Chapter Nine

Adapting *We the Living*

By Jeff Britting

We the Living is unique among Ayn Rand's fiction for two reasons. First, it is the only work adapted and produced during her lifetime as both a stage play and a motion picture. Second, *We the Living* is her first novel—the first of any of Ayn Rand's works—to have a major impact on current events, which it did as a result of its adaptation.[1]

The theme of *We the Living* is: "the individual against the state; the supreme value of a human life and the evil of a totalitarian state that claims the right to sacrifice it."[2] In 1940 *We the Living* was adapted and produced as a Broadway play called *The Unconquered*.[3] The theater critics of the time, however, ignored or failed to grasp its theme and the work slipped into theatrical obscurity. In 1942, during World War II, *We the Living* was adapted and released as a two-part film in Italy called *Noi Vivi* and *Addio Kira.*[4] Italy's besieged public grasped its theme immediately and the film inspired a national protest against the Fascist government.

These two adaptations of *We the Living*, and their production histories, are case studies of Ayn Rand's early intellectual impact in the twentieth century.[5]

WE THE LIVING AS THEATER: *THE UNCONQUERED*

By the mid-1930s, Ayn Rand was at the start of a promising career. She had written and sold three works: a screen scenario entitled *Red Pawn*; a successful Broadway play, *Night of January 16th*; and a first novel, *We the Living.* The works showed promise and accomplishment, but they were not professional breakthroughs. *Red Pawn*, a story set in Russia, was sold to Universal Pictures in 1932. It never went into production and remains unproduced to this day. *Night of January 16th* ran successfully for twenty-nine weeks on Broadway during the 1935–1936 season, but Al Woods, its producer, disfigured the play with inappropriate changes.[6] In 1936 Macmillan published *We the Living.* Despite the novel's considerable coverage in the press and slow but accelerating sales, the book went out of print prematurely and vanished.[7]

Adapting *We the Living* was proposed shortly after the novel's publication in 1936, a time when Rand's early successes were most evident. The proposal did not originate with Rand; rather, Jerome Mayer, a producer and writer, originated the idea.[8] Mayer had read and admired *We the Living* and offered to option the novel while Rand adapted the work. Unlike Al Woods, producer of *Night of January 16th* and a successful producer of "hit" melodramas, including *The Trial of Mary Dugan*, Mayer was a modest producer of intellectually orientated plays with no major financial successes.[9] Nevertheless, the idea appealed to Rand as a way to stimulate the slow domestic sales of the novel. As she later said, her motive was legitimate but "it was not a literary motive. My primary goal and interest were not in the play as such."[10]

Rand was a successful Broadway playwright and published novelist and her next theatrical effort warranted newspaper coverage. A July 1936 headline in the *New York Mirror* announced: "Mayer Buys Play from Girl Who Fled Soviet."[11] The *New York Times* reported that Ayn Rand was spending the summer writing a play based on her novel, a "bitter attack of Soviet Russia," published that spring.[12] In a September follow-up report, the *New York Times* wrote: "Ayn Rand has been toiling through the summer on a dramatization of her own novel, 'We, the Living.' By this morning she should have finished two acts of it. By November, she expects, Jerome Mayer will be ready to produce it—a bitter and anti-Soviet note that will not make Union Square very happy."[13] By January 1937, *Publishers Weekly* reported that Ayn Rand had completed her adaptation.[14]

In March 1937, a year after the publication of the novel, the production was delayed. "First announced last July for production last February," the *New York Times* reported: "Ayn Rand's dramatization of her novel, *We the Living*, is now listed for a spring [1937] tryout. All being well, [Mayer] would bring it here in the autumn."[15] However, all was not well. Mayer's effort to raise sufficient money to capitalize his production proved daunting and casting the role of Kira Argounova caused further delays. In June 1937, theater columnist Jack Stinnett reported that Mayer was in Hollywood searching for actors for a spring 1938 production of *We the Living.* The play, he wrote, "will undoubtedly start a siege of picketing, being strongly anticommunist."[16] Casting troubles continued. A year later in July 1938, Leonard Lyons's column "Broadway Melody" reported: "Ayn Rand, author of *Night of January 16th* is having difficulty casting her new play. Its theme is anti-communist."[17]

Rand's own assessment of the situation concurred with the published reports. The underlying cause of Mayer's casting troubles was the play's openly anti-communist theme. It was the height of the 1930s "Red Decade," an aptly named period when American intellectuals sympathetic to Soviet Russia struggled to dominate Hollywood and Broadway.[18] Leonard Peikoff, Rand's literary executor, relates that there was

> a tremendous amount of opposition from Hollywood stars, who would profess to her—Bette Davis is one example—that they would be honored to do the part of Kira and suddenly, two weeks or two months later, they would say, "I'm sorry. My agent says [appearing in an anti-communist play] will destroy my career."[19]

Without Bette Davis or an equivalent star, Mayer was unable to capitalize his production and his option lapsed. Meanwhile, Rand focused on other writing projects, completing her novella, *Anthem*, and the plotting of her next novel, *The Fountainhead*.

Rand was well into the writing of *The Fountainhead* when her agent called with news of yet another offer on *We the Living*, this time from the Broadway star Eugenie Leontovich.[20] Leontovich read the novel, learned that a theatrical adaptation existed, and requested a script. Leontovich then sent the play to George Abbott, a personal friend and one-time director, who was also a major Broadway producer.[21] Eager to direct a serious drama, Abbott read the play and agreed to proceed with Leontovich in the role of Kira Argounova.

Rand described Abbott as a "scrupulously" honorable man primarily interested in musical comedy and farce, but who aspired to a more serious type of theater. Financially speaking, Abbott was a significant advance over Mayer: he was one of Broadway's most successful producers and was backed financially by Warner Bros. Studios in Hollywood. Abbott's interest in *We the Living* was auspicious—a Broadway success might generate further interest on the part of Hollywood.[22] Meanwhile, in 1937, Rand had made a disturbing discovery, which underscored

the urgency of a Broadway production. Much to Rand's surprise, Macmillan failed to keep *We the Living* in print, having destroyed prematurely the book's typeset. Abbott's theatrical venture, virtually the only way to keep the memory of the novel alive in the public's mind, could not be ignored.

Abbott scheduled *We the Living* for the 1939–1940 New York theatrical season. By fall 1939, Abbott began casting *We the Living* around Eugenie Leontovich and preparing the play's out-of-town tryout in Baltimore. The play would open on Christmas evening and run for one week, thereafter coming to New York at the beginning of January 1940. *We the Living* would be Abbott's fourth Broadway production that season and his most costly, ambitious production ever.[23]

Meanwhile, Rand began revising *We the Living* under Abbott's supervision and, in the weeks before the Baltimore opening, came to realize at the last minute that the whole venture was a mistake. Abbott, she recalled, was a "very nice person" but "totally inept about drama." As a director, he was

> totally un-stylized. And he wanted the folks next door. . . . [He] tried to suggest that if a line was simple, you must use ten words instead of three. . . . [For instance] something as simple as Kira saying, "I will try to cross the border." . . . He wanted her to say . . . "Well, if I have a chance, and I think I might try, what I really would like is to cross the border." . . . And I asked him, "What for?" And he said, "Because when it's too brief, people don't talk that way."

Unlike Woods, who sought to make script changes in *Night of January 16th* without her permission, Rand had final say over all changes in *The Unconquered.* Abbott requested changes and Rand refused constantly: "I usually like to permit them changes, if there's any reason for it, and even when it's dubious, once in awhile to permit it, simply not to be too arbitrary about it, because he had to direct. But it was one succession of flat 'No's' after another."[24]

By November 1939, Rand and Abbott's script troubles surfaced publicly. Under the headline "Author, Actor Trouble Hits Coming Play," the press reported that

> Miss Rand's play, "We, The Living" was to go in rehearsal immediately under George Abbott's sponsorship. The play is an indictment of Soviet Russia and Abbott has decided that one character needs to be made more sympathetic. Miss Rand doesn't think so, and the contretemps threatens to become serious. Also, Eugenie Leontovich, the play's star, is reported in the throes of reconciliation with her husband, Gregory Ratoff, and is anxious to return to Hollywood and abandon her stage career.[25]

The controversy, however, was quickly diffused by the *News.* It reported that a story "floating around Broadway" concerning a disagreement between Abbott and Rand over a "leading character" was false. On the contrary, both producer and author were "in complete agreement and of equal enthusiasm as to the drama's chances." The play was "scheduled to go into rehearsals early next week."[26] In December 1939, the *News* announced a new cast member and a name change: "With John Emery as her leading man, Eugenie Leontovich is en route East for 'The Unconquered,' new title of Ayn Rand's play George Abbott is doing."[27]

In November 1939, newspaper coverage of *The Unconquered* began to widen beyond casting and writing controversies. Several months earlier in August 1939, the USSR signed a

controversial nonaggression treaty with Nazi Germany.[28] As a result, newspaper reports about the play began to include references to the Soviet Union and other current topics. The *World-Telegram* wrote that the "George Abbott show is going to be a local Ninotchka—ridiculing the pro-Soviet plotter. . . . *The New Masses*, incidentally, stations men to guard its editorial offices against vandals."[29] The press also tied the play back to Hollywood. According to *Woman's Wear* [*sic*], the new Ayn Rand play in rehearsal "will mark the first time Mr. Abbott has given any actor or actress precedence in billing over the name of a play he has produced. Miss Leontovich's reputation, however, and the magnitude of her role in the forthcoming production have moved him to change his traditional attitude toward the star system."[30]

By mid-December 1939, the play left New York for its Baltimore tryout, and a major problem surfaced in Eugenie Leontovich's portrayal of Kira. Rand recalled:

> You could do nothing with her. She would play it in the old Moscow Art Theater style, ham all over the place, and she wouldn't take direction. Abbott, literally, couldn't do anything with her. He would work and he'd explain and he would show lines. She would say Yes, and when it comes time to perform, she does it her way.[31]

Despite leading-lady problems, the press remained oddly silent. Instead, the press appeared diverted by the enormous size of the production loading into the Maryland Theatre and the elaborate theatrical vision of scenic designer Boris Aronson. The *Baltimore Sun* announced that the new Abbott show was "one of the most elaborate productions he has ever presented" and reported that "fourteen van loads of equipment, properties, electrical fixtures and setting were hauled to the theatre Tuesday night and Wednesday" in anticipation of a Christmas opening.[32]

As described by the *Baltimore Evening Sun*, the production was enormous:

> The twin turntables, each eighteen feet in diameter, have been placed side by side on stage. Although each of the play's seven major scenes is being played out front, stagehands at the rear will be setting up the backdrops and properties for the next scene on the rear halves of the two turntables. A curtain will drop momentarily, the twin tables will spin then halt with the new set facing the proscenium and the action will be resumed with but the briefest of delays.

As to the set design, the report continued: "The action takes place in and around the Kremlin [*sic*], the massive and gloomy stone citadel of Czarist origin in Moscow, and the massive sets were designed by Boris Aronson, to recreate the atmosphere that surrounds that grim building."[33]

In an interview with Aronson, the *Baltimore Sun* reported extensively on the designer's vision:

> Aronson uses the color red as the predominant theme in the sets for *The Unconquered.* . . . "Of course red is the revolutionary color," Mr. Aronson explained, "but it is used here as the connecting theme between the two regimes." Its backgrounds are a rich, wine red velour and against them he projects the splendor of Czarist palaces, and the upsurge of the proletariat. For one, red symbolizes richness of color and decoration; for the other, red symbolizes a movement overtaking an older one.
>
> Even the last scene, an exterior, has the same red background, except that the red is black. Better let Mr. Aronson explain this: "Plain black is flat," he said,

> "but red-black is different from green-black. Look at the difference . . . the use of emulsions of the lights changes the red to black, only it's red-black and carries out the artistic sense of red which runs through the other scenes."
>
> He doesn't believe in making sets the duplicates of actual rooms. Sets, to him, should express the mood of the play, the essence of the environment. He takes special interest in the current production because it is Russian. Most of his other plays have been one hundred percent American. . . . "I got so I knew more about American hotel bars than I did about Russian houses so I had to study up before I started this one."
>
> There are seven sets in the latest Abbott play and thirteen changes, any of which can be done in forty seconds. Eight men came with Mr. Abbott, and about two dozen from Baltimore are needed to operate the sets. Three banks of switches—where one alone sufficed for the other Abbott shows—are used. . . .
>
> "Nineteen hundred and twenty-four was a dynamic period," he said. "It was the time I last remembered Russia. The old was being taken over by another order. That's what I tried to do in the sets. Show the former period and contrast it sharply with the new." Executed on a massive scale by Boris Aronson . . . [t]heir decadent tone is in keeping with the author's underlying inference—the decay of the human character and the destruction of the human soul by the Moloch of the all-powerful state, which denies even the primary rights to humanity.[34]

In addition to press mentions of the sets, a Baltimore paper reported on a new production aspect: "Special music is being arranged by Alexander Haas to be played during performances of *The Unconquered.* . . . The selections will be made from post-revolutionary music now popular in Russia. . . . Mr. Haas is also preparing an unusual program of music to be played during the entractes [*sic*]."[35]

In a summary statement, another Baltimore paper wrote that *The Unconquered* will be "Mr. Abbott's first appearance hereabout as a director of romantic drama . . . an impassioned love story [that] deals with the way in which individual liberty was crushed by the tyranny of communist bureaucracy."[36]

The Unconquered opened on the evening of December 25, 1939. The curtain rose upon a massive production, which included its own artificial snow—as well as a flurry of theatrical jinxes. The *Baltimore Sun* reported that

> Howard Freeman, character actor in the cast of George Abbott's *The Unconquered,* fell fifteen feet from a second-floor tier of the dressing rooms at the Maryland Theater just before the curtain was scheduled to rise on the world premiere of the play. . . .
>
> John Parrish, who had never rehearsed Freeman's role, went on in his place and read the part from the script. The accident was not announced before the play began. . . .
>
> A wondering Baltimore audience, many of whom could not remember a read performance at a premiere in this city, at first received the substitute coldly. There was much grumbling when the curtain fell on the first act. . . . In the lobby outside, the news of the accident spread quickly. And as the audience awoke to

> the situation the whole feeling changed from distaste to warm sympathy. This spirit was evident throughout the rest of the play.[37]

Unfortunately, the Baltimore critics were not of a unanimously warm spirit. Norman Clark wrote that one "hesitates to pass judgment upon George Abbott's newest play, *The Unconquered*, after viewing the hesitant, out-of-key performance given at the Maryland Theatre last evening." The play was

> a jerky melodrama—there are thirteen scenes—with its locale in Red Russia. But, barring some jibes at the inefficiency and hypocrisy of Communism, the plot could have been laid anywhere at all. . . . Whether or not *The Unconquered* presents a true picture of affairs in Russia, we honestly cannot say. We once had dinner in a Russian cafe in New York, but that hardly qualifies us to pose as an expert on Soviet conditions.

In conclusion, Clark wrote: "may we wish Mr. Abbott a most happy and prosperous New Year."[38]

The *Baltimore Evening Sun*, however, disagreed and referred to *The Unconquered* as a "Gripping Abbott Tragedy." The review said the producer of "'Brother Rat' and 'Room Service' . . . has taken an excursion into heavy drama—powerful, gripping tragedy with a trio of emotional stars whose Herculean wrestling with their several cosmic problems present some of the most effective dramatic acting seen here in many months." Calling the play a "ringing indictment of communism," the reviewer referred positively to the plot, especially "Andrei's speech on Communistic principles after his disillusionment in which a wooden repetition of Reed platitudes becomes a ringing indictment of Sovietism."[39]

The mixed Baltimore reviews had a sobering effect. Abbott now explained to Rand that if they went to New York, they would have to fire Leontovich. Rand agreed completely. However, Abbott's dilemma was how to fire Leontovich—after all, the entire production had been developed with her in mind. Rand recalls Abbott's solution:

> [H]e asked me: Would I permit him to tell her that it's my decision, not his? And since I have the okay on the cast, he can do nothing about it. And I said, "Most certainly," kind of [astonished]. And it took me several days to realize what a cowardly thing it was on his part. He had said, "You see, we're old friends with her, and can I tell her that it's you, and that I'm giving in." I said, "By all means." . . . [And] that's how he got rid of Eugenie Leontovich.[40]

When the Baltimore tryout closed, the *Journal-American* reported that Leontovich had "retired gracefully from the recent Abbott play when it was discovered she wasn't the type, [and] will retire from the stage, too, and resume as Gregory Ratoff's hausfrau. . . ."[41] Immediately, Abbott began to revise his production. The *Sun* reported that "Broadway won't see its first production of 1940 until the second week in January due to the shelving by George Abbott of Ayn Rand's play *The Unconquered*, which has been due to come to the St. James a week from this evening."[42]

Anticipating the next round of battles between producer and author, the *Baltimore Eagle* reported that the play was "not without its comic situations."[43] In early January, the *News* announced: "George Abbott has made up his mind to go ahead with the revised edition of Ayn Rand's *The Unconquered.* The drama already has been drastically rewritten with Abbott submitting several ideas and sequences. The producer is searching for an actress to replace

Eugenie Leontovich."[44] The revisions, recalled Rand, resulted in "sacrificing everything for comedy": "[T]here was a scene in the Home of the Peasant, with Comrade Bitiuk and Kira. . . . And he played it for a farce in the most ridiculous way, with the girls marching in and out of the office almost in goose step. . . . It's the only kind of thing that he felt at home in."[45] Abbott's direction, according to Rand, was "miserable." However, during the recasting of Kira Argounova in New York, Abbott at last discovered "how to really direct" the play:

[T]here was one English actress that some agent had sent insisting very much that he wanted us to hear her. She was sort of late thirties, very homely. She was really a young character woman type that would have done much better for Comrade Sonia than Kira, so that Abbott had not even wanted to give her a reading but did it as a courtesy for the agent. She was marvelous. Now that

> was really heartbreaking, in a way, for both Abbott and me. The reading was magnificent. But she was just so much not the type that it was impossible. She was short, stocky, somewhat piano legs or on that order or, you know, which would have been really impossible. Why the incident remains in my mind is this: Abbott told me afterwards, he said, "Do you know," in a kind of a sad manner, "I only now realized what your writing is like or how this play should have been done." He said "that actress made me realize." He said, "You know, your style is the same as Bernard Shaw's. Bernard Shaw is considered very difficult to stage, for the same reason. I only realized it by the way she read it." . . . [Abbott] didn't mean style in the full literary sense of the word. He meant the method, the purposeful and intellectual. In other words, lines that had to be understood and not projected emotionally. That's what he got out of that girl. But imagine a director telling you that, when it's too late. I don't think he could have done it, anyway.

Helen Craig was cast as the new Kira. Although not ideally suited for the part, Rand considered Craig, an admirer of *We the Living*, a hard-working, "rather good," and politically conservative actress.[46]

With script changes completed and a new Kira in place, Abbott announced his opening date: Tuesday, February 13. A reporter noted: "Tuesday is a departure for Mr. Abbott, who has long favored Wednesday openings on Broadway. Now he has picked not only a Tuesday, but a Tuesday the 13th!"[47] During February 1940, seven new and competing Broadway productions would open, including plays by Clifford Odets and Ernest Hemingway.[48]

By February the play was a truncated 102-page adaptation of the novel in three acts comprising ten scenes in seven settings.[49] In act 1, Leo Kovalensky is released from G. P. U. custody following his father's execution for counterrevolutionary activities. Kira arrives at his apartment indicating she will now join him. In the opening thematic statement of the play, Kira turns from her parents' disappointment with her decision to live with Leo, and addresses her future:

> Kira: I think they hate me because I want a future—any future. They've given up. Father's crying for the factories they've taken away from him, mother's crying for the diamond necklaces she's had to sell. They can't understand why I laugh about it. There's so much ahead of me!
>
> Leo: Is there?

> Kira: To build, Leo. To build, to shape, to raise girders in a net against the sky, to watch the sunrise from the top of a steel skeleton and to know that it's mine, every beam of it!
>
> Leo: Of the building—or of the sun?
>
> Kira: Of the building. That's more important, because it's I who will have created it. . . .[50]

By February 11, 1940, the week of *The Unconquered*'s Broadway opening, over 300 blurbs, column mentions, preview pieces, and feature articles including photographs and drawings of cast members had prepared the New York theatergoing public for the premiere.[51] On February 11, two days before the opening, the *New York Times* placed an Al Hirschfeld caricature announcing *The Unconquered* across page one of the Sunday arts section. The headline read: "This Week Gives Broadway Only One Drama Opening." The pen and ink drawing foretold a drama involving the Soviet state, the proletariat, propaganda posters, and a defiant girl.[52]

On Monday, February 12, the first preview performance hosted a fund-raising event for the Young Folks Auxiliary of the Home for Hebrew Infants.

On February 13, *The Unconquered* opened at the Biltmore Theatre.

On February 14, roughly between the hours of midnight and early morning, the New York critics completed twenty-six full-length reviews of *The Unconquered*.

On February 17, George Abbott closed *The Unconquered* after six performances.[53] The production was a complete failure.

The reviews were almost entirely negative. The critics were unanimous in their negative assessment of the play's structure, Abbott's direction, the comedy-satire, and the character motivations. The critics praised the acting, especially performances by Dean Jagger as Andrei Taganov and Helen Craig as Kira Argounova, and the settings of Boris Aronson. Politically, the reviewers divided into three camps: those on the left, who rejected the play's politics; those in the middle, who rejected the play's lack of entertainment value; and those on the right, who rejected the play's diluted attack on the evil of Soviet Russia.

Leading the attack from the political left was Alvah Bessie, screenwriter and future member of the Hollywood Ten. Under the headline "One for the Ashcan. . . ." Bessie wrote in the *New Masses*:

> if you were a smart, capitalistically inclined impresario and were anxious to produce a vicious and effective diatribe against the USSR, wouldn't you hire the finest playwright you could lay your hands on, who could write a brilliant, incisive, subtle, and above all *moving* play, that would damn the hell out of all those awful Bolsheviks? Or would you toss onto the stage a deadly dull 10-20-30 meller written by a fourth-rate hack?

After summarizing the play, Bessie concludes with a nod to his fellow reviewers:

> To quote the capitalist press: "Not only does Miss Rand's melodrama make a GPU man its most attractive character, but its loudest eloquence seems devoted to the contention that what the Russians needed (in 1924–1925) was more and better purges. The idealistic agent of the secret police is surrounded by shrewd, Tosca-like heroines, decadent aristocrats, corrupt politicians and fat speculators, and the most violent charge the play brings against the Communist regime is that the GPU

refuses to shoot more of them." (New York *Herald Tribune*) Soviet papers please copy.[54]

Theatre Arts expressed a more politically liberal viewpoint: "The *Unconquered* by Ayn Rand, a dramatization of her novel, *We the Living*, . . . suffered from the lack of perspective that recent experience makes inevitable. Reputed to be founded on actual events, Miss Rand's story of life in present day Russia smacked more of nineteenth-century melodrama, French Revolutionary style, than reality," by which was meant the current events involving the USSR.[55]

The nonpolitical, nonintellectual, middle-of-the-road commentators included the following: a gossip column in the *Post* wrote, "*The Unconquered* is a story of a White Russian in a Red Sea of trouble, and if Mr. Abbott cares, or doesn't, I like him better when he's in more of an 'Abbott' and Costello mood."[56] The *Bronx Home News* wrote that although "The *Unconquered* was heralded as an expose of the terrible G. P. U., Ayn Rand O'Connor actually has written about poor Russians in the dreadful clutches of SEX."[57]

From a politically more sympathetic but still theatrically critical mode is the *Morning-Telegraph*'s review. After apologizing to George Abbott for attacking his efforts to fill a "feeble" season with an "astounding" four new plays, the reviewer wrote: "The truth of the matter is Mr. Abbott should stick to his last [comedy] and Miss Rand should stick to her knitting. For not only is the play an absurd and improbable one, but it is produced and directed . . ." without any subtlety, which makes the play's "gem of an idea" a "gross caricature of Miss Rand's philosophy and an immense bore to the public at large." Conceding that a play about a philosophy that "refuses to recognize the importance, or even the existence of individual desires" is a valid theme, the paper writes that the only valid way to attack the wrongness of such a philosophy "is to demonstrate that even under ideal conditions such a philosophy only brings disastrous results, while Miss Rand, on the contrary does her best to convince us that all Soviet officials are venal and self-seeking grafters, and that idealism has been corrupted by the basic pettiness of human nature, which is unable to use power for constructive purposes." The *Morning-Telegraph* repeated objections expressed by the critical establishment: the play's "characters are completely unreal; the comedy is unbearably caricatured; its plot is melodramatic and unconvincing. The tale of a couple who because of bourgeoisie descent and a desire for personal freedom are unable to exist under the Soviet Government, turns into a lurid story of a pair of food speculators."[58]

From the other side of the country, Hollywood's representative in New York filed the following with the *Hollywood Reporter*:

> George Abbott unveiled Ayn Rand's anti-Soviet play, *The Unconquered*, at the Biltmore Theatre last night, and no matter how you look at it politically, dramatically it's sabotage, comrades.
>
> In adapting this bit of anti-entertainment to the stage from her novel, "We, the Living," Miss Rand has succeeded only in boring from within—for [its] three acts are as interminable as the five-year plan. Neither John Emery's noble struggle with a plot that thickens every time it should be liquidated, nor Boris Aronson's eye-blinking settings can save *The Unconquered* from being an anti-Red excursion that will put Mr. Abbott in the red.[59]

The regional *Philadelphia Record* took a broader, more cultural viewpoint. The paper noted that the "isms" sweeping Europe and spreading into this country periodically transformed Broadway into "a rostrum either to defend our form of democracy, or to reveal the flaws of the ideologies

of dictators." Writing that *The Unconquered* might have been "inspired by the front pages" and by a recent speech by President Roosevelt about "the dictatorial qualities of the Soviet Government," the play was "far more a political document than it is entertainment expected from a night in the theatre."[60]

Lewis Nichols of the *New York Times* wrote that the drama was "confusing, not going into the matter of the individual man in Russia, 1924—where there would be a play—and not adding to the theatre's already expert knowledge of the state of romance." Abbott tried to "pull together the sentimental melodrama that was almost old Hoboken and the discussion of the rights of man, of which there was not nearly enough."[61]

Completing the spectrum of political commentary was the voice of the political Right. Sidney B. Whipple criticized the play because it diluted the presentation of Soviet Communism's evil with trivializing theatrics. Whipple wrote that, opposing Andrei Taganov, a character who

> is tragic and noble rather than a symbol of Bolshevik ruthlessness, [Ayn Rand] gives us [in Leo] a decadent aristocrat, a weakling whose liquidation would not be a matter of concern to the bitterest of Red-baiters. Certainly this cannot be the "civilization" Miss Rand hopes to save! . . . The other characters are too petty—too unimportant, in fact, to be considered horrifying examples of the rotten fruits of Stalinism.

Whipple concludes that the "unadorned facts are stronger than any of the imagined situations created by dramatists however sincere they may be and however hotly they burn with crusading fervor."[62]

Virtually the only semi-sympathetic review came from *Women's Wear*, which wrote that the play is "an anti-Soviet melodrama with scattered moments of compelling interest" and that the "play is well acted in the main. . . . Dean Jagger is a bit stagy in his portrayal of Taganov, until his big scene where he addresses the Marxist club. The scene he plays brilliantly."[63]

Within days of *The Unconquered*'s closing, the production's physical properties were dispersed, its personnel dismissed, and the play slipped into theatrical obscurity.[64]

What was Ayn Rand's own critical reaction to the production? On this she commented at some length. She regarded the venture as a total and expensive disaster. First of all, the book was not proper play material. Its plot involved too much well-connected action and was better suited for film adaptation.[65] By the Baltimore tryout, she also realized Abbott's production, including her own script, was bad. By the play's February opening, the script was a compromise encompassing ten or more versions. Even the expensive sets were wrong for the play. Abbott, to his credit, had expended his best, most honorable effort, which made the failure worse.[66]

"It was," Rand recounts, "a total flop. . . . I had a terrible time writing the play, and I disliked every version of it, from the original to the many rewrites. I became acutely aware of the fact that my purpose in writing it did not originate with me." And, in a candid insight from an author who had interrupted writing *The Fountainhead* to write and rewrite *The Unconquered*:

> The play never was—and I came to realize, never could be—good. It grew out of somebody else's suggestion plus my own irrelevant motive. So, no matter how conscientiously I tried, I could not make it good. . . . This taught me never to write anything that was not my own idea. Even if it is a good idea, if it does not come out of my own context, I will be unable to integrate it. It will not be *first-handed.*[67]

The Abbott production marked the end of Ayn Rand's career as a playwright.[68] The promising decade of the 1930s—which included her first financial successes—ended in professional disappointment. In 1940 Rand returned to freelance employment, reading and summarizing stories for the film industry. But most importantly, she returned to writing and securing a publisher for *The Fountainhead.* Ayn Rand's own theatrical adaptation of her novel failed to stimulate domestic sales of *We the Living.* But in 1942, a film adaptation made without her knowledge did, in an unexpected way, stimulate foreign recognition of the importance of the novel's philosophy. *We the Living*'s film adaptation ignited an international protest a year and a half before the phenomenal success of *The Fountainhead* in 1943 established Ayn Rand's worldwide fame.

WE THE LIVING AS FILM: *NOI VIVI* AND *ADDIO KIRA*

In March 1940, a month after the Broadway closing of *The Unconquered*, Benito Mussolini and Italy agreed to join Germany in declaring war against Britain and France. In December 1941, Italy declared war on the United States.[69] These events, while seemingly removed from the matter of dramatic adaptation, actually account for the second adaptation of *We the Living*: a 1942 two-part film called *Noi Vivi* (*We the Living*) and *Addio Kira* (*Goodbye Kira*) sanctioned by the Italian government as anti-Russian/anti-Bolshevik propaganda.

In 1947 Ayn Rand characterized communist propaganda in motion pictures as any content or film technique "that gives a good impression of communism as a way of life . . . that sells people the idea that life in Russia is good and that people are free and happy."[70] As understood by one of the Axis powers, anti-communist propaganda in motion pictures presented a bad impression of communism, suggesting—in a description attributed to Nazi minister of propaganda Joseph Goebbels—that the Russian people were "inhuman animals."[71] Propaganda was used by Germany and Italy to justify or sustain their ideologies while, simultaneously, discouraging or crushing intellectual dissent with police force.[72]

In Italy, the ideology was Fascism and motion pictures were developed to disseminate it. "The foundation of Fascism," wrote Mussolini,

> is the conception of the State, its character, its duty, and its aim. Fascism conceives of the State as an absolute, in comparison with which all individuals or groups are relative, only to be conceived in their relation to the State. . . .
>
> The Fascist State is itself conscious and has a will and personality—thus it may be called the "ethic" state. . . .[73]

The "ethic" required the subjugation of the interests of the individual before the interests of the collective. In the Italian version, the collective was a syndicate of labor, management, and nominal private property owners united by an all-embracing ideology articulated by the Fascist Party and enforced by the police.[74]

Since motion pictures appealed to a mass audience, "for us," Mussolini concluded, "cinema is the strongest weapon."[75]

The development of Mussolini's cinema-weapon occurred, albeit inconsistently, over nearly two decades of Fascist intervention in the Italian film industry. After coming to power in October 1922, the Fascist movement took over the Istituto Nazionale LUCE, or *L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa* (Union of Cinematography and Education), in 1926 in order to

control the dissemination of documentaries and newsreels. Over the next thirteen years, the Fascist government created a public distribution and exhibition network for narrative feature films, established motion picture studios, influenced the funding of films through government approved bankers, created a film school under the supervision of the Ministry of Popular Culture, and encouraged the development of the world's first film festival, First International Exhibition of Cinematic Art, which was held for the first time in conjunction with the eighteenth Venice Biennale exhibition of figurative arts in 1932.[76]

Although Mussolini's regime monitored "foreign ideologies," it was not fully effective in doing so. Unlike Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, which arrested and executed entire intellectual and artistic communities, Italy's approach was less monolithic. The regime might silence dissenting intellectuals—or, on pragmatic grounds, might reverse this effort by looking the other way. The latter appears to have been the case with the Italian translation and publication of Rand's *We the Living.*

In 1937, fifteen years into the development of the Fascist state, Rand signed a contract for an Italian translation of *We the Living.* No such contract was ever signed with Soviet Russian or Nazi German publishers.[77] That same year Mussolini instituted production goals for the Italian film industry, ordering one hundred films, out of which only thirty-two were eventually completed. By 1938 sales of Ayn Rand's novel were growing. Baldini & Castoldi of Milan, publishers of *We the Living*, issued a second edition of the novel.[78] Simultaneously, Italian legislation restricted the importation of American motion pictures, which resulted in the boycott of the Italian market by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Warner Bros. Pictures, Twentieth Century Fox Motion Picture Corporation, and Paramount Pictures. The resulting scarcity of Hollywood films caused the Fascists to increase their production quota to eighty-seven films in 1940.[79] As the demand for filmable literature grew, the literary works of foreign authors were seized.

"The Italian war law authorized the Italian Government to seize the copyrights of enemy authors, more or less on the same basis as the American law did. The procedure consisted of making a request to the Ministry of Propaganda. Same would grant the permit, against a token payment, that went to a special fund."[80] Prior to the war, Fascist film authorities had encouraged the development of propaganda genres, including revisionist European costume dramas featuring idealized proto-Fascist historical figures. Once the war effort was under way, in 1939 the Fascist authorities created a new propaganda category consisting of anti-Russian/anti-Bolshevik films whose objective was to portray the Soviets as unfavorably as possible. [81]

Following 1939, Bruna Scalera, daughter of Michele Scalera, owner of Scalera Film Studios, proposed adapting *We the Living* into a motion picture, and recommended the project to Massimo Ferrara-Santamaria, general manager of Scalera. After reading a treatment of the novel, Ferrara-Santamaria was impressed favorably and decided to arrange for a production, hiring writers Corrado Alvaro and Orio Vergani to prepare a script. Ferrara-Santamaria also attached the services of director Goffredo Alessandrini, and cast actress Alida Valli as Kira Argounova, and actors Rossano Brazzi as Leo Kovalensky and Fosco Giachetti as Andrei Taganov. In addition, Antonio Giulio Majano, Alessandrini's assistant director, was appointed by Ferrara-Santamaria as the production's "fiduciary."

After assembling his cast and crew, Ferrara-Santamaria's next step was to request permission from the Ministry of Popular Culture to proceed with the production. At first, the Fascist minister of Popular Culture, Corrado Pavolini, ruled against it, regarding the prospective screenwriters as "outside the fascist ideology." Undaunted, Ferrara-Santamaria appealed the minister's ruling before Vittorio Mussolini who, besides being Ferrara-Santamaria's friend, was

himself a film producer and the son of Benito Mussolini. Pavolini was overruled and the production was able to proceed.[82]

Under Italy's wartime conditions, the production appeared to have an official stamp of approval as anti-Soviet propaganda. However, Goffredo Alessandrini regarded the basic situation in *We the Living* as "perfect" film material, apart from its alleged value as propaganda. Alessandrini said,

> there was this girl from a well-to-do family; the serious and idealistic commissar; and the young son of an admiral. . . . The two men were very different, but both interesting, and between them a young woman, in love with one because he is handsome and romantic, and with the other because of his almost "religious" political commitment.

After reading *We the Living*, Alessandrini informed Scalera that he would like to work "without a script—just bring out from the book all the parts that should be brought on the screen." This meant directing a film of unusual length. Alessandrini said "we could make for the first time in Italy a film longer than three hours, and then see what happens."[83]

During the preproduction period, Majano and Alessadrini left for Africa to work on a production there, leaving the completion of the script in the hands of the "two writers." When Majano and Alessadrini returned to Italy, they discovered the script was unusable: the writers had transformed Kira Argounova from an engineering student into a ballet dancer.[84] With an imminent starting date and no time to draft another script, Alessandrini and Majano decided to write and film the script concurrently. The night before each day's shooting, new dialogue was prepared and distributed the next morning by Majano's assistant.[85]

Alessandrini was unable to shoot on location because of the war. "At that time," he recalled, "we had to shoot everything in the Scalera Studios, everything, the winter too, with artificial snow, and Petersburg and its bridges. The film was held back by all that. . . . [T]he result was a narration that you could call 'for television': all close-ups." As to the casting and directing of Alida Valli, Alessandrini said, ". . . while reading how Kira was described in the book, I saw Valli in the description of the woman. . . . I couldn't imagine any other actress." Alessandrini's minimal direction consisted of blocking and lighting her. He relayed to Valli: "I won't tell you how to interpret Kira, because you *are* Kira. What you'll do will be fine."[86] As Alessandrini's assistant director, Majano directed the film extras, significant numbers of whom were former Russian nobles and members of the Russian émigré community.[87]

Andrei Taganov as portrayed by Fosco Giachetti was the most controversial casting choice and, from the perspective of anti-Soviet propaganda, the most ambiguous character during the production. Taganov was an idealist who commits suicide after realizing his Communistic beliefs undermine not only human life in general but his newfound self-assertiveness in particular. According to Giachetti, Majano's dialogue diminished Taganov's character and Giachetti fought against it throughout the filming. It was a continuation of a battle begun by Giachetti at an earlier and politically riskier stage.

Giachetti recalled a meeting he had with Vittorio Mussolini several days before the commencement of filming. Il Duce's son requested that Giachetti accept changes in Andrei's character in order to bring it in line with Fascist ideology. Giachetti recalled:

> [Vittorio] asks me to do him a personal favor, to give up Andrei as presented in the book because of cuts they had to make due to "political reasons. . . . With such

> an artistic personality as yours," [Vittorio] says, "you can take part in a film as a lesser character and not be diminished."
>
> So I answered: "Well, I don't do favors to anybody, my artistic personality is mine, and if in the film I don't find the novel's Andrei, on whom we have based everything and signed the contract, I won't do the film."

In a few hours, the minister of Popular Culture, Pavolini, proposed a second meeting with Giachetti, scheduled for the following day. Upon Giachetti's arrival, Pavolini planned to ask him for a favor, which Giachetti had anticipated and then politely refused. When asked why, Giachetti answered:

> Because I have signed a contract. I like Andrei because he is an idealist, not only a communist, he could be a Christian, he could represent—and why not?—your 1919 program. . . . "But you see," [the minister] says, "I'm afraid that in the little theatres, in the low-class theatres, when they see this character, people may applaud and give me headaches." So I say, "Your excellency, if I'm to play Andrei as he is written in the novel, I'll use my modest artistic talent, whatever I have, to receive that applause rather than lose it."[88]

The production of *We the Living* was a matter of official concern. Majano recalled further encounters with the authorities who reviewed the film footage at sudden intervals. However, scenes removed at the direction of the Fascist censors were subsequently edited back into the film.[89] There were two especially offensive sequences: the first showed Leo unable to secure employment because of his lack of Communist Party membership; the second showed Andrei denouncing communism before an assembly of party members.[90]

The first public exhibition of *Noi Vivi* occurred during the 1942 Venice Film Festival. The film's running time was now three hours and fifty minutes. As to the public's reaction, *La Stampa* reported that the Venice Film Festival ended with *Noi Vivi* and *Addio Kira,* based on the novel by Ayn Rand, and that Alessandrini had successfully condensed the material from Rand's novel, creating an appealing film. The film received the prestigious Biennale Prize.[91] The screening audience gave *Noi Vivi* a standing ovation.[92]

Certain reviewers concurred. Raffaele Calzini wrote that *Noi Vivi*, the story of a sensual and tragic heroine, was the most elaborate and lengthy film production in the history of Italian filmmaking. Fosco Giachetti's interpretation of Andrei was superb. And in comparison to other frenzied portrayals of the Russian Revolution such as *October* by Eisenstein or *The End of St. Petersburg* by Pudovkin, *Noi Vivi* appeared civilized.[93] Others, such as Diego Calcagno, noted that the film did not invent anything new but did well in reproducing the novel. The novel itself was propagandistic and of relatively low quality. It did not have enough elements to make it totally noble and satisfying. Yet, for the most part, the actors were well selected and the parts were well performed. The positive response among festival audiences suggested that such responses would only increase in the future.[94]

As director Alessandrini recalls, summarizing the issue of propaganda:

> We never considered making an anti-communist film, even Scalera never asked me to do such a thing. In any Italian reader's eye, there were similarities between the Russian situation and ours. As the fact that you couldn't obtain a job without being a party member . . . Because of this, *Noi Vivi* came to be unofficially called

> "the film of elbowing in the dark," as people recognized the present conditions in the film.

Alessandrini thought the "even-handed" story explained the public reaction. "I mean," he recalled, "it was not anti-communist, other than in the official party line, despite all the propaganda; and the same fascists admitted there were characters on the other side worthy of respect. This was exactly the case with Giachetti's character."[95]

The audience reaction at the Venice Festival was repeated nationwide. Majano described the reaction to the release and singled out an aspect that horrified the Fascist officials: "It was an extraordinary success, almost a fanatical success. . . . People would get up from their tables along the street and embrace me and say, 'At last you've begun to go against the tide.' People who saw it, who were intelligent enough, did realize what we were doing."[96]

During the first six months of its release in Italy, the film earned an estimated $631,043 in profits. It became a rallying point for the besieged Italian population. After the film's successful Italian opening, Massimo Ferrara-Santamaria turned to foreign film market sales and arranged a screening for the German minister of propaganda, Goebbels, and his family in Berlin. Goebbels objected to the film as "too mild" in its portrayal of the Russian people.[97] The film was exhibited in Denmark, Switzerland, Slovakia, Rumania, Hungary, Belgium, Greece, and Vichy France.[98] What was manifestly clear to the Italian public during the fall and winter of 1942–1943 gradually became clear to the Ministry of Popular Culture. The film attacked dictatorship and praised the individual, thus criticizing both communism and fascism with an attack on both. Benito Mussolini was reported to be furious and, after six months, Nazi Germany pressured the Fascists to withdraw the film from release. [99]

The secretariat of the National Fascist Party issued an injunction seizing the negative and the exhibition prints. Ferrara-Santamaria was ordered to appear before the Roman headquarters of the director of the Fascist Party, accused of making an anti-totalitarian film and "waging a war against the wishes of the majority of the Italians." In his defense, Ferrara-Santamaria argued that he had made a "beautiful love story" and was "not responsible for the Italian public sentiment."[100]

Alida Valli and Rossano Brazzi protested the film's confiscation by refusing to work in Italy for the duration of the war. In addition, "Scalera's legal counsel was blacklisted by the government for having allowed [*Noi Vivi*] to be produced. Alessandrini and Majano had to flee the country because of their other anti-fascist activities. Fittingly, when they crossed the Allied lines, what they used for identification were publicity pictures of themselves taken on the set."[101]

In 1945 the Axis powers were defeated.

In 1946 Armitage Watkins, Rand's agent from the office of Ann Watkins, received a letter from Donald Downes, who revealed news of an Italian piracy of *We the Living*:

> Scalera made not one, but two movies from the book; the first was called NOI I VTV [*sic*] and the second called ADIO KIRA [*sic*]. Both were extremely successful during the war years, not only, I am informed, in Italy but had a big box office in Germany and Vichy France. This is in part accounted for by the fact that my informant who used to work in Scalera advises me both were made in cooperation with the Ministry of Popular Culture as semiofficial, fascist, anti-Russian and anti-leftist propaganda.[102]

In reaction to the news, Rand wrote to Watkins:

> Your letter of May 24th was certainly a bombshell to me. I am extremely indignant at the piracy of WE THE LIVING by the Italian producers, and at the use which they made of it. Thank you for finding this out for me. I shall now blast them with the kind of lawsuit which they deserve.[103]

Rand wrote to her attorney, John C. Gall, and advised him of the situation:

> I should sue not only for whatever royalties are due me, but also and primarily for the damage to my reputation as a writer, damage caused by the fact that a book of mine was used as Fascist propaganda. WE THE LIVING is a story laid in Soviet Russia, and it is anti-Soviet but, above all, it is anti-dictatorship. Therefore, it is as much anti-Fascist as anti-Communist, and I resent, more than the financial piracy, the use of my material or the distortion of my message into a pro-Fascist picture.[104]

In another development, a March 1947 letter from Rand to Gall mentions David O. Selznick's possible interest in acquiring film rights to *We the Living.* Selznick's office "called my literary agent here, asked whether the movie rights to WE THE LIVING were available, and said that he was interested in the book and knew about the Italian picture. . . . Selznick has not made any definite offer for the movie rights as yet."[105]

Two courses of action were possible: one was to remake the film entirely and the other was to reedit and rerelease the Italian film. Alida Valli, now in Hollywood, attempted but failed to persuade Selznick to produce a remake. Thereafter, the most promising avenue appeared to be editing and subtitling a version for release in the United States, but certain literary and political problems remained to be solved.

Rand's initial reaction to the film was positive. She elaborates in a May 1947 letter to her attorney:

> I have now seen the two pictures. I had an Italian interpreter present, who translated for me the general action of every scene and the key lines of dialogue. But it was impossible for her to translate literally every single line. So I was able to form only a general opinion of the two pictures.
>
> The cast, direction and production are excellent. The adaptation follows my novel closely—until the last part of the picture, at which point some changes have been made.

As to the presence of any political propaganda,

> as far as I can judge . . . the story has not been distorted into Fascist propaganda in any major way, but it does contain some lines of dialogue stuck in without relation to the story, which are most objectionable and offensive to me. . . . The interpreter caught one blatantly Fascist, anti-Semitic line—and I do not know how many other lines there may be, which she did not get.[106]

Apart from cutting the film, the remaining issue was the damage to Rand's political reputation. The film had been exhibited in Europe during the war, a fact that might enable American Communists to smear her as pro-Fascist. By July 1947, this danger was resolved in favor of releasing the picture. Valli apprised Rand of the film's history: both its reception by the Italian

public and its suppression by the government as anti-Fascist propaganda. "If this story is true," Rand wrote in a letter to John Gall,

> I think it is wonderful. It would make the greatest kind of publicity in this country, not just publicity for my book, but an important proof to demonstrate concretely the similarity of Soviet Russia and Fascism, which even Mussolini recognized, though some of the fools in this country refuse to.[107]

In a February 1948 letter to Isabel Paterson, Rand related her plans for the film:

> We are still in the process of negotiating. . . . If I let them release it in this country, I will have to change the ending by means of new English dialogue, and extra film footage. That will be quite a job, but if we reach an agreement, I will have a writer of my own choice to do it for me; I cannot take time off from my novel for this work.[108]

That same day Rand wrote to Jack Warner about releasing a reedited version of the film. She admired Warner's stand against communism and thought he might want to exhibit an anti-Soviet picture in the United States.

Still, remaking the picture was not entirely out of the question. In 1947 Rand put down her thoughts on the matter by answering the objection that the novel was "dated," an objection also raised against the novel and its earlier theatrical adaptation. She wrote:

> The *theme* of "WE THE LIVING" is: *the Individual against the State.*
>
> It is a much wider theme than merely the presentation of any particular period of Soviet life. It is a picture of Communism and of every other kind of dictatorship, anywhere, at any time. It is a denunciation of the doctrine of dictatorship—and this is the most timely and crucial question in the world today.
>
> The three leading characters of "WE THE LIVING," who carry the entire plot and action of the story, do not belong to any particular period of Soviet history. Their story could take place at any time, under any dictatorship. The specific, superficial details of the year in which their story might be played do not affect it any more than would a change of clothes styles.
>
> The elements of the central conflict are:
>
> A girl, who is a born individualist, who has so independent a spirit that she can never compromise with any form of compulsion, can never exist under slavery, and can never be broken. A young man who is a stern, incorruptible idealist, who believes in Communism and devotes his whole life to its service—only to learn, in tragic disillusionment, the real nature of its cause and of its monstrous evil. And a young man of reckless pride and violent temper, who cannot adjust himself to a life of servility, who is too strong to compromise, but too weak to withstand the pressure; who cannot bend, but only break.
>
> The essence of their story is their desperate desire to live, their blind struggle for a human being's right to life and happiness—under a system that recognizes no such right. Kira understands the issue and fights for happiness passionately, ruthlessly, against terrible odds, never giving in. Andrei, who has renounced all thought of a personal life, considering it evil, discovers—through his love for a girl who is his political enemy—the nature, the beauty and the

> supreme importance of personal happiness, discovers it to be a higher right and a nobler cause than the inhuman Collectivism of the State—but discovers it only to find tragedy and to learn that it was he who brought it upon himself and upon the girl he loves. Leo, who was born with a great capacity to enjoy life and would have been a man of great energy in any normal, human society, turns his own nature against himself; his bright gaiety becomes bitterness, his courage becomes cynicism, and he breaks in spirit, losing all desire to live.[109]

By 1948, unable to interest Hollywood in a remake, Rand began making notes on future cuts and revisions. Although the public remained interested in the film—in February 1949 the Federated Italo-Americans of Los Angeles held a screening of it—Rand was no longer interested in Hollywood. By 1951 she returned to New York City and devoted her full energy to writing her next novel, *Atlas Shrugged.*

The legal battle to recover damages from the Italian film piracy proved long and protracted. According to actors who worked on the film, the picture was released in Italy under the Allied occupation.[110] In 1961 Rand's fifteen-year effort to collect damages resulted in an out-of-court settlement of 14,000,000 Italian lire (US $22,778).[111] Thereafter, an abbreviated version of the film was exhibited in Europe. Alessandrini recalled seeing a ninety-minute version of the film in an Italian cinema specializing in film revivals. The shorter version was titled *Noi Vivi* (with *Addio Kira* added underneath in parentheses). At a later point, Alessandrini considered directing a ninety-minute remake of *Noi Vivi* for Italian television.[112]

After the settlement of Rand's legal claims, another effort to reedit the film began. In 1966 Henry Mark Holzer, Rand's lawyer at the time, initiated a search for the film after Rand informed him of its existence. In 1968 Holzer located and purchased the nitrate negative in Rome and then, with the assistance of a young editor named Duncan Scott, began the long process of assembling the film. In New York, Rand reviewed and orally edited the film footage on a Moviola while the English translation of the script was read aloud. As assistant editor, Scott, who would later become producer of the final project, carefully recorded Rand's instructions. In recalling those editorial sessions, he remarked that Rand was "very perceptive, like someone who had been studying the movie for weeks before. . . . She displayed no hesitation. She would say to cut this scene out or to put these two together. Whatever made her a good editor of writing made her a good film editor too."[113]

During Rand's lifetime, the major editorial revisions were recorded under her supervision but never enacted fully. She died in 1982, leaving the reassembly of *Noi Vivi* and *Addio Kira* unfinished.[114]

CONCLUSION

The United States was—and remained—Ayn Rand's political refuge from communist dictatorship. She was free to write as she pleased even if, during America's 1930s Red Decade, American critics dismissed or misunderstood her treatment of her first major theme: "the individual against the state" and "the supreme value of a human life and the evil of the totalitarian state that claims the right to sacrifice it." Ultimately, the importance of her message, or at least the evidence of its impact, found its way to America from abroad. The history of theater and film adaptations of *We the Living* is not simply a case study of Rand's early intellectual impact on the twentieth century—it also confirms that she not only developed her

philosophical ideas, but throughout her life succeeded in communicating them to the world's stage.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank the following institutions and individuals for assistance in preparing this chapter. Any errors or omissions are my own. For primary and secondary materials: the Ayn Rand Archives, a special collection of the Ayn Rand Institute; the Richard J. Riordan Main Branch of the Los Angeles Public Library; the Billy Rose Theatre Collection at the Lincoln Center Branch of the New York Public Library; Internet Broadway Database; and the Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. For editorial comment and research assistance: Michael S. Berliner, Scott McConnell, and Sharyn Blumenthal. For English summaries and translations of Italian sources: Anu Seppala.

Special thanks are due the Billy Rose Theatre Collection at the New York Public Library, whose preservation microfilming of *The Unconquered* press book made this chapter possible.

2. Ayn Rand, *For the New Intellectual* (New York: Random House, 1961; Signet paperback edition, 1963), 60.

3. Producer: George Abbott; From the novel *We the Living* by Ayn Rand; Adapted by Ayn Rand; Staged by George Abbott; Principal cast: Helen Craig as Kira Argounova, John Emery as Leo Kovalensky, Dean Jagger as Andrei Taganov; Additional opening night cast: Georgina Brand, Arthur Pierson, Edwin Philips, Lea Penman, Ludmilla Toretzka, Paul Ballantyne; Scenic Designer: Boris Aronson; Incidental Music: Alexander Haas. Biltmore Theatre, New York, NY. *Ayn Rand Papers,* Ayn Rand Archives.

4. Production Company: Scalera Films, Rome; Producer: Massimo Ferrara-Santamaria; Director: Goffredo Alessandrini; Principal cast: Alida Valli as Kira Argounova, Rossano Brazzi as Leo Kovalensky, Fosco Giachetti as Andrei Taganov; Production Manager: Franco Magli; Screenplay: Anton Giulio Majano; From the novel by Ayn Rand; Adapted by Corrado Alvaro and Orio Vergani; Editor: Eraldo da Roma; Director of Photography: Giuseppe Carracciolo; Music: Renzo Rossellini; Art Direction: Andrea Beloborodoff, Giorgio Abkhasi, Amleto Bonetti; Costumes: Rosi Gori; Sound: Piero Cavazzuti, Tullo Parmegiani; Associate Director: Anton Giulio Majano; Assistant Director: Giorgio Cristallini; Camera Operator: Leone Bioli. Included in Angelika Films media kit prepared in conjunction with the 1986 release of *We the Living*, a condensed version of *Noi Vivi* and *Addio Kira.* See note 114.

5. For further details about Ayn Rand's life and intellectual development, see the short biography: Jeff Britting, *Ayn Rand* (New York: Overlook Press, 2004).

6. Rand disavowed the play's amateur version and subsequent Hollywood film adaptation. For an explanation, see her 1968 introduction to the play, in Ayn Rand, *Night of January 16th*, final revised version (New York: Plume, 1987).

7. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

8. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

9. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

10. Ayn Rand, *The Art of Nonfiction: A Guide for Writers and Readers*, ed. Robert Mayhew (New York: Plume, 2001), 81. Rand is known primarily for her work as a novelist. However, she developed an early interest in theater, motion pictures, and, later in her life, television. As a child in Russia, she appreciated the dramatic inventiveness of Victor Hugo's plays and the visual stylization of Fritz Lang's silent films. Her second novel, *Anthem*, was originally conceived as a play while she was a college student in Russia.

11. *New York Mirror*, July 10, 1936, found in "Press Book, Warner Bros. Pictures *The Unconquered*, November 24, 1939–February 1940, Books A and 1," available on microfilm, Billy Rose

Theatre Collection, New York Public Library. (As a result of the press book's deteriorated condition, the authorship and publication information of some clippings have been lost.)

12. *New York Times*, July 10, 1936, press book, *The Unconquered.*

13. *New York Times*, September 6, 1936, press book, *The Unconquered.* The comma in the play's title reflects the original spelling of the book's name as used in promotional materials at the time of the novel's publication in 1936. The date and reason for the comma's discontinuation is not known. However, it remained a common journalistic practice until 1939.

14. *Publishers Weekly*, January 1937, press book, *The Unconquered.* Rand's adaptation under Mayer is no longer extant, and the evolution of the drafts is unknown. Among the *Ayn Rand Papers* (at the Ayn Rand Archives) are eleven typescripts, which appear to have been prepared and/or revised under George Abbott, including extensive revisions in Rand's hand and miscellaneous notes on speeches. (For a fresh assessment of the evolution of the play's drafts, readers are referred to Robert Mayhew's forthcoming edition of the play.)

15. *New York Times*, March 13, 1937, press book, *The Unconquered.*

16. Malone, *New York World-Telegram*, June 19, 1937, press book, *The Unconquered.*

17. *Chicago Times*, July 13, 1938, press book, *The Unconquered.*

18. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives). See also Eugene Lyons, *The Red Decade* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1971).

19. Michael Paxton, *Ayn Rand: A Sense of Life* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1998), 101.

20. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives). According to a profile in the *Baltimore Evening Sun* (December 26, 1939), Eugenie Leontovich first appeared before New York theater audiences portraying a ballerina in the Broadway production of *Grand Hotel* and had most recently portrayed the grand duchess in a London production of *Tovarich*, a comedy that toured subsequently in the United States. A native of Russia, Leontovich studied dance at the Imperial Theatre School and was later a member of the Moscow Art Theatre company. Both her father and her husband died in street fighting during the Russian Revolution and, after Lenin's assumption of power, she fled Russia disguised as a peasant. She met her future husband, actor-director Gregory Ratoff, in Constantinople, later joining him in a series of dramatic performances that brought her to the United States and to the attention of George Abbott. Abbott first directed Leontovich in his 1932 Broadway production of *Twentieth Century.*

21. George Francis Abbott (1887–1995). Born in Forestville, New York, Abbott studied at Harvard's distinguished 47 Workshop and went on to a career as coauthor, director, and producer of over one hundred theatrical productions, including *Chicago* (1926), *The Boys from Syracuse* (1938), *Pal Joey* (1940), *The Pajama Game* (1954), *Damn Yankees* (1955), and numerous revivals. (Gerald Bordman, ed., *The Concise Oxford Companion to American Theatre* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1987], 3.) "Combining an astute business sense and a rare flair for the stage, George Francis Abbott has become one of the most remarkable men of the American theater. Thoroughly schooled in a dozen branches of stagecraft, he is an admitted expert playwright, actor, director and producer." Quoted from "Theatre," Cue [?], no date, press book, *The Unconquered.*

22. Under the standard production contract, investors in Broadway plays earn a set percentage of the future market created by a successful theatrical run. Warner Bros. reportedly invested $50,000 in *The Unconquered* (*New York World-Telegram*, December 28, 1939) and provided the use of the Biltmore Theatre, which it owned at the time (Internet Broadway Database).

23. "When the rest of Broadway was trembling before threats of war in Europe and staged a general walkout, Abbott calmly announced four productions for the new season with possibility of others to come. True to schedule, he opened *See My Lawyer* (starring Milton Berle), *Too Many Girls*, and *Ring Two. We the Living*, due in January, rounds out the list." Quoted from "Theatre," Cue [?], no date, press book, *The Unconquered.*

24. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

25. Author and publication unknown, c. November 1939, press book, *The Unconquered.* Gregory Ratoff would eventually direct *Song of Russia* in 1943 at Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer. In 1947 Rand testified

before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, analyzing *Song of Russia* as communist propaganda.

26. Author unknown, *News*, November 23, 1939, press book, *The Unconquered.*

27. Author unknown, *News*, December 1, 1939, press book, *The Unconquered.* John Emery (1905–1964) portrayed Leo Kovalensky in *The Unconquered.* Emery first appeared on Broadway in *Mrs. Partridge Presents* (1925) and made his film debut in *Spellbound* (1945) directed by Alfred Hitchcock. He was married briefly to Tallulah Bankhead who, at the time of *The Unconquered*, was appearing as Regina Giddens in the 1939 Broadway production of Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* (Biographical File, Margaret Herrick Library).

Completing the principal cast of *The Unconquered* was Dean Jagger (1903–1991) in the role of Andrei Taganov. Jagger's acting career began in the New York regional theater followed by his Broadway debut in *Tobacco Road* (1933). In 1949 he received an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his portrayal of Major Stovall in *Twelve O'Clock High* (1949). He appeared in over 125 films (*Variety* (w), February 11, 1991).

28. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., ed., *The Almanac of American History* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1993), 477.

29. G. Ross, *New York World-Telegram*, November 27, 1939, press book, *The Unconquered.*

30. *Woman's Wear* [*sic*], December 6, 1939, press book, *The Unconquered.*

31. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

32. Boris Aronson (1900–1980) was a native of Russia who studied art and design in Kiev and Moscow before coming to New York in 1923. He became one of the leading scenic designers in American theater history. His work was featured in such productions as *Awake and Sing* (1935), *Cabin in the Sky* (1940), *Bus Stop* (1955), *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1955), and *Cabaret* (1966). "His stylization, free placement of form, and use of bright colors were heavily influenced by his admiration of Marc Chagall. He was one of the first to employ projections against neutral backgrounds to effect changes of mood and place." (Bordman, *Oxford Companion to American Theatre*, 25.)

33. *Baltimore Evening Sun*, December 22, 1939, press book, *The Unconquered.*

34. *Baltimore Sun*, December 23, 1939, press book, *The Unconquered.*

35. *Baltimore* [?], n.d., "Abbott Play at Maryland Dec. 25," press book, *The Unconquered.*

36. Author and publication unknown, c. 1939, press book, *The Unconquered.*

37. *Baltimore Sun*, December 16, 1939, press book, *The Unconquered.*

38. Norman Clark, "Unconquered, New Abbott Play, Now at Maryland," press book, *The Unconquered.*

39. R. B. C, *Baltimore Evening Sun*, press book, *The Unconquered.*

40. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

41. D. Kilgallen, *Journal-American*, January 29, 1940, press book, *The Unconquered.*

42. *Sun*, "The Holiday Stage" column, December 27, 1940, press book, *The Unconquered.*

43. "Abbott Play," *Eagle*, December 19, 1939, press book, *The Unconquered.*

44. *News*, January 7, 1940, press book, *The Unconquered.*

45. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

46. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives). Helen Craig (1912–1986), married to actor John Beal, was born in San Antonio, Texas, but moved to South America as an infant, where she spent her early childhood in Chile and Mexico, learning English upon her return to the United States at the age of eight. An aspiring actress since childhood, she created the role of the deaf-mute in the Broadway production of *Johnny Belinda.* Her film work included *The Snake Pit*, *They Live by Night*, and *War and Peace.* On television she appeared in episodes of *Kojak*, *The Waltons*, and *The Bionic Woman.* (Perry Lieber, RKO Studios Press Release, c. 1940s; *Variety*, July 23, 1986.)

47. Author and publication unknown, press book, *The Unconquered.*

48. "Producers List 7 Openings for Month; Fontanne and Lunt Play Head Schedule; . . ." Plays consisted of: "The Taming of the Shrew," Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne; "For the Show," a review by

Nancy Hamilton and Morgan Lewis; "The Unconquered," by Ayn Rand; "Another Sun," by Dorothy Thompson and Fritz Kortner; "Night Music," by Clifford Odets; "The Burning Deck," by Andrew Rosenthal; "Leave Her to Heaven," by John van Bruten; "The Fifth Column," by Ernest Hemingway. As quoted in "News of the Theatre," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 2, 1940, press book, *The Unconquered*.

49. The final version of the play as produced and directed by Abbott is not known. The observations made here are based on a reconstruction of the play prepared by Rand's literary estate and intended for (but not used in) Leonard Peikoff, ed., *The Early Ayn Rand: A Selection from Her Unpublished Fiction* (New York: New American Library, 1984; Signet paperback edition, 1986). For a brief description of the extant drafts of *The Unconquered* among the *Ayn Rand Papers* (at the Ayn Rand Archives), see note 14.

50. Ayn Rand, *The Unconquered*, "final draft," unpublished xerography of typescript, 1–9, *Special Collections*, Ayn Rand Archives.

51. Press book, *The Unconquered.*

52. *New York Times*, Sunday, February 11, 1940, press book, *The Unconquered.*

53. Press book, *The Unconquered.*

54. Alvah Bessie, *New Masses*, February 27, 1940, press book, *The Unconquered.*

55. Review, *Theatre Arts*, April 1940, press book, *The Unconquered.*

56. Dixie Righe [?], "George Abbott Presents," *Post*, February 14, 1940, press book, *The Unconquered*.

57. The Playviewer, "New Plays, The Unconquered," *Bronx Home News*, February 14, 1940, press book, *The Unconquered.*

58. "The Stage Today" column, "Ayn Rand's Play at Biltmore Theatre Came, Was Seen, Failed to Conquer," *Morning-Telegraph*, February 15, 1940, Press book, *The Unconquered.*

59. "The New York Play" column, *Hollywood Reporter*, February 14, 1940, press book, *The Unconquered*.

60. Mark Barron, "Spying on Gotham—'Unconquered' Changes Stage Into 'Antiisms' Rostrum," *Philadelphia Record*, February 18, 1940, press book, *The Unconquered.*

61. Lewis Nichols, "The Play" column: "The Unconquered," *New York Times*, February 14, 1940.

62. Sidney B. Whipple, "Events Too Rapid for Dramatist," press book, *The Unconquered.*

63. Kelcey Allen, "The Unconquered," *Woman's Wear* [*sic*], February 14, 1940, press book, *The Unconquered.*

64. Certain records of organizations involved with the production are on deposit with the New York Public Library. Besides a small collection of Van Dame Studio promotional photographs, Boris Aronson's set renderings, and a Warner Bros. Pictures press book on *The Unconquered* and related ephemera, nothing of the production is known to remain.

65. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

66. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

67. Rand, *The Art of Nonfiction*, 80–81 (emphasis added).

68. *Ideal*, a novella written by Rand during her first Hollywood period, was subsequently adapted for the stage in New York City and revised intermittently until 1941. A second play, *Think Twice*, was written in the years 1939–1940. Neither work was produced in Rand's lifetime. See: Rand, *The Early Ayn Rand*, 205–90, 293–377.

69. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., ed., *The Almanac of American History* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1993), 479, 486.

70. Ayn Rand, "Testimony," October 20, 1947, "Hearing Regarding Communist Infiltration of the Motion Picture Industry," House Committee on Un-American Activities as reprinted in David Harriman, ed., *Journals of Ayn Rand* (New York: Plume, 1999), 371–81.

71. Massimo Ferrara-Santamaria to Duncan Scott, February 20, 1988, Angelika Films media kit.

72. For an analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of twentieth-century totalitarianism, see Leonard Peikoff, *The Ominous Parallels* (New York: Stein and Day, 1982; Meridian paperback edition, 1993), 13–99. For the Objectivist view of the fundamentality of philosophical ideas in explaining human history, see Leonard Peikoff, "Philosophy and Psychology in History," *Objectivist Forum* 6, no. 5 (October 1985).

73. Benito Mussolini, *What Is Fascism*, in Paul Halsall, trans., *Internet History Sourcebooks Project* (New York: Fordham University, 1997).

74. James B. Whisker, "Italian Fascism: An Interpretation," *The Journal of Historical Review* A, no. 4 (Spring 1983).

75. Mussolini's statement is similar to Lenin's view of film as quoted in *We the Living*: "Of all the arts, the most important one for Russia is the cinema" (382).

76. Morando Morandini, "Italy from Fascism to Neo-Realism," in *Oxford History of Western Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 353–61.

77. Rand to Gall, June 24, 1946, *Ayn Rand Papers*, Ayn Rand Archives. For information about Italian critical reaction, see Michael S. Berliner, "Reviews of *We the Living*," in the present volume.

78. Rand to Gall, June 24, 1946, *Ayn Rand Papers*, Ayn Rand Archives.

79. Morandini, "Italy from Fascism to Neo-Realism," 357.

80. Graziadei & Scipioni to Gall, October 21, 1945, *Ayn Rand Papers*, Ayn Rand Archives.

81. Morandini, "Italy from Fascism to Neo-Realism," 355.

82. Ferrara-Santamaria to Duncan Scott, February 20, 1988.

83. "Goffredo Alessandrini," interview conducted by Francesco Savio from *Cinecittà Anni Trenta: Parlano 116 Protagonisti del Secondo Cinema Italiano* [*Cinecittà in the 1930s: 116 Voices from the Italian Secondo Cinema*] (Roma: Bulzoni, 1979), 48. New English translations and review of unidentified translation: Anu Seppala.

84. Duncan Scott, "An Interview with Anton Giulio Majano, Associate Director, *We the Living* (May 6, 1986), Angelika Films media kit.

85. Peter Schwartz, "*We the Living*—The Movie," *The Intellectual Activist* A, no. 16 (September 1986).

86. "Alessandrini," *Cinecittà Anni Trenta*, 48.

87. Scott, "An Interview with Anton Giulio Majano."

88. "Fosco Giachetti," *Cinecittà Anni Trenta*, 584.

89. Scott, "An Interview with Anton Giulio Majano."

90. Schwartz, "*We the Living*," 3.

91. Mario Gromo, Correspondent, Venice Film Festival, *La Stampa*, September 16, 1942.

92. Author unknown, "*We the Living*—A Film Discovered," press release in conjunction with *We the Living* (New York: Angelika Films, May 6, 1986), 2, Angelika Films media kit.

93. Raffaele Calzini, *Film Anno* 5, no. 39, September 26, 1942. English summary Anu Seppala.

94. Diego Calcagno, *Film Anno* 5, no. 45. November 7, 1942. English summary Anu Seppala.

95. "Alessandrini," *Cinecittà Anni Trenta*, 49.

96. Scott, "An Interview with Anton Giulio Majano."

97. Ferrara-Santamaria to Scott, February 20, 1988.

98. Foreign Claims Settlement Commission of the United States, Washington, DC; In the matter of the Claim of Alice O'Connor [Ayn Rand] Under the International Claims Settlement Act of 1949, as amended. Filed September 27, 1956, *Ayn Rand Papers*, Ayn Rand Archives.

99. Schwartz, "*We the Living*," 3.

100. Ferrara-Santamaria to Scott, February 20, 1988. The producer was found guilty of anti-Fascist propaganda and expelled from the party.

101. Schwartz, "*We the Living*," 3.

102. Downes to Watkins, May 16, 1946, *Ayn Rand Papers*, Ayn Rand Archives.

103. Rand to Watkins, May 28, 1946, *Ayn Rand Papers*, Ayn Rand Archives.

104. Rand to Gall, May 28, 1946, *Ayn Rand Papers*, Ayn Rand Archives.

105. Rand to Gall, March 13, 1947, *Ayn Rand Papers*, Ayn Rand Archives.

106. Michael S. Berliner, ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 368–70.

107. Berliner, *Letters*, 370.

108. Berliner, *Letters*, 196.

109. Ayn Rand, "Line of Treatment for: 'We the Living,'" Seven typewritten pages with markings, December 2, 1948, *Ayn Rand Papers*, Ayn Rand Archives.

110. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

111. Berliner, *Letters*, 488–89.

112. "Alessandrini," *Cinecittà Anni Trenta*, 48.

113. Schwartz, "*We the Living*," 4.

114. After Ayn Rand's death, the revisions of *Noi Vivi* and *Addio Kira* were finished and a single "author's version" with English subtitles, entitled *We the Living*, was completed. Duncan Scott Productions produced *We the Living*, in association with Henry Mark Holzer and Erika Holzer, and with the cooperation of the Estate of Ayn Rand. Angelika Films distributed the film theatrically in 1986. The Scott revision of *Noi Vivi* and *Addio Kira* falls outside the scope of the present chapter and merits its own separate study. *We the Living* debuted at the Telluride Film Festival in Colorado in 1986. During its North American release, the *New York Times* called *We the Living* an "ambitious and ingenious film."