



Ayn Rand: the thinker who defended that individualism will make us free

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The writer and philosopher Ayn Rand (1905-1982) was a historical anomaly in the 1940s and 1950s in the United States.

She attracted both the new right and the new left.

Her thoughts were like shell casings popping out of a gun.

Egoism is a virtue, altruism a sin (in contravention of the Judeo-Christian tradition), libertarian capitalism (extreme neoliberalism), the only moral system that allows the freedom of the human being to be promoted, and profits or greed came before people.

Those were the iron threads with which happiness was woven.

Everything was *laissez faire*.

“Let do” to the market.

Ayn Rand was a voice full of individualism, personal freedom and, above all, selfishness, but under the echo of the Declaration of Independence: each person must seek their own happiness.

Not just 20th century It all started on February 2, 1905 in St. Petersburg (now Russia).

It is the date of Ayn Rand's birth.

In 1924 she graduated from her university and two years later she emigrated (leaving behind her original Jewish name, Alissa Rosenbaum) to the United States.

She worked in Hollywood as an extra in several movies and as a junior screenwriter.

In those days she met Francis O'Connor, an artist, on a film set and she married him in 1929. That same year, in New York, she was already the director of the wardrobe department of RKO Pictures.

But it was in California—correcting texts that director Cecil B. DeMille's own team considered historically implausible—that she developed her militancy in capitalism.

And in the movies.

In the 1930s she was a screenwriter for Universal Pictures, Paramount and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

And even she worked for free as a typist, *The spring* (Deusto).

It took seven years to raise its main text.

The story of an architect —played on film in 1949 by Gary Cooper— who collapses his own building when he discovers that it will be imitated by others.

Therein lies Ayn Rand's vision of the "true" human being.

An individualistic and lonely man.

A hero who pursues his dream and his happiness without compromise.

That is why she was admired by the co-founder of Apple Steve Jobs or Travis Kalanick, former CEO of Uber.

She reflected the ideal of Silicon Valley tech gold diggers.

But she was never interested in how an entrepreneur ran her business.

"She was a champion of reason and individualism in an age of irrationality and conformity," observes David Boaz, vice president of the Cato Institute, a *think tank*. Washington-based libertarian.

He vehemently defended abortion, atheism, and advanced sexual freedom.

"I am harsh and intolerable when I am absorbed in my work.

And I have few friends", he narrated in a letter to readers in the seventies after the success of *El manantial*.

One of those few friends would be Alan Greenspan—then an economic adviser to President Richard Nixon—who became a mentor to Rand for two decades.

Greenspan would become the head of the Federal Reserve (1987-2006), but he never followed the economic ideas of the philosopher.

However, the influence has reached Trumpism. *The New York Times* reported that *The spring* was Trump's favorite novel.

And Mike Pompeo, former Secretary of State (2018-2021) and member of the conservative Tea Party movement, admitted that *Atlas Shrugged* (Deusto) “really” had an impact on him.

But nobody like Ray Dalio, one of the most influential investors on the planet, revealed in 2017 the depth of the roots.

"Rand's books capture the mindset very well" of the Trump administration, he noted.

"They hate the weak, the unproductive, socialism and its policies while admiring the strong and those who can generate profits."

It is easy to recognize many of those faces among those who stormed the Capitol on January 6, 2021.

Ayn Rand, author of *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, in 1967. Everett Collection (CSU Archives/Everett Collection)

Because everything, including sex, was truly *laissez faire*.

The writer Jennifer Burns tells in *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (Oxford University Press; the goodness of the market: Ayn Rand and the American right, without Spanish edition) that she forced her patient husband to wear bells on his shoes to know when he was coming and going around the house.

She also required her biggest supporter, self-help book writer Nathaniel Branden, to meet with her twice a week for sex, with her husband's consent.

Rand interpreted it as a rational agreement.

That freedom made his fiction texts attractive for part of the LGTBI + movement —despite his homophobia: Ran describes homosexuality as “immoral” —.

He wrote as he thought, he lived as he wrote.

Perhaps that was the great charm of him.

Would she react?

“Reactionary means based on the past.

What's wrong?

Mozart and Bach, my favorite composers, are reactionaries in that sense.

Does that mean they are bad?

Hardly”, reflects Walter Block, professor of economics at Loyola University in New Orleans.

"Just as Mozart and Bach 'remain valid,' the same is true of Ayn Rand and other free enterprise philosophers."

However, if there was one thing he hated—besides communism—it was the welfare state.

The Nobel Prize in Economics Paul Krugman criticized him in October 2020, in the midst of a pandemic, in an article ("How many Americans will Ayn Rand kill?"; How many Americans will Ayn Rand kill?) in *The New York Times*.

What would have become of the citizens without federal aid?

Left to their own devices, Amazon was the leading distributor of coronavirus medical devices in those days.

Rewriting the words of the evangelist Matthew, it was to leave the fate of the "humble and the meek" in the hands of Jeff Bezos, one of the richest men on the planet.

Only Rand would have found it logical.

His views were those of Adam Smith, Ludwig von Mises, and Henry Hazlitt.

All libertarian economists.

“It is a defense, in his fictional and philosophical writings, of self-interest as 'heroism.'

Those who should be revered and celebrated are the rich and selfish individuals," criticizes El Reid-Buckley, a researcher at the European Center for the Study of Hate at the University of Limerick (Ireland).

Like many Americans, any proposal that smacks of social democracy, Rand inertia associates it with communism.

It is an atavistic evil and Rand participated in it.

He believed in greed.

She grew rich from novels and lectures at Yale, Princeton, or Columbia.

"That's why the free enterprise system turns the dregs of greed into gold profits, and Rand saw that very clearly," says Walter Block.

She plundered, like the characters in her books, ideas of Nietzsche's nihilism, took them to the extreme, and created a world to her own measure.

"His arguments for her were, above all, moral rather than economic," says Peter Klein, professor of Social Sciences at the University of Missouri (United States).

The defense of individual freedom and the right to lead the life one chooses was a message that attracted the counterculture of the sixties, the conservatives of Ronald Reagan - whom he detested for his opposition to abortion - and the libertarians.

Even former President Barack Obama, in a 2012 interview with the magazine *Rolling Stone*, criticized his "narrow view" and described his work as "one of those things that many of us, when we were 17 or 18 years old and we felt misunderstood, we looked for".

And what is life but an infinite quest?

In the United States it was the time of Vietnam, racial segregation, the vindication of blackness, the *hippy* movement .

A new society was emerging that murmured, something, about public services or more space for well-being.

After his bestseller, *The Fountainhead* (1943), he went on to publish (he used amphetamines to write) *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), *The Virtue of Egoism* (1964), *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (1966), and *An Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*. (1979), works that the Deusto publishing house has been reissuing since 2019, taking advantage of the fact that their rights expired and that their work was not well published in Spanish.

Also part of this library are a first-time novel, *Los que viven* (1936), and the dystopia *Himno* (1938), where humans only exist to serve the State.

The plan is to publish his complete works, according to Roger Domingo, editorial director of Deusto.

Rand was the great defender of the individual and his independence.

The need to think for oneself.

"Her novels of her deal with timeless aspects," says Onkar Ghate, head of Philosophy at the Ayn Rand Institute (California).

"What it means to be a person: to embrace your own life, to pursue happiness; what is the role of reason in human existence.

They are topics out of time, which is why thousands of readers a year continue to search for Rand's fiction."

She can also explain why refrains like "freedom, freedom, freedom", by the Madrid president, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, traveled far.

They call to the essence of man.

In the 1970s he embarked on a reading tour of the country that attracted a new generation of students who believed in unrestricted freedom.

He permeated his philosophy of objectivism based on *laissez faire* and individual effort.

Reagan and Thatcher would deregulate the markets in the eighties.

Randy's dream.

Or his nightmare?

"Ayn repudiated American conservatism because she saw it as intellectually bankrupt," says Elan Journo, a senior fellow at the Ayn Rand Institute.

Little by little, she became more elusive with the press and her followers, who gathered at her house on East 34th Street in New York.

The last complete book of hers was *Philosophy. Who needs it?* (Deusto), 1982. She died at the age of 77, on March 6 of that year and was buried, like her husband, Francis O'Connor (1979), in the Valhalla New York cemetery.

She perhaps she found true freedom in the Nordic paradise.