

Title: Ayn Rand and Russian Education in Fact and in Fiction: In Life and in Her Novel *We the Living*.

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In her foreword to the 1959 reissue of her novel *We the Living* (originally published in 1936), Ayn Rand wrote that this novel “is as near to an autobiography as I will ever write.” This is true on two counts: 1) Soviet life as presented in the novel mirrors actual Soviet existence of the early and mid-1920s, and 2) the experiences of the novel’s characters are very similar to Ayn Rand’s own experiences during her years in Russia. This paper examines the striking similarities between the education that the young Rand received in Russia and education as presented in *We the Living*, particularly the education of its heroine, Kira Argounova.

For example, the university curriculum, instructional format, and life of a college student as portrayed in the novel are similar to ones Rand experienced. Rand’s purposeful pursuit of an education as necessary preparation for her future career is presented in the novel through Kira’s own goal-directedness in education. Rand had been subjected to rampant Communist indoctrination in her university classes – a fact that appears prominently in the novel. The infamous 1923 purge of university students (which affected Rand, who was a student at the University of Petrograd at that time) affects a number of the novel’s characters. Even the childhood education of the two women in pre-Soviet days is similar: each had a foreign governess to teach her a foreign language, and each attended a gymnasium (high school in Czarist Russia).

Finally, we will see that the similarities between Rand’s own education and the education of the characters in *We the Living* not only make the latter a nearly-autobiographical novel but that they serve a literary purpose as well. Inclusion of actual facts, particularly the Communist incursion into education, helps to establish the novel’s theme: that dictatorship kills.