

After the Warnings

Orwell and Rand Observe the American Republic

By Lev Neymotin

What follows imagines an encounter rather than an argument.

George Orwell and Ayn Rand appear here not as historical authorities or political emblems, but as literary minds—observing, questioning, and speaking in voices shaped by their own writings. What follows is not quotation, prophecy, or verdict, but an act of attention: two ways of seeing the present, unfolding in conversation and reflection.

PART I – A CONTINUOUS CONVERSATION

A city at dusk. They have walked all day—newsrooms, campuses, courts, streets. Now they sit at a small table by a window. Screens glow in the background. Sirens far away. Coffee cooling.

Orwell:

I keep returning to the same sensation, Ayn: this country is not ruled by terror, and yet it is governed by fear. Not fear of the state – fear of accusation. People speak as though every sentence is a potential crime scene. They weigh words not for truth, but for survivability. That is new. Even in my bleakest imaginings, the fear came from above. Here, it comes from everywhere at once.

Rand:

Yes. And fear without a clear source is the most paralyzing form. When men fear a dictator, they can name him. When they fear an ideology dispersed through institutions, committees, and social rituals, they begin to doubt themselves instead. I wrote about the mind withdrawing in protest. What I see here is worse: the mind withdrawing in confusion—unsure whether it is even permitted to function.

Orwell:

The language is the key. It always is. I have spent this week listening—really listening—to how people speak. In newsrooms, in classrooms, in courtrooms. Words no longer describe reality; they preempt it. “Safety,” “harm,” “equity,” “context” – these are not neutral terms. They are shields. Once invoked, no further thought is required.

Rand:

And no further responsibility either. Consider what they have done to merit. They have not disproved it. They have not replaced it with a superior standard. They have simply declared it immoral. Achievement is treated as a provocation. Excellence as an insult. And then they wonder why institutions decay.

Orwell:

I walked through a school today. Children repeating phrases they do not understand, about identity, about oppression. Meanwhile, many cannot read fluently. That struck me as a kind of quiet barbarism. In my time, illiteracy was a weapon used deliberately by tyrants. Here it is dressed as compassion. The effect is identical.

Rand:

Yes, cripple the mind early, then tell it the world is unjust. That way, resentment replaces ambition. Dependency replaces pride. The tragedy is that this is done most aggressively to the children who need intellectual rigor the most. It is not kindness. It is sabotage; committed with a smile.

Orwell:

And if anyone points this out, the response is immediate: “Why do you hate them?” Critique is recoded as malice. That maneuver collapses discussion instantly.

Rand:

Because if motives can be condemned without evidence, power becomes effortless. I recognize this pattern. In my work, the looters accused the producers of greed. Here, the accusation is more refined. Success itself is framed as proof of moral failure, unless it is surrendered to the correct causes.

Orwell:

Yes. Wealth is tolerated only if it kneels. Speech is tolerated only if it apologizes. Thought is tolerated only if it arrives pre-surrendered.

(A pause. Orwell watches a protest forming outside.)

Orwell:

Look at that. Masks, identical clothing, signs printed in advance. They will call this spontaneous. They always do.

Rand:

Spontaneity with logistics is never spontaneous. But funding is not even the interesting part. Permission is. These movements operate because authority fears confronting them. Not because it lacks force, but because it lacks moral confidence.

Orwell:

In Animal Farm, the pigs ruled by rewriting commandments. Here, the commandments are never written down in the first place. They are felt. Implied. Enforced socially. That makes them harder to challenge.

Rand:

And harder to escape. The producer in my novel could leave physically. Today, exit is quieter. People withdraw into automation, into silence, into private enclaves. They comply outwardly and detach inwardly. That is not rebellion, but it is a form of strike.

Orwell:

Which may be more dangerous. Because systems collapse faster when their most competent participants stop caring.

Rand:

Exactly. And the system does not notice at first. The lights stay on. The shelves remain stocked. The decay is internal.

Orwell:

I am struck by how openly law is now discussed as a flexible instrument. Judges speak of “balancing” principles that were once absolute. Borders, for example. I watched officials insist that enforcement itself is immoral. A nation ashamed of defining itself is already halfway to dissolution.

Rand:

Law without enforcement is not law; it is theater. And theater cannot protect rights. Rights depend on clarity. On boundaries. Once everything is contextual, nothing is secure.

Orwell:

That is why courts trouble me most. When the last arbiter of meaning becomes ideological, there is no refuge left. In my world, the Party dictated truth. Here, truth is outsourced to moral fashion.

Rand:

And fashion changes faster than law can follow. Which means citizens are perpetually guilty retroactively.

Orwell:

The press could resist this. But it does not. It amplifies it. It negotiates language rather than interrogating facts. It is no longer adversarial. It is curatorial.

Rand:

Yes. The journalist has become a priest, guarding orthodoxy. Heresy is punished not by jail, but by erasure. Loss of platform. Loss of livelihood. Soft power, far more efficient than prisons.

Orwell:

Do you think this resembles your world more—or mine?

Rand:

It has borrowed from both. From mine, it takes the moral condemnation of achievement. From yours, it takes the manipulation of language and reality. What neither of us fully imagined is how willingly people would participate in their own intellectual confinement.

Orwell:

That may be the most sobering realization. There is no single tyrant here. No obvious villain. Only incentives—social, professional, moral, that reward silence and punish clarity.

Rand:

Which means the battle is not institutional first. It is personal. In the mind of each individual who must decide whether reality is negotiable.

Orwell:

And whether truth is worth the cost.

(Outside, the protest chants grow louder. Inside, a family laughs at another table.)

Orwell:

Life continues. That is what makes this moment ambiguous. People are not starving. They are not imprisoned en masse. And so the warning feels abstract to them.

Rand:

Civilizations rarely die screaming. They die rationalizing. They die explaining away contradictions until nothing solid remains.

Orwell:

If you were to address them—not as a lecturer, but as a fellow citizen, what would you say?

Rand:

I would say this: **do not surrender your judgment.** No institution, no movement, no moral fashion is entitled to your mind. Once you give that up, everything else follows.

Orwell:

I would add: **protect language.** Demand that words mean what they mean. Once words are corrupted, reality itself becomes unreachable.

Rand:

Then perhaps that is the final question of this republic—not left versus right, not rich versus poor.

Orwell:

But whether enough individuals still believe that truth exists, and that it is worth defending.
(*They sit in silence as the city darkens.*)

*What precedes is the conversation **as lived**: immediate, unfinished, occasionally jagged, shaped by interruption and discovery. But thought does not end when speech stops. Writers continue thinking after the words fade, when silence, memory, and distance begin to work on what was said.*

*What follows is not a new argument, nor a correction of the first part. It is the **same encounter**, allowed to settle into a different form. Dialogue remains, but it is now interwoven with observation and interior reflection. The voices are unchanged; the tempo is slower. If the first part captures the republic as it is encountered, the second captures it **as it is understood**.*

PART II – AFTER THE WARNINGS

They arrive without ceremony, without prophecy fulfilled in flame or ruin. The United States they encounter is intact: loud, prosperous, distracted. Its cities glow at night. Its shops are full. Its people hurry, laugh, argue, and scroll. Nothing about the surface suggests a fallen republic.

That, perhaps, is what unsettles them first.

They walk. They read. They listen. They do not announce themselves. They absorb the country the way writers always do, through language before spectacle, through tone before event.

The republic speaks constantly. And yet, it rarely says what it means.

George Orwell notices the language first. He always does.

In the newsroom, words slide across screens faster than anyone can read them. Headlines arrive already softened, verbs dissolved into abstractions. *Concerns were raised. Tensions escalated. Narratives emerged.* The sentences float, unattached to agency, unmoored from consequence.

Orwell watches editors negotiate phrasing the way diplomats once negotiated borders. No one asks whether a statement is true. They ask whether it is survivable.

"This is not censorship," someone says nearby. "It's responsibility."

Orwell does not interrupt. He has learned that systems reveal themselves best when unchallenged. He turns instead to Ayn Rand, who is standing at the window, watching the city move below as if it were a vast, self-propelling machine whose operators had misplaced the manual.

"They no longer rewrite the past," Orwell says quietly. "They exhaust it. Memory doesn't vanish, it drowns."

Rand nods, but her attention is elsewhere. She is listening not to what is said, but to what must now be *prefaced*. Every assertion arrives padded with apology. Every claim hedged against offense.

"The mind," she says, "has been demoted. Thought is tolerated only if it kneels first."

They leave the newsroom without being noticed. Outside, the city continues, unconcerned.

The schools disturb them more.

In a classroom filled with posters about identity and belonging, children speak earnestly about feelings, about fairness, about how the world has wronged them. They are articulate in grievance. They are less confident in reading. Mathematics is treated as an optional language, useful but not essential. Discovery replaces instruction; self-expression replaces mastery.

Orwell watches a child stumble over a paragraph meant for much younger readers. No one corrects him. Correction, it seems, is considered intrusive.

"They are being taught," Orwell murmurs, "that truth is personal and skill is suspicious."

Rand is less restrained.

"This is not education," she says. "It is moral disarmament. You cannot call it kindness to deny a child the means of independence. That is not compassion; it is theft."

The tragedy, she sees immediately, is not abstract. The children most loudly proclaimed as protected are the ones most thoroughly stripped of intellectual weapons. When they fail later, and many will, the system will present their failure as evidence of oppression, never as evidence of betrayal.

"Dependency," Rand says, "has learned to disguise itself as care."

Orwell recognizes the pattern. In his own work, ignorance had been enforced crudely. Here it is curated. The result is the same: a population trained to trust authority because it lacks the tools to verify it.

They sit in on a **university meeting** where merit is discussed with visible discomfort. Standardized tests are questioned not because they are inaccurate, but because they measure something inconvenient. Excellence is described as a construct. Equity, as an imperative.

Orwell notes how quickly language shifts from description to command.

"The remarkable thing," he says afterward, "is how complete the moral certainty is. No hypothesis is tested. No counterargument entertained. The system does not ask whether it works, only whether it aligns."

Rand is sharper.

"Merit has not been refuted," she says. "It has been declared immoral. That is what frightened societies do when they fear comparison."

They watch as institutions once designed to select and elevate ability now apologize for doing so. The apology becomes permanent. Over time, apology replaces function.

On the street, the transition from abstraction to consequence is immediate.

A protest assembles with impressive speed. Uniforms appear. Masks. Professionally printed signs. Legal observers wait nearby, as if on schedule. The movement calls itself spontaneous.

Orwell studies the choreography with a practiced eye. "This is not chaos," he says. "It is rehearsal."

Rand watches authority retreat in advance of confrontation. Police stand down. Businesses board up. The narrative is already prepared: violence will be reclassified as expression; destruction as justice. "What strikes me," Rand says, "is not the anger. It is the permission."

Orwell agrees. The state no longer lacks force, it lacks confidence. It fears accusation more than disorder. In such a climate, intimidation becomes governance by proxy.

"In my time," Orwell reflects, "power demanded belief. Here, it demands non-resistance. Do not insist on clarity. Do not name what you see."

The chant rises. It is rhythmic, simple, moralistic. A verdict rather than a demand.

"No justice, no peace."

Orwell smiles thinly. "A conditional threat masquerading as a principle. The Party would have admired the efficiency."

The courts offer no refuge.

They attend a hearing where enforcement of public-order laws is debated as if law itself were optional. Context is invoked repeatedly, as though it were a solvent capable of dissolving responsibility. Judges speak of balance. Lawyers speak of impact. Individuals vanish into categories.

Rand listens with visible impatience.

"When law ceases to protect equally," she says afterward, "it ceases to be law. It becomes a lever, applied selectively, justified endlessly."

Orwell hears something else: the quiet normalization of contradiction. The same act punished harshly in one moral category is excused in another. Guilt precedes evidence; innocence is granted by alignment. "In my world," Orwell says, "justice was staged after guilt was assumed. This is subtler. Here, the category replaces the trial."

They follow the **news of the border** not by visiting it, but by watching how it is spoken about. Officials insist it is secure. Images show otherwise. No one appears embarrassed. Contradiction has lost its stigma.

Orwell recognizes the technique instantly. "Doublethink without uniforms," he says. "The training is complete when contradiction provokes no discomfort."

Rand sees something more fundamental. "A nation unwilling to define itself," she says, "cannot sustain rights. Borders are not walls, they are definitions. Without definition, nothing has meaning."

To notice this, they learn, is to invite moral accusation. The charge arrives quickly: hatred, fear, cruelty. "Hatred," Rand says, "is the most efficient silencer. Once invoked, it ends all inquiry."

At dinner, they overhear a conversation about taxation. The rich are discussed as though wealth were a hoard rather than a process. Job creation is treated as incidental. Resentment substitutes for economics. Rand has heard this before. "They still believe wealth is stolen," she says. "As if value appears without thought, risk, or effort."

Orwell notes the tone. "Envy," he says, "has always been the easiest political fuel. It requires no data—only comparison."

What neither of them hears anymore is gratitude, not personal gratitude, but civilizational recognition of how fragile production actually is. The producers are expected to create endlessly and apologize for existing. Many comply. Others withdraw quietly.

"The strike," Rand observes, "no longer needs a valley. It happens invisibly, through disengagement."

Orwell frowns. "That may be worse. Collapse arrives without drama."

By the end of the week, they are not exhausted. They are unsettled.

Life, after all, continues. Families gather. Children play. Cafés are full. The republic has not fallen in spectacle. It has softened in meaning.

“That,” Orwell says, watching ordinary life unfold, “is what makes this moment dangerous. No alarms. No crisis loud enough to demand clarity.”

Rand agrees. “Civilizations rarely die screaming. They die rationalizing. They die explaining away contradictions until nothing solid remains.”

They sit in silence for a long time.

Finally, Orwell speaks, not as a prophet, but as a man who has seen this shape before. “If words no longer mean what they mean,” he says, “there is no path back to reality.”

Rand responds, just as quietly. “And if reason is surrendered, voluntarily, no constitution can save you.”

They do not offer solutions. They do not issue calls. They are writers, not generals.

They have only done what they have always done: named what they see.

Whether the republic still believes naming matters, that remains unresolved.