

Mozart Was a Red

A Morality Play In One Act

by [Murray N. Rothbard](#)

Justin Raimondo wrote his commentary for the [Rothbard-Rockwell Report](#).

Introduction

"Mozart Was a Red" is, to my knowledge, Murray N. Rothbard's one and only play. It is a form unusual for him, but one well suited to its subject: the cult that grew up around the novelist Ayn Rand and flourished in the 60s and early 70s. For the principal figures of Rand's short-lived "Objectivist" movement were indeed like characters out of some theatrical farce.

With her flowing cape, intense eyes, and long cigarette holder, Rand was the very picture of eccentricity; she sometimes wore a tricornered hat, and at one point carried a gold-knobbed cane. Her thick Russian accent added to the exoticism. It is a measure of Rand's powerful personality – and the real key to understanding the Rand cult – that, after a while, many of her leading followers began to speak with a noticeable accent, although each and every one of them had been born in North America.

This Russification process was especially pronounced in Nathaniel Branden, her leading disciple. Branden delivered his lectures on the "Basic Principles of Objectivism" in a sonorous singsong voice with a very definite Slavic undertone. Pompous, dogmatic, and utterly self-infatuated, Branden was the second-in-command and chief enforcer of a cult that demanded total obedience and agreement on every conceivable subject – in the name of individualism. Any deviation from the Randian line – and they had a line on everything – was taken as evidence of "bad premises," and grounds for expulsion from the inner circle.

Murray's own experience with the Randians was a case in point. In the late 50s, Murray and a group of his libertarian friends in New York City became interested in the burgeoning Objectivist movement, which had taken off as a result of the success of Rand's novel, *[Atlas Shrugged](#)*.

Murray wrote Rand a letter complimenting her on the novel, and soon joint meetings of the Randian "Senior Collective" and Rothbard's Circle Bastiat were being held. As advocates of laissez-faire

capitalism, avowedly committed to the supremacy of reason, it seemed as if the Randians would be valuable allies.

But the Randians did not understand the concept of "allies": in their universe, you either agreed with all of their positions, or else you were consigned to the Outer Darkness. (Curiously, on the level of macro-politics, the Randians were grossly opportunistic.)

The Randian ideology was not so much an integrated philosophical system as a mythos, based as it was on Rand's novels. Unfortunately, as she got older, she imagined herself to be a philosopher, and gave up fiction writing to become the leader of a movement.

In her nonfiction tirades, Rand quotes mainly from her own works; this was due not only to her inflated self-estimate, but also to a colossal ignorance. She read almost nothing but detective novels, and her followers, usually considerably younger, were even worse. Although her philosophy of rational self-interest was an eccentric modern variation on a much older philosophical tradition, the only precedent she acknowledged was Aristotle.

While claiming not to be militant atheist – "It would be paying religion a compliment it does not deserve" – she denounced conservatives for their devotion to religion and tradition, dismissing them as "moth-eaten mystics."

Religion was also the main issue in the events leading up to Murray's break with the Randians: although Murray was an agnostic, his wife, JoAnn, was (and is) a Presbyterian. Apprised of this, Rand grilled Joey on the reasons for her religious faith and suggested that she read a pamphlet put out by the Randians that "disproved" the existence of God.

When Joey refused to recant her heresy, Murray was told that he had better find himself a more "rational" mate. That was enough for Murray. The break was finalized by his formal "trial" held by the Randian Senior Collective, which Murray declined to attend.

Murray's real talent as a satirist comes through in his deft characterizations: in Carson Sand, the imperious author of *The Brow of Zeus*, Murray has Rand down to a tee. With one well-placed brushstroke – "Jonathan's nose was permanently tilted at a 45 degree angle from horizontal" – Murray paints a vivid picture of cult leader Nathaniel Branden. His subtle portrayal of Rand's husband, the quiet, amiable, and rather intelligent Frank O'Connor, in the character of George, is imaginative and structurally clever: at key points in the drama, it is George, always speaking quietly amid the grandiose histrionics of the others, who asks key questions of Keith Hackley, the bewildered neophyte, and moves the action along.

Here, then, is "Mozart Was a Red," which represents the lighter side of Murray Rothbard, the side that those of us who knew him will always

treasure and remember.

~ *Justin Raimondo*

The Play

SCENE:

The living room of a modern luxury apartment on New York's upper East Side. The walls are a lush, tropical green. Sofa (c), several armchairs and sectional chairs (r) are all over-sized, so designed that no one can sit comfortably in them. Sitting back, no one under eight feet tall could place his feet on the floor. Therefore, for anyone in the room, there are only two alternatives: (a) to sit perched precariously on the edge of the sofa or chair, clinging to one of the arms for support, or (b) to curl up in it, feet pressed against thigh and upholstery.

To CARSON SAND, owner of the apartment, this choice presents no problem. She is now curled up in one of the sectionals (lc), cigarette holder raised aloft. This is to symbolize mocking contempt of, and hostility toward, men, and therefore rationality and high romantic standards.

CARSON is a little woman with straight hair seeping down one side of her face. Her figure can only be described as protoplasmic, amorphous; her age, too, is indeterminate, but is presumably in the fifties. She wears a shapeless suit with military shoulders, in the height of fashion (Moscow, 1925). Her eyes are beady and intent, and when she talks, she is invariably curled up, ready to strike.

CARSON skyrocketed to fame as author on the basis of a novel, eagerly bought for its graphic rape scene. She believes its popularity demonstrates the mass devotion to her philosophical message.

Sitting at right, also curled, are her two disciples, JONATHAN and GRETA. They are in their twenties but already stamped with the arrogance of their patron. JONATHAN's nose is permanently tilted at a 45-degree angle from horizontal and his straight brown hair is heightened in front by a blond bleach. GRETA is a pretty blonde, with dark skin and a general feline air. Although bearing no physical resemblance to CARSON, she also affects the same type of cigarette holder, and the same brand of tiny matches as the latter. She does not yet wield the holder with quite the same flourish .

On sofa at extreme right, GEORGE KELLY lies sleeping. GEORGE is tall and thin, his once-handsome face permanently marked in an expression of great gentleness, languor, and boredom. GEORGE is CARSON's husband. At center back, is a deluxe radio-phonograph-27-inch TV set. Curled up in front of the set is a luxurious black-and-grey

cat, ALFONSO III.

On top of the mantelpiece (rc) next to the set is a framed double photograph of JONATHAN and GRETA, autographed to CARSON.

GRETA has inscribed: "Thank you, CARSON, for giving me a round universe." JONATHAN wrote, archly: "To the woman with the beautiful cat."

Enter: KEITH HACKLEY, a pleasant, earnest, well-dressed young man of 25. Hackley, a graduate student in history, walks in hesitantly from left. GEORGE, awakening, leaps to his feet, and approaches.

GEORGE: Here, let me, please.

GEORGE leads KEITH into the room.

GEORGE: Keith Hackley – Jonathan, Greta, and...Carson Sand.

JONATHAN and GRETA nod their heads imperceptibly. CARSON extends her arm in a gesture of welcome and points to the sofa where KEITH sits down. GEORGE resumes his sleep at right.

CARSON (Speaking in a strong Russian accent, e.g., her "t"'s sound like "s"'s): Well, Mr. Hackley, I'm glad you could come.

KEITH: Thank you, ah (hesitantly for is she Miss or Mrs....?) ...Miss Sand. (After a pause.) I'd like to tell you how pleased I am that you wanted to see me.

CARSON: Oh, Keith, how could I not ask you to come after sending me such a splendid letter about my novel?

KEITH: Oh, it was really nothing.

CARSON (annoyed): Oh?

KEITH (a little puzzled): I'd like to say, though, Miss Sand, that your book was an inspiration. *The Brow of Zeus* was one of the finest novels I've read in years.

(Exclamations of dismay and disbelief from JONATHAN and GRETA. JONATHAN and GRETA, by the way, speak in a portentous sing-song with a trace of Russian-Canadian accent.)

GRETA (sharply): Mr. Hackley, did you say *one* of the finest novels?

KEITH (puzzled): Why... yes.

JONATHAN (with tightly controlled rancor): Do you care to offer us the name of any novel you've read in years that even remotely compares to *The Brow of Zeus*?

KEITH (sweating): Well – I – really don't...

JONATHAN: If there is one thing we cannot tolerate, Mr. Hackley, it is imprecision of language. You said one of the finest novels – what were the others?

KEITH: Well, I – Hemingway was rather impress...

JONATHAN and GRETA (in unison): Hemingway! Good God! (then quickly):

JONATHAN: (in a low, rapid ritualistic mutter) Of course, you know that when we say "God," we do not imply agreement with the concept. We are merely using the term as a strong, idiomatic metaphor.

CARSON (keeping her inner fury in close rein): Oh, Keith, can't you see Hemingway's death premises in every line that man writes?

KEITH: Well, man's struggle against the bull, the moment of...

JONATHAN: Hemingway is anti-life, anti-mind, anti-reality.

CARSON (looking fondly at JONATHAN): Jonathan, Greta. Come, I think we should give Mr. Hackley more of a chance. After all, he is a lover of *The Brow of Zeus* and that's a big plus.

GRETA: Yes, you're right, Carson.

JONATHAN: Of course, Carson.

CARSON (turning to KEITH): Keith, would you like a cigarette? Here, this is a particularly rational brand.

KEITH (a bit bemused): "Rational...?" (A slight pause) Oh, I'm sorry, thank you. I don't smoke.

(Exclamations of disapproval from JONATHAN and GRETA.)

GRETA (lashing out): You don't smoke! Why not?

KEITH (taken back): Well, uh... because I don't like to.

CARSON (in scarcely-controlled fury): You don't like to! You permit your mere subjective whims, your feelings (this word said with utmost contempt) to stand in the way of reason and reality?

KEITH (sweating again): But surely, Miss Sand, what other possible grounds can you have for smoking than simply liking it?

(Expressions of fury, dismay from GRETA, JONATHAN, and CARSON, "Oh!", "Ah!", etc.)

JONATHAN (bounding up): Mr. Hackley, Carson Sand never, never does anything out of her subjective feelings; only out of reason, which means: the objective nature of reality. You have grossly insulted this great woman, Carson Sand, you have abused her courtesy and her hospitality. (sits down)

KEITH: But. ..but...what possible reason can there be...?

CARSON: Mr. Hackley, why are you evading the self-evident fact? Smoking is a symbol of the fire in the mind, the fire of ideas. He who refuses to smoke is therefore an enemy of ideas and of the mind.

KEITH: Symbol? But then a match is even more of a symbol...

(Further expressions of fury, anger, exasperation.)

JONATHAN (bounding up, crossing over to KEITH): Enough! How dare you mock Carson Sand in that hooligan manner? You wouldn't mock God!

CARSON (once again in tight control): Wait, Jonathan, let us wait before passing final judgment. Perhaps his problem is on a deeper level.

JONATHAN: Of course, Carson. (JONATHAN crosses back, sits down)

CARSON (turning to the thoroughly nettled KEITH): Now, Keith, and this is very important, are you a rationalist?

KEITH (again puzzled): Well, I – I, that's a very difficult...

CARSON: Come, come, do you hold reason as your absolute?

KEITH: Well, yes, but I – that depends on how you define rationalism. I would think...

JONATHAN (bounding up, tossing his long hair aloft, and pacing up and down): A rationalist is a man who lives exclusively by his reason, which means: by the power of his mind to grasp reality, which means: by the power of his mind to think, which means: by his own power to think, which means...

CARSON: Wait, Jonathan. (Jonathan stops pacing, sits down again.) Well, Keith are you a rationalist?

KEITH: Well, I approve of reason, and – and thinking, of course, but I'm not quite sure what...

CARSON (temper rising): Mr. Hackley, we are being very patient with you because we extend every courtesy and every leeway to a lover of *The Brow of Zeus*. Let me put it this way: are you a mystic?

(This question snapped out with flashing eyes, hatred in voice.)

KEITH: A mystic? Why no, I don't believe in this Zen Buddhist business, or...

CARSON (squirming with indignation): Oh! Really, Keith, I am trying to hold a serious conversation with you.

KEITH: Well, yes, but...

CARSON: Please give the courtesy of not interrupting me in the middle of a thought.

KEITH: I'm sorry, I...

CARSON: Surely, you must realize I'm not talking about the twisted, leprous Asiatic bum sitting somewhere on a diaper – that's only the most obvious, the most blatant kind of mystic.

KEITH: I know; Los Angeles is full of queer...

JONATHAN: Mr. Hackley, why do you persist, again and again, in conscious and deliberate evasion of Miss Sand's frank and open questions? We both know you're running like hell.

KEITH: Look here, I don't know what you're talk...

CARSON: Keith, to put it simply, a mystic is someone who allows something else to come between his reason and his reality, who places something higher than his reason. Do you see?

(There is an uncomfortable pause.)

GEORGE (softly, lifting his head a bit from the sofa at right): Are you religious, Keith?

KEITH (casting a grateful glance in George's direction): Oh, am I religious? I see – well, not terribly. I go to church twice a year, Christmas and Easter, you know – but religion plays a very small part in my life.

The silence now is deeper, more ominous. A hissing sound comes from GRETA's direction.

GRETA: Only twice a year, he says.

(GRETA turns to JONATHAN)

GRETA: You know where that comes from...

JONATHAN: Of course. There's a passage on Page 236, Paragraph 2 of *Zeus* that explains this syndrome perfectly.

GRETA: Yes. And notice how he tries to curry favor with us and with the mystics.

JONATHAN: Of course.

KEITH: Look here, I didn't know that you people felt so bitterly about religion.

CARSON: Keith, our feelings do not count here at all. Our reason tells us that religion is evil.

JONATHAN (bounding up and pacing): Religion is evil, which means anti-mind, which means anti-life, which means anti-reason, which means anti-reality. (He resumes his seat.)

CARSON (looking fondly at JONATHAN): Well done, comrade.

KEITH: Well, look, I told you that I don't take religion very seriously.

(The pause that now settles over the room is deathly.)

CARSON (explodes, agitated. She leaps up): My God, we are talking about life and death matters and he doesn't... Oh!! (CARSON sinks back on the chair, covering her head in fury.)

GRETA (in voice of low menace): Mr. Hackley, do you take anything seriously?

(Another long pause.)

(KEITH starts to get up to leave. CARSON summons up the last reserves of her patience and stops him.)

CARSON: Wait, Mr. Hackley, perhaps we can approach your problem through aesthetics. What composers do you like, for example?

KEITH (sinks back, a bit relieved, feeling erroneously on safer ground.): Well, the usual, you know. I'm not much of a musician...

CARSON (quickly): That's all right. That doesn't matter. Your taste reveals your musical premises.

KEITH (puzzled): Oh? Well, I like Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, the standard . . .

GRETA: Oh!

CARSON: Keith, how could you? I, who know the depth of depravity to which most men sink, even I have to ask myself, how can they? Beethoven, Mozart, who reek of naturalism, whose whole work tramples on values, whose every note displays the malevolent universe premise.

KEITH (stunned): Malev...?

CARSON: Oh, Keith, can't you see the hatred of life in every bar of their music?

JONATHAN: Mr. Hackley, you told Carson in your letter that you liked *The Brow of Zeus* because it opposes collectivism and totalitarianism.

KEITH (lights up): Yes, yes, exactly. I...

JONATHAN: Well, how in the name of reason can't you see that a composer like Mozart, on the malevolent universe premise, is on the same premise as the collectivists that you claim to despise? They are all part of the anti-mind, anti-life Enemy.

KEITH (stunned again): Are-are you saying that Mo-Mozart was a collectivist?

CARSON: Oh, not in that very primitive kind of way. But the system of premises interconnect, on a deeper, and therefore on a more important level. Do you see?

(KEITH, more and more convinced that he must get out of this place quickly, starts to get up again.)

(GEORGE KELLY sits up, intercepts him in a kindly tone.)

GEORGE: Keith, we always ask every new person we meet who is his favorite character in *The Brow of Zeus*. Who was yours?

KEITH: Oh, I liked Joey Fontana.

CARSON, GRETA, JONATHAN (in unison): Joey Fontana!!!

KEITH: Yes, why?

CARSON (under tight control): Why did you prefer him, Keith?

KEITH: Well, he was on the good side, for freedom, and he was a nice, bright, good-natured, amiable fellow.

CARSON: Ohhhh!! (Unable to stand the proceedings any longer, CARSON rushes up, runs offstage at right.)

GRETA (in tone of deadly menace): Joey Fontana! The very image of the nice, third-rate, common man. And you picked him over a hero like Kyle Crane or Sebastian del Rey!

KEITH: Well, they were all right; they just seemed a bit wooden and one-dimensional to me. They...

JONATHAN (bounds to his feet, comes to center and declaims at KEITH): Enough! Keith Hackley, you have had the rare privilege of spending an evening with the greatest minds you can ever hope to meet: Carson Sand, Greta Landsdowne, and myself. And above all you have met Carson Sand, the greatest, the most original mind of our time and of all times, the greatest human being who has ever lived or shall live. And how have you treated this privilege? Above all, how have you treated Carson Sand? I have sat here while you have committed a series of irrational, unforgivable sins against Carson Sand. You interrupted her continually, hardly giving her a chance to speak; you openly evaded every question which Carson or I put to you. You have tried to kowtow to us and to the mystics, to us and to Mozart, to us and to all the depravities of our society.

You criticized, instead of asking questions. You mocked like a hooligan, instead of showing proper reverence. And to whom? To this woman who has brought to the world the knowledge that A is A, and that 2 and 2 equal 4. And finally, after your rudeness had driven this woman with the patience of Job from this room, you capped your crimes by saying that your favorite character is Joey Fontana, the mediocre, the nice guy (*with absolute contempt*), the second-hander. Thereby, Keith Hackley, you damned yourself forevermore. You have made your choice, Keith Hackley, and therefore you leave me with but one alternative: to demand that you leave this house never to return.

(KEITH staggers up, pale, shaken. Goes to the door. There, GEORGE KELLY comes over to hand Keith his hat and coat.)

KEITH: Mr. Kelly, forgive me, but you seem like a nice fellow. How can you stand all this?

GEORGE (softly): Oh, this sort of thing goes on almost every night. You get used to it.

KEITH: But how can you...?

GEORGE: Oh, after a few years you get to overlook it. You take it easy, you sleep on the couch, say "Yes" once in a while. Hell, it's a living.

Curtain falls.

THE END