

## 2

# Publishing *Anthem*

*Richard E. Ralston*

Ayn Rand intended *Anthem* as a story or serial in a magazine. But Ann Watkins, her literary agent, pitched it to publishers as a book in 1937. She was not successful. As with *We the Living*, a book critical of collectivism was unlikely to be well received by many New York publishers in the 1930s. This is confirmed by correspondence Ayn Rand had in 1947 with Archibald Ogden (at Bobbs-Merrill) regarding *Anthem*. When he told her he doubted *Anthem* was rejected for political reasons in 1937, she replied:

Ann Watkins submitted it to three publishers. I do not know (but suspect) the reasons why two of them rejected it; but I know the reason given by Macmillan who were my publishers then [of *We the Living*]. They said that *I did not understand socialism*. I think you are probably in a position to see right now how well I understood it.<sup>1</sup>

Unsuccessful in the United States, Watkins sent the manuscript to Cassell, the British publisher of *We the Living*, who had actively been soliciting additional titles from Ayn Rand. They published *Anthem* in 1938 and kept it in print for many years. Originally, Newman Flower at Cassell proposed an illustrated edition. Ayn Rand responded in a January 2, 1938, letter:

in the case of illustrations I should like to offer my suggestions to the artist in order to keep the spirit of the book intact, in text and appearance. I would not ask for this if this story were not more precious to me than anything I have ever considered writing.

It is so very personally mine, it is in a way, my manifesto, my profession of faith. The essence of my entire philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

You may quote my saying this in the advance publicity for the book if you find it advisable.<sup>3</sup>

In his reply (of January 12, 1938), Flower indicated that there would be no illustrations, as they would hold up publication, and added:

I was intensely stirred by this piece of work. I thought the writing marvelous. I am not going to say we shall sell a lot of the book. One can never tell, of course—books being the biggest gamble in the world—but it is a book I should certainly not have liked to have passed. I regard it as an ornament to our list.<sup>4</sup>

It is unclear how long Watkins tried to secure an American publisher for *Anthem*, though it is likely that finding a publisher for *The Fountainhead* soon replaced any attempts to publish *Anthem*. In any case, after the publication of *The Fountainhead* in 1943, Ayn Rand no longer wanted to publish *Anthem* as a book in the United States. She wrote to the Ann Watkins agency on February 1, 1944:

In reply to your inquiry about *Anthem*, I must say that I have not done anything with it, so far—because I think it would be wrong to publish it at this time. It is too short a book, on the same theme, to come out right after *The Fountainhead*. It might spoil the market which *The Fountainhead* has created for me. I have not shown it to Bobbs-Merrill at all and do not think it would be advisable right now.

If you feel that you can arrange for a magazine publication of *Anthem* and you want to handle it let me know.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, the first publication in the United States was in pamphlet form, published by Pamphleteers, Inc., an organization whose purpose was stated in the foreword of the pamphlet: “to further the cause of freedom and individualism.” Leonard Read, in this publisher’s foreword (later reprinted in the Caxton edition), described a meeting in Ayn Rand’s home in Chatsworth, California, during which he and William Mullendore, an executive at Southern California Edison, learned of *Anthem*, its theme, and its British publishing history. That meeting led to their decision to publish the novel in the Pamphleteers series of pamphlets, which previously included only nonfiction essays in politics or economics.

This occasioned the many revisions to the British edition discussed in chapter 3 of this volume, which are reflected in all later editions. As usual, Ayn Rand paid close attention to the design and promotion of the pamphlet. In a letter to Pamphleteers on June 24, 1946, for example, she suggested many minor changes to the advertisement copy, much of which she liked: “At the top of page 2, the line, ‘Too daring for 1937,’ is very good, and intriguing, but the line following it, ‘too incredible,’ weakens the effect by qualifying it. I suggest you eliminate this last.”<sup>6</sup> Rand edited and approved advertising, including a poster and counter display card, and in at least one instance she personally reimbursed Pamphleteers for the cost of a poster. A first printing of 5,000 copies was soon followed in February of 1947 with a reprinting of 1,500 copies. In November of 1946 she received a detailed list of 175 bookstores that ordered the pamphlet.<sup>7</sup>

The original intention to publish *Anthem* in a magazine was eventually realized when it was published in the June 1953 issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. (The magazine had requested publication rights much earlier. On November 30, 1945, Rand had written to Alan Collins at her new agent, Curtis Brown Ltd., asking, “Could you let me know whether this is a legitimate, respected magazine?”<sup>8</sup>) This attractively illustrated version likely reached a new and larger audience for the book. It was almost immediately followed by the first American publication in book form.

The hardcover edition by the Caxton Printers was published in 1953, reproducing the edits and foreword of the Pamphleteers edition. (This edition is still in print, and has sold more than 100,000 copies.)

Once again, Ayn Rand took a “hands-on” approach to promotion of the book. For example, in a December 23, 1952, letter to J. H. Gipson, the president of Caxton, she wrote:

Thank you for the advertising material on *Anthem*, which you sent me. I am enclosing copies of it, which I have revised and retyped, and am also returning your original copies, so that you may see what particular changes I have made.

I have attempted to follow the form of the original material, but to stress the positive theme of Individualism, rather than the negative aspect of an expose of the Collectivist State. This last might give readers the impression that *Anthem* is merely another sordid story on the order of Orwell's *1984* (which, incidentally, was written many years after *Anthem* had been published in England).

I have rewritten the copy about the story because I felt that it was both too detailed and too confused, and that it suggested the tone of a non-fiction political treatise. I can't say that I blame the young man who wrote it, however—it was a terribly difficult job to do, even for me.

You will note that I have included in this copy a brief mention of the publishing history of *Anthem*. I consider it most essential that we do not mislead the public and do not give the impression that *Anthem* is a *new* novel by me, written later than *The Fountainhead*. It is essential that all our publicity mention the fact that this is a new edition, not a new work.

As a small publicity suggestion, I would not feature the description “tender and terrific” out of the context of Ruth Alexander's review. It is good and impressive in the review, but not right when given without quotes (*Anthem* is anything but tender).

Under separate cover, I am returning the sketch of the jacket design. It is excellent and I like it very much for its dignified simplicity. The only suggestion I would make here is that the color yellow tends to give the lettering a faded, “yellowed” look. A pale green or blue-green would be infinitely better. Yellow and black is a bad combination, it suggests lifelessness.<sup>9</sup>

It was no longer a challenge to find a publisher for any novel by Ayn Rand after the success of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. Caxton licensed New American Library to publish a paperback edition of *Anthem* in 1961, and this quickly achieved far greater sales than all previous editions combined.

Since *Anthem*'s initial publication in the 1930s, many translations have appeared, in languages including Hebrew, Romanian, Finnish, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, Turkish, German, Italian, Spanish, Danish, and Chinese. In 1947, Ayn Rand received a sales report from the Spanish publisher indicating 6,339 copies had been sold—about the same as U.S. sales by that time.<sup>10</sup> However, as with most of Ayn Rand's books, foreign sales have never been a significant fraction of sales in the United States, and translations seldom remained in print for many years. Translations of *Anthem* in print at this writing include German and Italian.

The publication history of the English language editions of *Anthem* merged when in 1995 New American Library published a Fiftieth Anniversary Edition (celebrating the first American edition of 1946). This special edition includes an introduction by Leonard Peikoff, and an appendix consisting of a complete facsimile reproduction of Ayn Rand's 1946 edits to her copy of the original 1938 British edition.

Total sales to date of New American Library and other Penguin editions of *Anthem* have reached more than 3,500,000 copies, and more than 100,000 copies are currently sold each year.

This is a remarkable record for a book that Ayn Rand completed during the summer of 1937 as “a kind of rest” from working out plot problems in *The Fountainhead*.<sup>11</sup>

## NOTES

- 
1. Michael S. Berliner, ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 473.
  2. Note that these observations were made years in advance of the publication of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*.
  3. Unpublished material (Ayn Rand Archives).
  4. Unpublished material (Ayn Rand Archives).
  5. Unpublished material (Ayn Rand Archives).
  6. Berliner, *Letters*, 285.
  7. Unpublished material (Ayn Rand Archives).
  8. Unpublished material (Ayn Rand Archives).
  9. Berliner, *Letters*, 494–95. The color was changed to blue-green.
  10. Unpublished material (Ayn Rand Archives).
  11. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).