Ayn Rand novel I have read. It is her first novel. I would highly recommend this. It is an invention of your soul, so read this when you have the endurance to enjoy Ayn Rand's *We The Living*.

Marija Andreeva says

Fountainhead was the first book from Ayn Rand that I read. I found it deeply inspirational, book that pushed me to think outside the box. And it talked about one of my favorite subjects, individualism. I thought, Oh my God, what a book. I felt even emotionally exhausted, but in a good way. Then I read *Anthem*, which I thought was good, but not as *Fountainhead*. I felt as if *Fountainhead* was the standard of measuring her work. I didn't think anything can surpass it. But, oh boy I was wrong.

I haven't had the chance to read *Atlas Shrugged* yet, but I don't think that it can surpass *We the living*. This book left me physically and emotionally shaking at the end. It is one of the best books I have ever read. So real, so outstandingly written. It shows in the most appealing way that life is never black and white, among other things. It is a must read. You don't need to like Ayn Rand or her philosophy to like this book. It is a true literature masterpiece. Very few books have shaken me so much.

Walter says

In the foreword that she wrote for the 1959 edition of her own novel "We the Living", Ayn Rand wrote, "I had not reread this novel as a whole, since the time of its first publication in 1936, until a few months ago. I had not expected to be as proud of it as I am." Well, I'm glad that Rand is so proud of her own first novel. As for me, I am less than impressed.

The novel takes place between 1922 and 1926, during the turbulent years after the Bolshevik Revolution.

Most histories and novels that I have read about that turbulent time tell of a Russia that was struggling for existence, barely legitimate in the eyes of her own citizens, in the midst of an ongoing civil war, and experimenting with a limited form of Capitalism that Lenin euphemistically called the "New Economic Policy." But that's not the Soviet Russia that Rand portrays in "We the Living". Instead, Rand describes a government that is an ultra-efficient in its oppression of its own citizens, which was able to find dissenters who merely think questioning thoughts about the new Soviet reality, and which is able to perform super-human feats to keep their own citizens in line.

I find many similarities between "We the Living" and Upton Sinclair's novel "The Jungle". Both novels were completed earlier in the careers of their authors, who both went on to write more influential works. Both are works of political propaganda. And both portray a world in which the oppressors (who are the evil Chicago capitalists in "The Jungle" and the Soviet government in "We the Living") can completely oppress anyone that they want. Granted that the political views of Sinclair and Rand are very different. But their political novels are very similar. It's ironic, isn't it?

I am no fan of the Soviet government. I really enjoyed Solzhenitzin's works that detail the oppression of the Soviet Union. I have no doubts that many people suffered from the Soviet tyranny in the 1920s. But, please, even Solzhenitzin will acknowledge that the Soviet secret police were not Supermen. They could only do so much, in fact, most of the suffering that they caused was not because of their evil intent but rather because of their incompetence.

Another problem with Rand's novel is the same problem that exists in Rand's more well known novels, "The Fountainhead" and "Atlas Shrugged." That problem is Rand's political philosophy, which is a strange combination of Nietzsche's UberMensch, Bakunin's Anarchism, and a good dose of narcissism. A healthy dose of narcissism. In fact, Rand's philosophy is the worship of the self, the dogma of narcissism. And narcissism, in literature as in life, leads to emptiness and disappointment.

"We the Living" is the story of Kira, a young daughter of a man who owned a factory in the days of the Czar, who wants to become an engineer in the new Soviet experiment. She falls in love with another pre-Soviet aristocrat named Leo, and she causes another man, Andrei the Soviet soldier and GPU agent, to fall in love with him. Now, Tolstoy used the device of the love triangle to masterfully tell the story of Anna Karenina in the 19th Century. In that novel, the triangle caused a tremendous amount of agony for Anna and her lovers. But in "We the Living", the love triangle is really no big deal to Kira. When her two lovers find out about each other, bad things happen, as you could imagine. But Kira is not in the least concerned. It's very strange.

This novel is heavy with the self-righteousness of Rand's philosophy. That makes it hard to work through most of the time. Granted, there are a few places where the novel looks as though it will become interesting. But it never really does. That's a shame, because Rand has a ton of things to work with, given her setting in 1920s Russia, the love triangle, and her amoral outlook. But she can't get it done. In the end, the novel fizzles and dies. It's very disappointing.

I would really not recommend this novel to anyone, unless that person is just absolutely in love with Ayn Rand, and even then it's iffy. If you want to read a great novel about the Russian Revolution, I would recommend Sholokhov's "And Quiet Flows the Don", Pasternak's "Doctor Zhivago" or Solzhenitzin's epic trilogy about the First World War and the revolution. It's really not worth reading "We the Living" if you can read any of those works.

Sporkurai says

Erotica at its best. *We the Living* is about a young lady with a brilliant mind and a ferocious appetite for sex. The book begins with Kira, a hot little harlot who might have been working at a strip joint (if they weren't so damn bourgeois!), as she seeks to find a nightlife for herself in her newly Soviet city of Petrograd. Posing as a prostitute in a red light district, she quickly forms her first life-long sexual bond with the first guy who comes along. He happens to be a philosopher, and that's how this book meets its philosophy quota. Over time, her close personal friendship with a secret police agent (WTF?!?) becomes sexual, and the real story begins. Truly, trying to masquerade as faithful to multiple sexual partners is something we can all relate to. A must read for any hip cat.

????????? says

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SPOILER ALERT!

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Daniella says

It's funny because this book usually only gets 5 stars or a 1 star, and here I am giving it a three star. I'll come up with a coherent review in the morning. Overall it was a good classic. Exhausting. But good.

Miso says

Duuschlaa gjuu dee, jaahan haramsal... muuhai tugsgul, eswel uuriiguu olson bardam, emzeg negnii jargaltai tugsgul geh uu yag onood heleh ug oldohgui bn, saihan hair bsn yumsn, 2 hair bsn yumsn, ali aliiigni uzlee de gi bodogdiiin, daanch 2ulangni aldchihlaa neg talaas...

nuguu talaas hen negnii togtooson uzel surtaliin gai gamshgaar niigem, huvi humuus herhen uurchlugdj, amidral yamr aihtar programchlagdan hev zagwart ordg yumbe, leningrad hotiig uezhsen, bas kira teneg shd, emegtei hund heleh zunduu ug bhda yaj tiim anir chimeegui bolj haragdahiin nuutsiig bas il gargaj toochchihloo shuu dee, zolios, zorig gedeg ug hamtda hereglegdh niilmel ug bhda gsn 9n zuiliin zuils bodogdono, setgel huurul deed tsegte l bh shig bn, bichihgui ungursn olon zuil hedii bga ch bodoood tungaagaad uldeh tarhind orson bgaasai gj husne... ene bichsn commento unshih buriidee medremje sanah gj tog tog hiilgew...

Jack Gardner says

I really don't know that there is much I can say about this novel that hasn't already been said. **We The Living** is the most tragic of Ayn Rand's novels and possibly the most under appreciated.

While it is clearly an early effort for her - her use of English is occasionally off and her style is not consistent throughout the novel - the story line is the most (I hate to use this word, but I can't think of a better way to put it) realistic of all her novels. There are no amazing machines or amazing feats in **We The Living**, the most amazing thing that anyone does is survive under the early Communist rule.

However, the survivors are the villains of the book. Rand never allows her heroes to exist under tyranny. Kira and Andrei struggle against it in their own individual ways, one choosing death over a life of lost ideals and the other dying in an attempt to escape.

Holding on to the idea of the individual must have been impossible in early Communist Russia. Rand should know - she escaped Russia in 1926. **We The Living** is probably one of the most accurate pieces of literature we have to depict what life was like under the initial Communist regimes. The 'great idea' that fueled the Revolution of 1917 turned in to what can only be called a 'great mess' that lasted for nearly 80 years and has still not completely resolved itself.

If you are interested in life in the 1920's, **We the Living** is a must read book. The people of Russia had a very different experience with this decade compared to those of Europe and the US. While for much of the decade the big cities of the Western world were the Land of Plenty, the general Russian population was suffering hardships that made the poorest mid-western farmer seem to be living the life of a King.

We the Living is a testament to man's ability to survive. It is a testament to Rand and held the seeds to her philosophy. It is an encouragement to all of us to strive to be the best we can be - even when the world is against us. It is also a warning to reason before revolt and to express as opposed to repress. You can take away an mans home, you can take away his possessions, you can take away his family, you can take his life, but his mind and soul are his and his alone unless he chooses to give them to you. It is a reminder to all of us, that every individual has that choice to make every day.

Rebecca F. says

Instantly as visceral as her more popular later work, Rand's first novel set in early 20th-century communist Russia can really stir you up -- that is, if you support her views on individualism and passion for life, which I do. Like her other novels, the characters are boldly drawn archetypes, strong and obvious, minus extraneous detail that could be distracting from the philosophical ideal overlaying the plot. While Rand experienced first-hand much of the life in Russia she portrays in *We the Living*, Rand smartly understood that often fantasy can be more effective than reality, hence we have incredible co-incidences, master manipulators, tragic love triangles (c'mon, what girl doesn't dream of being loved by two dynamic men?), valiant death scenes, all these sort of super-life scenarios not totally believable, but intended to enthrall the reader, likely just as Rand was enthralled by writing it. Where her human characters fall short in terms of detail, the city of St. Petersburg, also a sort of sub-character in the book, is rendered with excessive descriptive minutia - and this is where the book gets a bit sleepy. You can tell Rand had a real fondness for "old Russia" by the sensitive way she paints a portrait of the city woven into the lives of her characters. As a young, idealistic

writer, Rand tackled with gusto multiple genres in one book (a teaser for things to come, e.g. *Atlas Shrugged*), thus *We the Living* is part love story, part action-adventure, part political intrigue, and to her credit, it totally works. There are certainly some rough spots, but overall, a respectable effort and a damn good read.

Richard Houchin says

If you ever want to acquire a keen appreciation for food, read any story about the USSR. History or fiction, doesn't matter. Mildewed millet and one loaf of bread a month is enough to break anyone!

We The Living is an illustration of the loneliness that seems the unavoidable consequence of any who possess an Objectivist viewpoint.

One passage in the book made me laugh in appreciation for how true it rang in my life. Kira says,

"Well, if I asked people whether they believed in life, they'd never understand what I meant. It's a bad question. It can mean so much that it really means nothing. So I ask them if they believe in God. And if they say they do--then I know they don't believe in life."

This is because no matter to whom you are speaking, no matter what religion they follow, God is always the highest conception of the highest possible. A believer in God has placed their highest conception above their own possibility, above their own life. Whatever such a person believes in, it isn't life.

"It's a rare gift," Kira says, "to feel reverence for your own life and to want the best, the greatest, the highest possible, here, now, for your very own. To imagine a heaven and then not to dream of it, but to demand it."

Just as celebrations are for those who have something to celebrate, life is for the living, not those who cherish the thoughts of their own death, and the after-life rewards which await them for their obedience.

Lorrie Savoy says

This book disturbs me and I don't quite know how to respond to it. On the one hand, the reality of Soviet Russia in the 1920's is haunting; the descriptions of food (or the lack of it) stayed with me, making me reflect on and enjoy my own meals while I was reading it and for a few days after. I also feel that it would work as a companion piece for *1984* because the tensions between the sordid details of daily life and the hypocrisy of the political system are clearly seen in both books. Rand's philosophy is clear but not too overstated so it is easy to read it simply as a novel, not a political tract. I'm okay with all of that.

What I don't care for are the characters themselves. Kira is the worst sort of passive woman; I know I'm supposed to see her as a strong individual, but she is neither. Her goal of being an engineer is not enough to sustain her, and it is barely shown - just stated. It feels like a detail added on after a first draft of the novel to distinguish Rand from Kira (she makes a point of the difference in her introduction). Her passion for Leo is all about being subjugated by him - at one point he is even described as her "slave-owner." Details that were originally used to show how supremely unconnected Kira was from the mundane tribulations of life ("Kira

never noticed what she ate" "Kira never noticed what she wore") are reversed the moment that Leo enters the picture - all of a sudden Kira is a fashion plate and wants Leo to notice how she is dressed. All of the details about how Leo can't be subjected to the sight of her cooking or cleaning truly upset me. I know I am approaching this book from a feminist perspective, but what kind of love is only able to be sustained in a perfect atmosphere with no glimpses of the everyday? Leo is loathesome; the words arrogant, contemptuous, and mocking are used in almost every passage about him - and we are supposed to admire him? Like a "young god"? Why? Just because he's hot? Really, that's what it seems to come down to. Most of the minor and background characters are awful - I can't think of a single description of a child that doesn't involve nose-picking. The older women are shrill, the older men are empty shells. Overall, I think the world that is portrayed in *We the Living* is worth seeing; the characters Rand admires are not my choice for admirable human beings but there are moments in the novel where they go beyond their cardboard versions of Rand's philosophy to show true humanity.

Mimi says

If you liked Ayn Rand's other books, you'd like this one too.

If you like her politics and enjoy her writing, then this is a must-read because it's practically an autobiography.

If none of the above applies, then this would be an unpleasant experience.

Moved to <https://covers2covers.wordpress.com/2...>

Chrissie says

Where to start? How to explain why I like it so very much?

I like Ayn Rand's style of writing. Her language is strong, clear and not in the least subtle. I think I could recognize it in the future. The reader observes what the characters do. Very little introspection. The plot fits the language and the behavior of the characters. Strong, determined people - no not people, just one character, but she is the central character. Kira is her name. This book is autobiographical, but only in the sense that it speaks of the author's life philosophy. The characters and the plot are all fictional. How Kira thinks is how Ayn Rand thinks....and if that doesn't appeal to you, well then the whole novel may not appeal to you. Do strong, determined people appeal to you?

This is a book that describes the Bolshevik era. It is set in Petrograd / St. Petersburg / Leningrad, predominantly the 1920s. It is a book about how Bolshevism destroyed people. It is also a love story.

The ending! It ends perfectly. Ayn Rand's writing, her description of places and events is so sharp and clear. The ending dazzles. You see it and you feel it and it moves you. The events fit the language. You want to know what will happen. You say, "Get to the end! Tell me! Tell me!" But at the same time you know you have to wait because Kira's path takes time too. That is what I mean when I say the words reflect the events.

Is the book realistic? Yes, I think so.

Mary Woods narrates the audiobook. She changes the speed with which she reads the story. Dialogs are read slowly so you can listen and think about what each is saying. Past events are read in a speedy blur. I have never run into such a technique before, but it is effective. I came to recognize the different characters by the different tones used.

Debbie Zapata says

Sometimes you should read the introductions before you start a book, and other times you should just jump in to the story. This particular anniversary edition of Rand's first novel (originally published in 1936) has an introduction with a major spoiler regarding a choice the main character Kira makes in her life, a choice that is the heart of the book. Even though I skipped the rest of the cursed intro, I was annoyed at knowing that detail. I prefer to discover such things on my own.

Oh, well. The important part to remember, and what makes this book relevant to me at this moment in history is this, from Rand's 1958 forward:

"We The Living is not a story about Soviet Russia in 1925. It is a story about Dictatorship, any dictatorship, anywhere, at any time, whether it be Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany, or ~~ which this novel might do its share in helping to prevent ~~ a socialist America."

This book is supposed to be semi-autobiographical. Once again I quote Rand's forward:

"I was born in Russia, I was educated under the Soviets, I have seen the conditions of existence that I describe. The particulars of Kira's story were not mine; I did not study engineering -- I studied history; I did not want to build bridges -- I wanted to write; her physical appearance bears no resemblance to mine, neither does her family. The specific events of Kira's life were not mine; her ideas, her convictions, her values were and are."

This is a grim story and it was not easy for me to spend much time on it. I needed to take breaks, to get out of its grey world that was so full of despair, broken dreams and twisted ideals. And truthfully, I did not care much for Kira at any point, although I admired her intense desire to be true to herself and to live her own life, the way any human being should be allowed to do. People are individuals, and while I accept the need for certain rules and regulations of society, no person or government or ideology should force those individuals into identical molds like bricks in a wall.

Not in Russia a hundred years ago, not in America today, not anywhere ever.

Mike (the Paladin) says

Ayn Rand is/was an interesting, intelligent woman. This is her first novel. If you're reading it simply for the novel then skip the introduction. If on the other hand you are interested in Ms. Rand's thought processes then by all means read the introduction. This is (of course) a newer edition (as the book was written in 1925). Ms. Rand wants us to understand that this is not a novel about the Soviet Union but a novel (in her words) of "man against the state".

While I am not a "student" or follower of Ms. Rand and her philosophy (Objectivism) I do find her quite

insightful..."in some ways".

There are places where I definitely disagree with Ms. Rand but on the other hand there are places she is right on and has been borne out by history. (Simply read her short discourse on "5 year plans" in the introduction).

This book tells the story of (basically) a woman. Most on Ms. Rand's writings do. She can be found in each of her books and this (even though her first) is no exception. Lets not forget that Ms. Rand's family lost everything to the Soviet revolution and while this isn't strictly about "the Soviet Union" that is a dictatorship that is "included".

As you read I think you'll see that Ms. Rand has hit the proverbial nail on the head in many ways. She points out that free people are quite often "taken in" by the idea that while the "effects" of totalitarianism..."colectiveism"...state controlled governing systems are negative the "ideals" are "noble". That, she points out has been the attitude of every free state that has ever fallen to totalitarianism.

Stalin referred to those who held this view as "useful idiots".

Ms. Rand also points out that to see this one has to be intellectually honest and open minded, willing to see it. Looking at America now it should be obvious to us but for some reason most don't see it despite the loss of prosperity, unemployment, loss of freedoms (including the erosion of rights GUARANTEED in the Bill of Rights) (yes several of the first 10 amendments have already been breached and the courts don't seem in any hurry to reverse this.) most not only don't see it...but seem to be voting for it.

Where do I disagree with Ms. rand? Well, she was very much a "my way or the highway" thinker. She herself had little patience with those who disagreed with her as her attitude seems to be that they just couldn't, or wouldn't see it. Also I'm a Christian and she seems to have seen little difference between putting others before yourself willingly and having the "State" force the view that everyone must exist "for the State". There is some argument by Objectivists that she saw the difference but simply rejected religious belief. That could be the case as I noted, I'm not a "student" of Ms.Rand's philosophy, I've simply read her work and some little about her.

Wherever you stand or whatever you think about the woman herself this is a book I'd recommend. It has some value and can have the effect of making us look at what we have before we lose it. I rate it a 3 as it's not quite as readable as some of her later work (it is her first after all) and can get dry. Still it's worth a read.
