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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

BOLSHEVIK FOR CAPITALISM: AYN RAND & SOVIET SOCIALIST REALISM

SUBMITTED TO

PROFESSOR LARISSA V. RUDOVA

AND

PROFESSOR GARY HAMBURG

AND

DEAN GREGORY HESS

BY

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FOR

SENIOR THESIS

SPRING 2011

APRIL 25TH

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INTRODUCTION

Ayn Rand's story seems, at first glance, quintessentially American. She was born in fin de siècle St. Petersburg of middle-class Jewish parents, and after the Bolsheviks seized power in October 1917, the family lost everything. She arrived on Ellis Island speaking almost no English, (Heller 54) armed only with the conviction that in America, the land of the free, she could create for herself a new life. After years of struggling in poorly paid screenwriting jobs, she achieved her childhood dream, becoming one of America's best-selling novelists, a controversial public intellectual, and one of her time's most charismatic, eclectic, and uncompromising advocates of laissez-faire capitalism. She created a distinct philosophical and political movement – Objectivism – opposed not only to the Left, but to the traditionally conservative Right.

Rejecting the pragmatic argument, most famously advanced by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*, that capitalism, by harnessing the self interest of market participants under a system of clearly defined property rights ultimately promotes the general welfare, Rand posited that a person's only moral duty is to themselves, and that the selfish pursuit of private profit is inherently justified as an extension of the individual's right to life. Where thinkers like Smith had seen a strong need for morality and civic duty, Rand saw these requirements as unqualified evils, a burden on the creative and productive individuals who she considered the "fountainhead" of human progress.¹ Though Rand herself was loathe to admit it, her novels, and the ideas they contained, were a major inspiration for the rise of another deeply American political movement –

¹ In her copy of Ludwig von Mises' *Human Action* (1949), she scribbled "Bastard!" next to his "rejection of a moral, as opposed to a practical, argument for capitalism." (Heller 249)

libertarianism – with no meaningful equivalent in Europe or elsewhere. Her two most important novels – *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) – are set in America, deal with American questions, and draw on a distinctly American mythology.

Yet it is difficult to describe Ayn Rand as an *American* novelist. Her novels are extremely long: in their Centennial editions *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, respectively, run to 727 and 1168 pages. They are highly didactic, and serve primarily as vehicles for Rand’s political philosophy. The plots are outlandish, without the irony or meta-fiction of literary modernism. The characters are one-dimensional: on one side stand larger-than-life heroes, brilliant and ruthless creators and captains of industry with whom the reader is encouraged and expected to sympathize; on the other, cartoon villains whose purpose is to illustrate the moral insidiousness of the advocates of “collectivism.” Critics of Rand’s novels tend to focus on their low literary merit, their facetiousness as political tracts, and the totalitarianism inherent in the thought they embody. *Atlas Shrugged* has been called, variously, “a ridiculous book;” (Ephron 45) “almost Soviet;” (Daniels 8) “melodramatic,” “didactic,” and “importunate.” (Hicks 266)

Whittaker Chambers’ review of *Atlas Shrugged*, in particular, is worth close attention. Chambers, a writer and editor, was a long-time member of the Communist Party, and for several years a spy for the Soviet GRU, smuggling stolen documents between Washington, DC and New York. Disgusted with the increasingly brutal Stalinist regime, he had renounced Communism in 1938, and by the time *Atlas Shrugged* appeared he was a “devout Christian” and fervent anti-Communist. (Heller 284) His scathing review appeared in the conservative magazine *National Review* on December 28th, 1957,

under the ominous title “Big Sister Is Watching You.” Chambers called the book “bumptious,” “dictatorial,” and “inflexibly self-righteous,” (“[it] can be called a novel only by devaluing the term”). In the damning penultimate paragraph, the apostate Marxist pointed out the totalitarianism inherent in Rand’s brand of “rational” individualism:

[*Atlas Shrugged*] proposes itself to be the bringer of a final revelation. Therefore, resistance to the Message cannot be tolerated because disagreement can never be merely honest, prudent, or just humanly fallible. Dissent from revelation so final (because, the author would say, so reasonable) can only be willfully wicked. There are ways of dealing with such wickedness, and in fact, right reason itself enjoins them. From almost any page of *Atlas Shrugged*, a voice can be heard, from painful necessity, commanding: “To a gas chamber – go!” (Chambers)

The critic Anthony Daniels, writing for *New Criterion* over five decades later, draws similar parallels, but goes beyond the vague accusation of totalitarianism, arguing more specifically that Rand’s fiction is distinctly Russian and bears a strong resemblance both to Stalinism and to 19th-century Russian Intelligentsia writers:

Her combination of vehemence, moral fanaticism, and mediocrity as a thinker was very characteristic of the earnest journalistic tradition of Dobrolyubov, Pisarev, and Chernyshevsky. [...] In her expository writings, Rand’s style resembles that of Stalin. It is more catechism than argument, and bores into you in the manner of a drill. [...] Her unequivocal admiration bordering on worship of industrialization and the size of human construction as a mark of progress is profoundly Stalinist. Where Stalinist iconography would plant a giant chimney

belching black smoke, Randian iconography would plant a skyscraper. [...]

Rand's fanaticism is Russian; philosophically she resembles Bazarov in *Fathers and Sons*, but without his more attractive qualities. (8-9)

Daniels quotes a short statement of Rand's on her theory of literature, which she called Romantic Realism:

Since my purpose is the presentation of an ideal man, I had to define and present the conditions which make him possible and which his existence requires. I had to define and present the kinds of premises and values that create the character of an ideal man and motivate his actions. (9)

Of this he writes, contemptuously, that "Zhdanov could have written that, and it is hardly surprising that, as a result, Rand's heroes are not American but Soviet. The fact that they supposedly embody capitalist values makes no difference. Rand fulfilled Stalin's criterion for the ideal writer: she tried to be an engineer of souls." (9)

Ayn Rand's biographer, Anne C. Heller, in describing Rand's early intellectual development, makes an observation that, while not meant as a criticism, amounts to much the same. It merits lengthy quotation:

Long before she began making notes for *We the Living*, she reached another conclusion: that political and philosophical ideas, especially those that are heroically clothed and set in large-scale novels, have the power to shape perceptions and change the world. As scholars have noted, novels and poems have been a surrogate for banned political speech in Russia. Literature as a subversive

force is a peculiarly Russian notion, one that was widely celebrated in Rand's youth. [...] Lenin said that Chernyshevsky's novel, a nineteenth-century tale of superhuman sacrifice in the service of a coming revolution, converted him to Communism [...] Rand once referred to her own novels as anti-Communist propaganda, [and] henceforth viewed national politics as a morality play whose theme is individual freedom in contest with overt or hidden mob force." (31)

It has been noted that critics have posited a certain similarity between Rand's fiction and that of the 19th-century Russian Intelligentsia and 20th-century Soviet Socialist Realists. In this paper, I intend to evaluate this claimed similarity critically. What is it in Rand's fiction that prompts comparison to these two Russian literary traditions? The question is interesting because of Rand's enduring influence in American culture and politics. Two contemporary St. Petersburg émigré intellectuals – the philosopher Isaiah Berlin and the novelist Vladimir Nabokov – also launched successful careers in English, and though they have been more culturally influential, especially among academics and educated readers, they have been nowhere near as widely read as Ayn Rand, nor exerted as direct a political influence. If indeed Rand's intellectual and literary style is distinctly Russian, it is curious that her work has resonated so deeply with generations of American readers.

I will begin by summarizing Rand's biography and literary work, especially her two mature novels, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*; I will follow this with a discussion of her influence on American politics and culture. In order to evaluate Rand's links with the Russian literary tradition, it is necessary to understand Socialist Realism

and its roots in the 19th century. What motivated the Socialist Realist novelists? What were their methods? What did they produce? What in Rand's novels, structurally, aesthetically, and symbolically, is similar, and in what ways does she differ? Finally, given these strong parallels between Ayn Rand's fiction and Socialist Realist fiction, why is it that Rand is so popular with American readers, and has been so influential in shaping the ideological program of the American right?

CHAPTER I: BIOGRAPHY

Alissa Zinovievna Rosenbaum was born February 2nd, 1905, in St. Petersburg. Her father was a pharmacist; her mother a trained but non-practicing dentist. (Heller 1-2) Rand's father had chosen to study pharmaceutical science at Warsaw University because at the time it was one of the few institutions in the Russian Empire that admitted Jews. (9) The Rosenbaums were part of a growing Jewish middle class in the city and were prosperous enough that the young Rand was able to attend the elite Stoiunin girls' gymnasium, which provided a rigorous classical education and was fashionable with the city's elite. (19) There she met and befriended Olga Nabokov, daughter of the prominent liberal statesman Vladimir Dmititrievich Nabokov and sister of Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, who would go on to launch a dazzling literary career after his family's exile from the young Soviet Union. (26)

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider the contrast between Nabokov and Rand. They were born and raised in the same city, at the same time (1899 and 1905), and arguably had access to similar cultural, political, and literary inputs. Both supported themselves for a time by working as extras in the silent film industry: Nabokov in Berlin, Rand in Hollywood. (Johnson) Both were transplants who spent their productive years in exile, writing for non-Russian audiences in an adopted language. Their most famous novels, *Lolita* and *Atlas Shrugged*, were published only a year apart, in 1958 and 1957 respectively, and sat side-by-side on New York best-seller lists. (ibid) Both were interviewed by *Playboy Magazine* in the early 1960s, establishing their pop-cultural credentials - Nabokov in 1961, Rand in 1964. (ibid) Both were at one time friends of

William F. Buckley, the aristocratic editor of the conservative *National Review* (though Rand broke with him, as was her wont, when ideological differences emerged). And both continue to exert a powerful influence on American culture.

Despite this, it is difficult to imagine two writers with less in common. Nabokov was one of the most brilliant novelists of the twentieth century and a major influence on such literary stars as Martin Amis, John Updike, (Woods) and Salman Rushdie: “one can only hope to be worthy of his shade.” (qtd. in Lowery) Rand’s novels, on the other hand, despite their clearly having touched many people and exerted a demonstrable influence as easily-digested vehicles for right-wing ideology, are simply bad novels. Katerina Clark has written that the prototypical Soviet novel is “the sort of kitsch that you would not read even if you were stranded in an airport for twenty-four hours and nothing else was available,” (36) and as a statement of elite taste her words apply just as readily to the novels of Ayn Rand. Vladimir Shlapentokh opts for a more understated dismissal: “the literary quality of Rand’s novels is very low.” (7)

As D. Barton Johnson convincingly argues in an article on the two St. Petersburg émigrés, titled “The Odd Couple,” the difference between the two writers is best explained by reference to revolutionary icon Nikolay Chernyshevsky: growing up, Nabokov and Rand shared “a milieu in which Chernyshevsky was a revered figure in the anti-establishment intelligentsia.” (3) Nabokov the aesthete famously scoffed at Chernyshevsky’s *What is to Be Done?*, considering it, among other things, a work of “helplessly rational structures,” and inserted an entire faux-scholarly work mocking the 19th-century radical into his mid-1930s novel *The Gift*. (5) According to Johnson, “the

literary line of descent from Chernyshevsky's mess of pottage to Gorky's 1906 *Mother*, with a segue through the Verbitskaya, Andreev and Arsybashev school, to Ayn Rand's ideological epics of the forties and fifties is clear enough." (Johnson 4) Rand and Nabokov each continued and reacted against elements of Russian literary heritage: Nabokov reacted against the Chernyshevskian tradition and was inspired by Symbolists like Andrei Bely, writing sophisticated, abstract, and highly aesthetic works of modernist fiction for a select audience of "good readers." Rand, on the other hand, took up the Chernyshevskian torch; her aversion to the aesthetic, linguistically playful strain in Russian literature is summed up perfectly by her quoted statements on Tolstoy (Nabokov's Tolstoyevsky of choice) and Nabokov himself. In her *Romantic Manifesto* she writes of the former, "I cannot stand Tolstoy, and reading him was the most boring literary duty I ever had to perform, his philosophy and sense of life are not merely mistaken, but evil, and yet, from a purely literary view point, on his own terms, I have to evaluate him as a good writer." (qtd. in Johnson 4) Her view of Tolstoy merits full quotation only because it bears a remarkable resemblance to her view of Nabokov, which appeared in her 1964 *Playboy* interview: "I have read only one book of his and a half – the half was *Lolita*, which I couldn't finish. He is a brilliant stylist, he writes beautifully, but his subjects, his sense of life, his view of man, are so evil that no amount of artistic talent can justify them." (qtd. in Johnson 4-5) What Nabokov thought of Rand is not known, though one imagines him replying in the words of Howark Roark:

[Dominique:] "Roark, what do you think of Ellsworth Toohey?"

[Roark:] "Good God, why should anyone think of Ellsworth Toohey?" (Rand, *Fountainhead* 294)

Perhaps the only things Rand and Nabokov really shared, beyond bookishness and a heavy cigarette habit, were political conservatism, a passionate belief in “the supremacy of the individual consciousness,” and “a militant anti-Freudism.” (Johnson 6) It is an open question, though, whether the first is much of an observation: to label thusly both Nabokov’s aloof classical liberalism and Rand’s furious capitalist demagoguery would be to do violence to both.

On October 25th, 1917, the Bolsheviks seized control of the central government, ousting Alexander Kerensky’s Provisional Government, and plunged the country into civil war. Immediately after the Revolution, Rand had an early experience with government power: armed Bolshevik soldiers arrived at her father’s pharmacy. Like many other business, it was “raided, stamped with a red seal, and shuttered,” leaving the family without income. In mid-1918, fed up with the government’s campaign of forced expropriation, the family left for the Crimean peninsula, where White Russian resistance remained strong. They remained there, in the resort town of Yevpatoria, for three years. When the Crimea finally fell, and the last of the refugees were being loaded onto ships bound for Europe, Rand’s father decided, over the objections of her mother, that they would stay: he could not believe that Communism would really last. In the summer of 1921, Rand graduated from a local high school. By then, the family had abandoned hope of having its property restored, and made the now-two-week return journey to Petrograd. (31-37)

The family adapted. Rand’s mother took up teaching; later she would work for Gosizdat as a translator of proletarian fiction and magazine articles. Ayn Rand herself

entered Petrograd State University, something that was possible because restrictions on Jews had been lifted in 1917, to study history and philosophy. There she had the chance to study with the “classically trained, Western-leaning liberal professors who were slowly being phased out, arrested, and deported.” In terms of timing, she was lucky: soon after her 1924 graduation, students from families that had held property before the Revolution were barred from admission. (39)

Young Rand read Nietzsche and Victor Hugo, “loved military marches” and enjoyed light operettas. When, in 1923, American and European films made their debut in the Soviet Union under the New Economic Policy, Rand became an avid movie-goer, seeing more than a hundred films, “some three or more times,” before emigrating. (44-45) She began writing, producing a short, unpublished science fiction novel about a group of scientists and engineers trapped on a spacecraft orbiting the Earth. The scientists develop a miniature capitalist economy on the ship, allowing them to produce necessary supplies while they develop a plan to return to earth. Unfortunately, a Communist faction takes over, and “soon everyone is starving.” The desperate scientists beg the story’s hero to take over, and he agrees: it is implied that order is restored and the return mission will now be a success. (48)

Though the ending differs, the plot of this early sketch has much in common with that of the epic *Atlas Shrugged*, and demonstrates that even early on, Rand accepted the Russian tradition of literature as a vehicle for political expression. Fresh from the University, Rand entered the State Technicum for Screen Arts, a new institution whose mission was to train actors and cinematographers for the creation of Soviet propaganda.

She hoped to learn about screenwriting, because she had already decided that she would emigrate to the United States and embark on a screenwriting career in Hollywood. Based on the sponsorship of relatives who had settled in Chicago in the 1890s, Rand was able to obtain a passport in the fall of 1925. On January 17th, 1926, she bid her family farewell and boarded a train to Berlin, bearing the proceeds from the sale of the last of the Rosenbaum family jewelry – approximately 300 dollars. (49-51)

Ayn Rand arrived in New York City on February 19th, 1926. Later, she would recall crying at her first sight of American skyscrapers, which she saw as “the will of man made visible.” (53) “There was one skyscraper that stood out ablaze like the finger of God, and it seemed to me the greatest symbol of free man.” (qtd. in Ephron 46) Rand’s visa did not allow for permanent settlement in the United States, but she was determined not to return to the Soviet Union. She set out for Chicago, where she planned to stay with relatives while she improved her English. It seems to have been at this time, also, that she selected the pseudonym by which generations of American readers would come to know her: Ayn Rand. This rechristening had at least three purposes: the creation of a new, Hollywood-inflected persona; her desire to hide her Jewish identity in order to avoid the discrimination her family had faced in Russia (which she may have sensed would continue in America); and the knowledge that it would be more difficult for the immigration authorities to track her down for overstaying her limited visa were she to live and work under an assumed name. There has been some discussion of what prompted her particular choice, because in choosing her “Hollywood” name Rand selected one that few could mistake for American. While there is no conclusive evidence on her reasons for choosing “Rand,” Heller finds it most likely that “Ayn” was a pet

name for the young Alissa used by her pharmacist father; the choice may simply have reflected her affection for him. Rand herself would later claim that that her primary concern had been to protect her family, still in Leningrad, from Soviet reprisals, (55-57) though this may say more about Rand's tendency to rewrite the past to suit her idealized conception of reality than it does about her actual motivations at the time.

Rand stayed with her relatives in Chicago for six months. She was a difficult house-guest: she stayed up at night, slept late in the mornings, and had the annoying habit of taking long, hot baths when her hosts were trying to sleep; during the day she strutted around the living room singing popular songs at the top of her heavily-accented voice. When Rand's relatives wanted to talk about the situation of family members who had remained in Russia, Rand answered their questions in monosyllables and droned on about her own glorious future in Hollywood. In the fall of 1926 she headed west, supplied with a hundred dollar loan from her relatives, which she never repaid. (59-60)

In Hollywood, thanks to a fortuitous chance meeting with the great director and producer Cecil B. DeMille, Rand got her first job in film, as an extra in *King of Kings* (1927), a film about the last days of Jesus Christ. On the set she met the man who would become her husband: the tall, blond and handsome bit actor Frank O'Connor, who was playing a Roman legionnaire. After filming was finished, DeMille, who was impressed with Rand's drive and enjoyed her admiration for him, hired her as a junior screenwriter. In the years to come, Rand would write and sell a number of film scenarios to Hollywood studios. (61-64)

One of her scenarios, called *Red Pawn*, takes place in a prison on a remote Siberian island sometime in the early 1920s. A “slender, beautiful, haughty” American woman named Joan arrives by boat. She “is secretly the wife of the prison’s most defiant inmate, a Russian engineer arrested for displaying too much ‘ability’ while managing a Soviet factory.” Seeking to liberate her husband, she has responded to what amounts to a personal ad placed by the camp’s commander, Commandant Kareyev, who is seeking a mistress (a patently preposterous premise whose humor is delightful despite being, in all likelihood, unintended). In seducing the Commandant, Joan teaches him that every person has “a right to the joy of living.” He falls passionately in love with both her and her shiny Western ideas, and as the story draws to an end Joan must decide which man she will love and which she will betray. (73)

Around the time she wrote *Red Pawn*, Rand was working on a novella entitled, tentatively, *The Little Street*, a courtroom drama whose hero was to be a young man guilty of a little girl’s violent slaying. The protagonist was based on a real-life killer: a disturbed young man named William Hickman who in 1927 murdered and dismembered an eight-year-old girl in Los Angeles, a crime that shocked and outraged the state of California. The young Rand admired Hickman, whom she called a “brilliant, unusual, exceptional boy,” noting his “disdainful countenance,” and “immense, explicit egoism.” Though his crime had been senseless and had accomplished nothing, Rand believed that Hickman’s arrogance and refusal to live by any rules but his own made him a potentially heroic figure: “he doesn’t understand, because thankfully *he has no organ for understanding*, the necessity, meaning, or importance of other people.” Rand’s

penchant for the extreme, and her identification with anti-social outcasts in opposition to the “fat, stupid, and placid” mob, was beginning to take shape even now. (70)

In the 1930s, Rand continued to work for Hollywood. She wrote a play, *The Night of January 16th* (1934), which ran on Broadway and was purchased by Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration, for a royalty of \$10 per performance – a tidy sum at the time. (95) There is some irony here, given Rand’s stance on government support (socialism!) for the indigent (worthless moochers!), including, presumably, indigent writers. She published two books, both commercially and critically unsuccessful: the 1936 novel *We the Living* and the 1937 novella *Anthem*. The former, adapted for the stage, would enjoy a brief but unsuccessful Broadway run in early 1940, with the conservative *Herald Tribune*’s reviewer finding it “so clumsy as to confuse the audience about whether it might be *advocating* Bolshevik propaganda.” (Heller 129)

Starting in June of 1938, Rand began work on the book that would turn her into a famous and, finally, financially successful, novelist: *The Fountainhead*. It would ultimately take her four and a half years, two missed deadlines with Alfred A. Knopf, and the publisher’s nullification of her contract to finish it. (122, 123, 130, 132) During this period Rand briefly entered party politics as a “foot soldier” in the 1940 Presidential campaign of the staunch isolationist Republican Wendell Willkie. By all accounts she enjoyed the experience, saying later that she had been “a marvelous propagandist.” (132) That November, Willkie was soundly defeated by the incumbent Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Rand returned to her work on *The Fountainhead*. (130-131) Disillusioned with the electoral fiasco, which Rand blamed on Willkie’s having backpedalled instead of sticking

to a principled free-market agenda, Rand and like-minded New York conservatives established the Associated Ex-Willkie Workers Against Willkie, under whose name they wrote to newspapers mocking their onetime candidate and demanding brave leaders who could provide a strong and coherent moral justification for capitalism. (134) It was a role strongly reminiscent of that held by the 19th century Russian radical intelligentsia writers, and one that, after her rise as a celebrity novelist, she would come to assume for herself.

In the fall of 1941, Rand found a new publisher for *The Fountainhead*, still unfinished at this point. Her closest friend at the time, the libertarian journalist and political philosopher Isabel Paterson, author of *The God of the Machine* (1943), sent the work in progress to Archibald Ogden, a young editor at Bobbs-Merrill, insisting that he publish the book. He was impressed, telling Rand that he considered it “great writing in the tradition of real literature.” Ogden promised to fight for her. D.L. Chambers, the president of Bobbs-Merrill, disagreed and told Ogden to reject it. Ogden immediately responded: “if this is not the book for you, then I am not the editor for you.” Chambers relented: “far be it from me to dampen such enthusiasm. Sign the contract. But the book better be good.” Rand signed three days after Pearl Harbor. The deadline was January 1st, 1943, and Rand, afraid that this might be her last chance to publish the book, was determined to meet it. She began taking amphetamines, a habit that would stay with her for decades, and there is reason to suspect that the drugs may have contributed to the irritability, bizarre mood-swings, and paranoia that Rand exhibited later in life. Averaging a chapter a week, Rand worked feverishly, and the book was finished on time. It was delivered to bookstores on May 7th, 1943. (Heller 144-149)

The Fountainhead has been called “one of the most astonishing phenomena in publishing history.” (Ephron 42) Reviews were broadly negative or dismissive. The first print run of 7,500 copies languished on shelves for most of the summer, but in the fall sales began to rise steadily, despite nearly no advertisement on the part of the publisher. (Ephron 48) People were simply reading the book and recommending it to their friends – a sort word-of-mouth, under-the-radar promotion that would come to characterize Rand’s ability to reach the sort of readers who, according to a sales manager at Rand’s publisher in the late 1960s, “have read three books in their whole lives, other than books they had to read in business, and the other two were *Gone with the Wind* and *Anthony Adverse*.”² (qtd. in Ephron 48)

In late 1943, as the book began to climb bestseller lists, Warner Brothers approached Rand about turning it into a feature film. Rand drove a hard bargain, demanding \$50,000 for the film rights at a time when Ernest Hemingway had recently been paid \$150,000 for *For Whom the Bell Tolls*., and against her agent’s advice that she “ask for \$25,000 and settle for \$20,000.” To everyone’s great surprise, Warner Brothers made the offer, with Margaret Dumont and Gabby Hayes initially chosen to play the parts of Dominique and Roark. Rand and her husband Frank celebrated by having dinner at their usual diner, where they realized that they could order from the 65¢ side of the menu instead of the 45¢ side. A few weeks later, Frank took her to Saks Fifth Avenue and told her she could pick any fur coat she liked: as long as it was a mink. The coat she settled on cost \$2,400. She had become “a proud producer of wealth – a capitalist – and she would never be poor again.” (Heller 157-160)

² Two popular 1930s romantic novels, both of which were adapted for the screen.

The film project took longer than expected. Though Rand had the 179-page first draft of the screenplay ready by February 1944, wartime rationing of materials like cement, wood, and metal made building the required sets impossible, and the project was shelved, ultimately until 1948. (Heller 163) Sales of the book, however, were brisk, with 50,000 copies sold by Christmas 1944 – despite mostly negative reviews. In the meantime Rand had conceived the overall theme of what was to become *Atlas Shrugged*: a “strike” by the country’s creative and productive minds that would cause collectivism to collapse once and for all: an idea strikingly similar to the general strike of industrial workers historically employed by left-wing radicals, including the Russian Bolsheviks, in their efforts to bring down capitalism. (Heller 165)

Because of the time Rand was now spending in Hollywood, working with the studio on the script for *The Fountainhead*, along with other screenwriting projects, she and Frank moved to Los Angeles, purchasing a “swan-shaped” house of concrete, steel, and glass in the San Fernando Valley. The home was designed by a former apprentice of Frank Lloyd Wright, the controversial modernist architect who had been the model for Howard Roark,³ and had been built in the mid 1930s for the director Josef von Sternberg and his then-mistress Marlene Dietrich. They hired a cook and maid, and Frank was able to devote himself to the land, tending flowers and fruit trees and “raising peacocks, chickens, and rabbits.” Here he was happy, though Rand missed New York’s skyscrapers and intellectual scene. (Heller 166) Rand began work on the novel that was to become *Atlas Shrugged*, and in July of 1949, after long delays, the film version of *The*

³ When the two finally met, the relationship quickly soured. Asked whether it was true that he was the model for Roark, Wright later said, “I deny the paternity and refuse to marry the mother.” (Heller 170)

Fountainhead was finally released in theaters, starring Gary Cooper and Patricia Neal. It made little money and received mixed reviews, with the New York Times calling it “high-priced twaddle.” (211)

In the fall of 1949, Rand received a letter from a young fan named Nathan Blumenthal, a Canadian teenager who had become with obsessed with *The Fountainhead* at the age of fourteen and “read the book forty times since then.” (Heller 219) He wanted to know more about Rand’s ideas. Rand was impressed by the intelligence of his questions. Blumenthal began college at UCLA that fall, and in February of 1950 she invited him to the ranch. (219-220) Blumenthal would later change his name to Nathaniel Branden, and he and his girlfriend and future wife, Barbara (born Weidman), would over the next few years become the core of Rand’s inner circle: the group known as the “Collective,” a group that, after Rand’s return to New York in 1951, would come to include Alan Greenspan, the future Chairman of the Federal Reserve.

Over time, the group became more regimented. Isabel Paterson, who had been Rand’s mentor and closest friend during the writing of *The Fountainhead*, was purged in 1949 over aesthetic disagreements. In 1954 Rand and Nathaniel Branden initiated a sexual affair that spanned 14 years, despite the enormous age gap – an affair to which Rand demanded that both her husband and Branden’s wife give their full consent. With the publication of *Atlas Shrugged* in 1957, Rand’s fame reached its high point. During this period her apartment was a popular gathering place for young conservative intellectuals, and libertarian philosophers like Murray Rothbard and John Hospers were regular guests. (Heller)

In 1958, Nathaniel Branden established the Nathaniel Branden Institute (NBI) to promote Rand's views to a wider audience. He and she gave regular lectures to NBI subscribers in New York, which were taped and sent to affiliates around the country. She also spoke to student audiences at a number of universities, including Yale, Princeton, Columbia, Harvard, and MIT, and received an honorary doctorate from Lewis & Clark College in 1963. She officially endorsed candidates for office, most notably Barry Goldwater's 1964 bid for the Presidency. (Heller 322) In the early 1960s Rand published a series of non-fiction books explaining her philosophical and aesthetic views more formally: *For the New Intellectual* (1961), *The Virtue of Selfishness* (1964), and *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (1966).

Rand's depression and paranoia began gradually worsening after the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*, due in part to her amphetamine abuse, and she developed an "increasingly authoritarian personality." (Heller 286) A cultish environment developed around Rand, with followers slavishly following not only her doctrine, but her tastes in music, clothing, and interior design, in order to avoid falling out of favor, a situation that Rothbard, in a private letter, half-jokingly called "Stalinist tyranny." (296, 299) In 1964, Branden, who by this point had been declared Rand's official intellectual heir and successor, initiated an affair with a young actress, and though he and his wife strove to keep it a secret from Rand, Rand found out in 1968, precipitating the scandalous implosion of the organized Objectivist movement. (365)

After a loud, emotional dustup, which included Rand repeatedly striking Branden in the face, the older woman published a lengthy letter to her followers in *The*

Objectivist, accusing Branden of dishonesty and (falsely) of embezzling NBI funds. (Heller 370-373) The NBI was shut down. (375) Branden's official replacement, Leonard Peikoff, began the purges, "setting in motion a wave of Soviet-style loyalty oaths and excommunications that would eventually slow Rand's movement to a trickle." (381) Branden's name was removed from the dedication page of all future editions of *Atlas Shrugged*. (384)

After this scandal, Rand largely retreated from the public eye. She underwent radical surgery for lung cancer in 1974, having smoked heavily her whole life (and pushed her followers to do the same) on the grounds that a lit cigarette symbolizes the "fire" in man's mind, and though she quit smoking herself, she refused to "make her decision public." (Rand, *Atlas* 61; Heller 393) After Frank O'Connor's death in 1979, Rand faded still further from view, and until her death in 1982 she suffered from poor health, receiving fewer visitors and rarely leaving her apartment. (Heller 405) At her funeral, attended by nearly a thousand people, her open casket stood beside "an enormous topiary, shaped into the sign of the dollar." (Burns 278)

CHAPTER II: MAJOR WORKS; POLITICAL & CULTURAL INFLUENCE

1 - The Novels of Ayn Rand

We the Living (1936) is set in early 1920s Petrograd, and much of it is autobiographical. It centers around the love triangle between Kira Argounova, an aristocratic young Randian heroine and engineering student who “dreams of building American-style skyscrapers and aluminum bridges;” Leo Kovalensky, also an attractive aristocrat, who sweeps streets because his pedigree excludes him from meaningful work; and Andrei Taganov, an idealistic (and very handsome) young Communist leader who Kira seduces in order to spend the money he gives her on tubercular Leo’s treatment at a Crimean sanatorium. In the end, Leo betrays his lofty individualist ideals and sinks into petty crime and alcoholism; Andrei kills himself in despair when he realizes the reason for Kira’s love; Kira, attempting to escape from the Soviet Union, is shot by a border guard and perishes in the snow near the Finnish border. The novel’s theme is how great, creative, productive individuals can be smothered and destroyed by the ignorant, mediocre masses if their rights are not protected. Heller quotes an instructive passage from the first edition of the book, which was later stricken as Rand “removed some of its shriller [...] elements:” Andrei tells Kira, “I know what you’re going to say. You’re going to say that you admire our [Bolshevik] ideals, but loathe our methods.” No, says Kira: “I loathe your ideals. I admire your methods.” (87) This statement by Rand’s mouthpiece in the novel suggests that Rand was quite aware that her fiction, in practice, resembled that of the intellectual foes she had left behind in Russia.

Anthem (1937) is an allegorical science-fiction novella, set in the far future. Our civilization has collapsed, all traces erased, and the remaining people live in pre-historic squalor under a collectivist dictatorship. Except for its less-sophisticated ending, the novel bears an uncanny resemblance to Evgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921), and for a reader who has read both works it is well-nigh impossible to imagine that the young Rand had not read the earlier work. Heller does not raise the question of whether Rand can be said to have plagiarized Zamyatin (who was little-known in the West at the time), but finds it very likely that Rand encountered *We* in samizdat while at Petrograd State. (105)

Like *We*, the novel takes the form of a diary, with the covertly written entries tracking the hero's gradual mental and spiritual liberation from his oppressive background. People are treated as interchangeable units, lack names, and are referred to only by letters and numbers (the hero is called Equality 7-2521). As in *We*, jobs are assigned by a Council (though the brilliant Equality is stuck being a street sweeper rather than a mathematician – Zamyatin's One State oppressed its citizens somewhat more efficiently). They are completely brainwashed, to the extent that singular pronouns have vanished from the language – an element that nicely foreshadows Orwell's famous Newspeak. There is forbidden love: Equality meets a woman called Liberty 5-3000, with whom he conducts a secret affair. Working alone in his tunnel, Equality rediscovers electricity and the light bulb and presents them to the World Council of Scholars, which is mainly occupied in finding new and exciting ways to make use of candles. They reject his invention. He escapes into the "Uncharted Forest," and superstitious fear prevents pursuit. Liberty follows him, and they discover a nicely preserved cabin (presumably designed by Frank Lloyd Wright) with a well-stocked library in which to live happily

ever after. It is here that Equality finds the word “I” in an old book, completing the inspiring happy ending required by Rand’s philosophy of fiction.

Heller draws a distinction between *Anthem* and Orwell’s *1984* by arguing that “Rand concluded – long before most others – that totalitarianism *doesn’t* work.” (104) The world of *Anthem* is stagnant and poverty and collapse follow naturally from the destruction of individuality. This deserves an answer: as the careful reader of *We* knows, Zamyatin saw this as well: at the end of his novel, following a nearly-successful uprising by the individualists of the One State, the citizens are forced to undergo a traumatic medical procedure similar to a lobotomy – the only way to prevent them from thinking the wrong thoughts. The clear implication is that for human beings not deprived of normal brain functioning, totalitarianism *does not* work; arguably, this newly-crippled society *will* collapse now that its brain-damaged citizens are incapable of producing and maintaining the advanced technology that sustains it.

The Fountainhead (1943) was Ayn Rand’s first true commercial success. It is the story of Howard Roark, a radical and brilliant young architect, and his struggle against the prevailing neo-classical tendency of his time. The novel begins in 1922, when Roark is expelled from architecture school for refusing to design the Gothic cathedrals and Tudor mansions demanded by his instructors. He believes that “what can be done with one substance must never be done with another, No two materials are alike. No two sites on earth are alike. No two buildings have the same purpose. The purpose, the site, the material determine the shape. Nothing can be reasonable or beautiful unless it’s made by one central idea, and the idea sets every detail.” Roark accuses the architects of his

day, who draw on the history of architecture in selecting details for their designs, of “making copies in steel and concrete of copies in plaster of copies in marble of copies in wood,” of building pretentious steel Parthenons rather than buildings that make use of the new creative possibilities offered by modern engineering. (Rand, *Fountainhead* 12) A classmate of Roark’s, Peter Keating, graduates with the highest honors and receives a coveted position at Francon & Heyer, the most prestigious architectural firm in New York. He is an essentially sympathetic character, and the closest thing Roark has to a friend. However, he lacks originality and a personal creative vision, and is only interested in doing what he thinks will please others. His future success will be the fruit of a careful process of ingratiation and the shrewd psychological manipulation of clients, co-workers, and his boss, Guy Francon.

Intent on going his own way, Roark joins the tiny, decrepit firm of Henry Cameron. Cameron had been hailed as a visionary in the 1880s for his daring skyscrapers, but had since faded into alcoholic obscurity. At fault, we learn, was the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, which had left the commissioners of new buildings so enamored of neo-classicism that the pursuit of modern architecture in the United States became impossible. Cameron could have changed his work to suit the fashion, but refused: he would not compromise or bend to the whims of clients he considered ignorant, and as a result his career stalled and finally crashed. Cameron is the only character whose judgment and ability the arrogant Roark respects, the only man from whom he believes he has anything to learn. In Roark’s time at Cameron’s struggling firm, he is mentored and honed by the older and more experienced man – the closest thing kinless Roark has to a father – in preparation for the coming struggle against the ignorance and

conservatism of the masses. It is a struggle in which Roark will ultimately have to stand alone: Cameron, worn down by years of poverty, humiliation, and heavy drinking, is confined to his bed after the unjust loss of a much-hoped for commission; his energies expended, he goes into retirement, instructing Roark to close the office and burn his papers.

The rest of the novel depicts Roark's career in architecture. After an attempt to work at Francon & Heyer, where Peter Keating secures him a drafting job, he opens his own firm. Despite client interest and a few commissions he is unable to make ends meet because he refuses to compromise his creative vision in order to secure work. He closes the office and takes a job smashing stone in a Connecticut quarry. There he has a chance encounter with Dominique Francon, the beautiful daughter of founding Francon & Heyer partner Guy Francon – a man who, much like Peter Keating, owes his successes more to an ability to flatter the vanities of others than to originality. The wordless sexual energy between Roark and Dominique takes the form of a battle of wills that culminates in a pivotal and much-discussed scene: late at night, Roark enters Dominique's bedroom, and though Rand clearly intends it to be an erotic high-point of the novel and a plausible start to a romantic relationship between equals, what happens is doubtless best described as rape.

They separate without exchanging names. Roark returns to New York to start work on a building he has been offered. Dominique, a newspaper columnist at the Gail Wynand-owned *Banner*, returns to work. Much goes on, mostly related to Peter Keating's career, the building of various houses, and Roark's slow rise among a small set

of wealthy and independent-minded benefactors. An influential and nefarious (and tweedy) socialist architecture critic named Ellsworth M. Toohey tries to destroy Roark (one struggles to imagine the alternative universe in which the word of an architecture critic has the power ascribed to him by Rand). Dominique, who has since discovered that her rapist – whom for reasons unknown she loves – is an architect she admires, she seeks to destroy him, because she does not think the world around her deserves his greatness. This involves marrying Peter Keating to spite Roark. Later she divorces him and marries her employer for the same reason.

The climax of the book comes when Keating asks Roark to help him with the design for a public housing project, called Cortlandt. Roark agrees, but on the condition that Keating will use Roark's design without any alterations. When Roark returns from a philosophical yachting trip with the newlywed Wynands (Gail Wynand is one of the wealthy and independent-minded benefactors, and Roark has designed a residence for him) he discovers that the plans have been altered and his vision spoiled. In retaliation, Roark breaks into the construction site and dynamites the unfinished building, placing his right to control his own creative vision above the needs of the poor who would have benefited from the housing project regardless of its architectural merits. Roark is arrested, and at his trial offers an impassioned eight-page speech in defense of the rights of the creative individual. Mesmerized, the jury acquits him. Dominique, who has learned that the heroic and great can be realized in real life, divorces Wynand to marry Roark. Victorious, Roark begins constructing an enormous skyscraper called the Wynand Building, which we are told rather matter-of-factly will be "New York's greatest building." (726) On the last page, Roark and Dominique sit lithely, Olympianly, atop the

naked steel skeleton of the unfinished tower, peering out over the city and the ocean below.

Atlas Shrugged (1957) is Rand's longest work. It is also the most truly *Randian*: fans tend to consider it her masterpiece, while for most critics it is her worst (in the sense that the preceding books are *less bad*). The book is set in an ahistorical America. The level of technology, the political state of the world, and other references suggest the 1930s, give or take a quarter of a century or more. The plot is fast-paced and rather convoluted, but its essence can be boiled down to this: in a world in which incompetent, needy collectivists are tightening their grip on the economic life of the country and making productive existence increasingly difficult for the strong, gifted individualist creators, the people who move the world – the Atlases of the awkward title's metaphor – decide that they will no longer carry the burdens placed on them by the less gifted. Refusing to slave away for the sake of the rest of humanity, they abandon their businesses and retreat to a secret hideout to await the inevitable collapse of the world as we know it. The Atlases, burdened with a world they gain nothing from carrying, decide to shrug, and the resultant deaths of thousands are no concern of theirs.

Dagny Taggart is the head of operations of Taggart Transcontinental, a major family-owned railroad. Her incompetent but socially-adept brother James is the head of the company, though she is the one who actually manages it. This is a struggle, because James Taggart is very good at finding innovative ways to lose money. Like all *Randian* heroines, Dagny is serene, severe, intelligent, and fierce, in a way that makes it difficult for other characters to like or understand her. Hank Rearden is the owner of a steel mill,

who has single-handedly developed a new alloy called Rearden Metal – both lighter and stronger than steel – that will revolutionize industry. Francisco D’Anconia, a childhood friend of Dagny’s, is the heir to the world’s largest copper mining empire. He is a tragic figure who, realizing that the “moochers” of the world will conspire to destroy any creative mind, has decided to become a degenerate playboy. He is an essentially noble character but, like the aristocratic Lev Kovalensky, he destroys himself and his family’s company rather than wage futile war against the oppressive society that surrounds him (later, like Dominique Francon, he changes his mind).

America is in recession, and the government begins to regulate the economy ever more closely in an attempt to restart economic growth. As government agencies ramp up interference in the economy, things only get worse. Special taxes are levied on successful business and even on high-performing States. “Selfless” (inevitably devious and incompetent) business leaders, like James Taggart, successfully appeal to the federal government for subsidies on the grounds that their businesses serve the greater good, while “selfish” (virtuous and productive) capitalists like Hank Rearden are persecuted. Things become increasingly difficult for Dagny, as she tries, despite the odds, to keep trains running and track maintained. Finally, as the government becomes more desperate, it begins forcefully nationalizing industries and attempting to implement a military planned economy, under an “Economic Dictator.”

In the background, something mysterious is happening. The nation’s great capitalists are disappearing one by one, leaving their businesses sabotaged and doomed to failure. The government, used to being able to boss them around, is powerless to restore

production, and the economic crisis spirals out of control. “Who is John Galt?” people ask with weary shrugs, not knowing why they ask or where they first heard the question. Dagny and Rearden, who have become romantically involved during their negotiations to lay new track made of Rearden Metal, take a romantic drive through the Midwest. In an abandoned factory they discover an unfinished experimental engine, which they surmise was designed to convert atmospheric static electricity into useful electrical power. What genius designed it? And why did he abandon it to the elements?

It transpires that the inventor of the motor is John Galt, a former engineer who twelve years ago abandoned the factory where he worked, realizing that the unproductive many were gaining control and were going to make life impossible for the exceptional few. He has concocted a plan to take down the system, so that true, free market capitalism may rise again out of the ashes of the United States economy. He is quietly convincing the productive minds of the world to go on “strike” and withdraw to Galt’s Gulch, a capitalist utopian enclave hidden in a secret valley deep in the Colorado mountains. There they will live as free men, exchanging services in what amounts to a hybrid barter/money economy, as they await the collapse of the old order. After a period of intense doubt, during which Dagny feels it is her duty to keep her family’s railroad running despite the best efforts of society at large to destroy it, Dagny and Rearden side with the strikers, and the United States go to pot. Galt replaces Rearden as Dagny’s lover, and Rearden accepts this without jealousy, because in Rand’s world, there cannot be conflicts of interest among rational men.

In true Bolshevik fashion John Galt hijacks the nation's radio system: "Ladies and gentlemen, [... the President] will not speak to you tonight. His time is up. I have taken it over. You were to hear a report on the world crisis. That is what you are going to hear." After answering the question that has been bothering everybody for years ("Who is John Galt? This is John Galt speaking."), Galt launches into a speech that goes on for a full 60 pages in hardcover. (Rand, *Atlas* 1009) He tells America that the country is collapsing because collectivism was allowed to triumph, and that the only way to restore order is to accept pure free market rule. Signing off, he nicely summarizes what has likely been a three-hour speech:

"[To win the future] requires your total dedication and a total break with the world of your past, with the doctrine that man is a sacrificial animal who exists for the pleasure of others. Fight for the value of your person. Fight for the virtue of your pride. Fight for the essence of that which is man: for his sovereign rational mind. Fight with the radiant certainty and the absolute rectitude of knowing that yours is the Morality of Life and that yours is the battle for any achievement, any value, any grandeur, any goodness, any joy that has ever existed on this earth.

"You will win when you are ready to pronounce the oath I have taken at the start of my battle – and for those who wish to know the day of my return, I shall now repeat it to the hearing of the world:

"I swear – by my life and my love of it – that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine." (Rand, *Atlas* 1069)

Having delivered his message, Galt is arrested and taken to a secret location. The country's political leaders keep him captive, hoping that if they can convince him to take

the reins and become “Economic Dictator” of the United States, he will be able to save their crumbling system from complete collapse: “You can’t expect us to ditch the machinery of the State. We’ve got to preserve the system. But we’re willing to amend it. We’ll modify it any way you wish.” (Rand, *Atlas* 1099) Galt, however, is not interested in incrementalist reform, and will do nothing: he wants the government to “get out of the way,” and no matter how many lives it ends up costing the corrupt old order must be allowed to destroy itself before true political transformation can occur. The politicians plead with him, citing the millions of people who are desperate for somebody to lead them out of the nation’s acute economic crisis:

“These are just plain ordinary people, Mr. Galt,” said Chick Morrison in a tone intended to project their abject humility. “They can’t tell you what to do. They wouldn’t know. They’re merely begging you. They may be weak, helpless, blind, ignorant. But you, who are so intelligent and strong, can’t you take pity on them? Can’t you help them?”

“By dropping my intelligence and following their blindness?”

“They may be wrong, but they don’t know any better!”

“But I, who do, should obey them?” (Rand, *Atlas* 1113-1114)

Having failed to persuade Galt with words, the desperate politicians try electrical torture. Galt suffers noiselessly, refusing to yield or even to utter a scream. The scene produces one of the most insightful moments in the novel: the politicians have convinced themselves that torturing Galt is a necessary evil, the only way to convince him to save the country, but the act of inflicting pain on a helpless human being brings out the worst in them, especially in James Taggart:

“Go ahead!” cried Taggart. “What are you waiting for? Can’t you make the current stronger? He hasn’t even screamed yet!”

“What’s the matter with you?” gasped Mouch, catching a glimpse of Taggart’s face while a current was twisting Galt’s body: Taggart was staring at it intently, yet his eyes seemed glazed and dead, but around that inanimate stare the muscles of his face were pulled into an obscene caricature of enjoyment.” (Rand, *Atlas* 1142-1143)

At this point the generator supplying power to the electrodes strapped to Galt’s body breaks down, and the incompetent technician (selected for an ability to follow orders rather than for technical skill) is unable to fix it. Now Galt speaks: he calmly and unhurriedly tells the technician what is wrong and how to fix it, thereby rendering the whole exercise grotesquely absurd and inducing a mental breakdown in Taggart. (1144) Rearden, Francisco D’Anconia, and Ragnar Danneskjöld (an Objectivist pirate) and Dagny (who has finally chose to abandon her railroad and join the strikers) arrive at the base where Galt is being held. They rescue Galt by killing the guard stationed outside his prison cell (his crime: refusing to choose between resisting Dagny with force and stepping aside) and shooting several others. (1148) In the closing pages of the book, the victorious heroes fly over New York City as they head for Galt’s Gulch. With supplies cut off by the collapse of the railroads, the city is on its “deathbed:”

Looking down, they could see the last convulsions: the lights of the cars were darting through the streets, like animals trapped in a maze, frantically seeking an exit, the bridges were jammed with cars, the approaches to the bridges were veins of massed headlights, glittering bottlenecks stopping all motion, and the desperate

screaming of sirens reached faintly to the height of the plane. The news of the continent's severed artery had now engulfed the city, men were deserting their posts, trying, in panic, to abandon New York, seeking escape where all roads were cut off and escape was no longer possible.

The plane was above the peaks of the skyscrapers when suddenly, with the abruptness of a shudder, as if the ground had parted to engulf it, the city disappeared from the face of the earth. It took them a moment to realize that the panic had spread to the power stations – and that the lights of New York had gone out. (1158)

The old, corrupt order has finally collapsed, and the “moochers” are free to tear each other to bits as they scramble for food among the ruins. As Alan Greenspan put it in a 1957 letter to the New York Times in support of *Atlas Shrugged*, “justice is unrelenting. Creative individuals and undeviating purpose and rationality achieve joy and fulfillment. Parasites who persistently avoid both perish as they should.” (Greenspan 283)

Having destroyed the parasites, John Galt and the other strikers rest in their hidden valley and prepare to return to the world. The judge and legal scholar among them rewrites the US Constitution, eliminating the “contradictions in its statements that had once been the cause of its destruction,” and adding a new clause: “Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of production and trade...” (1168) With the road forward now “cleared,” the novel ends with John Galt doing what Objectivists presumably do when they feel the need to cross themselves: “He raised his hand and over the desolate earth he traced in space the sign of the dollar.” (1168)

2 - Ayn Rand's Political and Cultural Legacy

Ayn Rand's influence on the development of the American political Right, and especially on modern American libertarianism, was huge. Jim Powell, a senior fellow at the conservative Cato Institute, calls her, along with Rose Wilder Lane and Isabel Paterson, one of the "three women who inspired the modern libertarian movement." (Powell) In the 1950s and 1960s she picked up a "youthful right-wing following," which by the 1970s and 1980s had turned into a position as a "guiding spirit of libertarianism and of White House economic policy." (xii) Rand's novels, and the philosophy they contained, helped "power an ideological explosion on the right that culminated in an independent libertarian movement." Arguably, it was her influence that ensured that American libertarianism, instead of becoming an anarchic subset of the Left, developed a firm commitment to free market economics – whatever the "social consequences" – and a permanent home on the Right. (Burns 247-248) The founder of the Libertarian Party, David Nolan, was a fan of Rand in college, and one 1979 poll of members of the California Libertarian Party found that 75% of them had read *Atlas Shrugged* – more than had read any other book. (266)

A number of business executives also cite Rand as an influence on their professional lives. Darla Moore, vice president of Rainwater Inc., says she "thrived on Rand's message that only quality work counted, not who you are." (Rubin) James Kilts, who has been a senior executive at Gillette, Nabisco, and Kraft, states that he read *Atlas Shrugged* "at a time in college when everybody was a nihilist, anti-establishment, and a collectivist," and that "Rand believed that there is right and wrong, that excellence should

be your goal.” (ibid) There are even businesses whose names reference Rand’s work: Annemarie Omrod, founder of software company John Galt Solutions, says “the book symbolized the importance of growing yourself and bettering yourself without hindering other people.” (ibid)

Over 30 years after her death, Rand’s popularity and influence on the American political landscape endures, despite the mostly negative view critics have taken of her, both as a novelist and a philosopher. Fifty years after its publication in 1957, her magnum opus, *Atlas Shrugged*, continued to sell 150,000 copies a year (Heller 287); by 2009, there were more than thirteen million copies of her books in print. (Heller xii) With the economic uncertainty following the 2007 financial crisis – and the election of Barack Obama to the Presidency – sales of Rand’s work skyrocketed, with combined sales of her four novels exceeding one million copies in 2009. (Murray 29) With the rise of the populist “Tea Party” movement on the American Right, Rand’s ideas about the dangers of big government and excessive regulation have been discovered by a new generation of readers, who attend rallies protesting President Obama carrying signs with phrases like “Who is John Galt?” and “Atlas is shrugging.” (Cummings) The Republican Party, traditionally wary of Rand’s atheism, has begun to push Rand’s vision, with one Congressman – John Campbell (R-Calif.), referencing *Atlas Shrugged* in a 2009 interview with the *Washington Post*:

“People are starting to feel like we’re living through the scenario that happened in ‘Atlas Shrugged’ [...] The achievers, the people who create all the things that benefit the rest of us, are going on strike. I’m seeing, at a small level, a kind of

protest from the people who create jobs, the people who create wealth, who are pulling back from their ambitions because they see how they'll be punished for them.” (qtd. in Weigel)

Numerous other Republican politicians point to Rand as an influence: Rep. Paul Ryan, a Wisconsin Republican, says that, “the reason I got involved in public service, by and large, if I had to credit one thinker, one person, it would be Ayn Rand,” and requires his staffers to read her books. (Chait) Junior US Senator Ron Johnson, also of Wisconsin, calls *Atlas Shrugged* his “foundational book,” and agrees that “we’re living it [the collapsing planned economy envisioned by Rand].” (Will) Right-wing talk radio host Rush Limbaugh has promoted her work, calling her a “brilliant writer and novelist” on his radio show. (“The Smallest Minority on Earth”) And then, of course, there is Alan Greenspan, an early member of Rand’s Collective and life-long devotee, who wielded enormous influence over the American economy as Chairman of the Federal Reserve between 1987 and 2006. All in all, there is no shortage of Republicans who consider Rand’s work an important guide and inspiration to political action.

In April of 2011 *Atlas Shrugged: Part 1*, a new film based on a novel by Rand – and the first to appear in over sixty years – was released in theaters. The movie opened on April 15th, normally the deadline for submitting income tax returns to the IRS. With the action moved to the contemporary near future (2016) it was marketed to the right-wing grassroots as an allegory on pressing current political issues. The Tea Party-affiliated conservative organization FreedomWorks, based in Washington and founded by former House Majority Leader Dick Armey, a Republican, encouraged its “followers to demand

that the movie be shown in more and more theaters,” offering a “networking page” to help them organize “viewing parties” with like-minded people. (Weeks)

According to an article from Forbes.com, sales of *Atlas Shrugged* exploded in the days leading up to the film’s release, becoming at one point the #4 best-selling book on internet book retailer Amazon.com. (Babej) Sean Hannity, a right-wing pundit on the Fox News Channel, has promoted *Atlas Shrugged: Part 1* as the movie “Hollywood doesn’t want you to see,” drawing on the common view of a left-leaning movie industry.

(Hayden) It was a shoestring production with a budget of only \$10 million, with an inexperienced (though ideologically committed) director, and most of the actors were drawn from television. (ibid) On its opening weekend, the film grossed a “respectable” \$1.7, with distributors in talks to expand to a significantly larger number of screens.

(Knegt)

It is difficult to quantify Rand’s real political influence. Book sales can be misleading, and the fact that politicians quote Rand regularly may have more to do with the fact that her name is widely recognized than with the intrinsic power her ideas exert over the political landscape. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that her work has reached – and continues to reach – a great many people, and that she is an important part of the intellectual arsenal of the modern American conservative movement. As historian Jennifer Burns writes in her biography of Rand, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right*, “reports of Ayn Rand’s death are greatly exaggerated. For many years to come she is likely to remain a fertile touchstone of the American imagination.”

(Burns 286)

CHAPTER III: AYN RAND & THE USSR: BOLSHEVISM, MARXISM AND SOVIET SOCIALIST REALISM

1 - INTRODUCTION

In order to more thoroughly evaluate the critics' claim that there exist strong parallels between the popular fiction of Ayn Rand and the Socialist Realist official literature of Stalin's Soviet Union, it is necessary first to discuss briefly the origins of Socialist Realism as literary school and doctrine. This will be followed by a discussion of the major thematic, structural, and aesthetic characteristics of Socialist Realist fiction, and the extent to which these characteristics find their equivalents in Ayn Rand's fiction. This will make it possible to identify what it is about Rand's novels that provokes such frequent comparison to Socialist Realist fiction, and to determine whether the kinship is really as strong as is claimed.

I intend to show that there are strong parallels between Ayn Rand's fiction and the fiction produced by the Soviet Socialist Realists. While Rand explicitly rejected the Marxist political program, and developed a philosophy that was, in a sense, its polar opposite, she remained true not only to many Soviet ideas about art, but retained many of Marxism and Bolshevism's ideas. Given that Rand spent her formative years in the cultural crucible of immediate post-Revolutionary Russia and studied at a Soviet university, this should not be particularly surprising. As Vladimir Shlapentokh, the esteemed émigré Soviet sociologist, declares in his 2010 review of the Russian translations of Rand's work, it would be "absurd to believe that nine years after the

revolution in Russia was not enough for Alice Rosenbaum to garner enough experiences for the rest of her life. [...] the formation of her ideology took place in Soviet Russia.” (2) As we will see, Shlapentokh’s verdict applies not only to Ayn Rand the ideologue, but also, in interesting ways, to Ayn Rand the novelist, regardless of her followers’ protestations on her behalf. This is not an argument that Rand was influenced directly by mature Socialist Realism. She left Russia in 1926, and there is no evidence that she read Soviet novels after settling in the United States. It is fair to assume, however, that with her middle-class family and quality schooling she was familiar with the 19th-century Russian radical tradition, and probably also with early Socialist Realist classics published before her emigration. In any case, endowed as she was with a set of literary and cultural references common to Russian intellectuals of her generation, it should not be too surprising that her American novels parallel contemporary Soviet literature in many key respects.

2 - THE ORIGINS OF SOCIALIST REALISM

Socialist Realism was the official Soviet literary doctrine. The term was first used on May 17th, 1932, in a speech by Ivan Gronskey, the head of the newly-formed Writers’ Union. (Clark 27) However, it was not until the First Writers’ Union Congress in 1934 that “Socialist Realism acquired a canonical formulation.” (27) The most essential features of Socialist Realism can be gleaned from Andrei Zhdanov’s famous statement in a speech at the 1934 First Writer’s Congress, that Socialist Realism was to strive for “a combination of the most matter-of-fact everyday reality with the most heroic prospects.” (qtd. in Clark 34) In a speech in 1946, Zhdanov, a leading Party official and an important

force in the ideological regimentation of Soviet literature under Stalin, would “reassert this doctrine, [...] making it even more stringent.” (Frank 80) Socialist Realism remained the proscribed literary method in the Soviet Union throughout Stalin’s reign and well into the post-War period, though after the death of Stalin its grip on Soviet literary life weakened. The publication of Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita* in 1966 and the republication of Yuri Olesha’s suppressed works after Stalin’s death are notable examples.

The formative sources of Socialist Realism are Marxism, Bolshevism, and the 19th-century radical intelligentsia tradition, or what Clark calls “the Russian radical intelligentsia’s traditional myths and hero images.” (8) The latter is exemplified by Chernyshevsky’s *What is to Be Done?* From Marxism, the state ideology of the Soviet Union, Socialist Realism draws the broad outlines of its worldview: materialism, atheism, and the necessity and historical inevitability of class struggle to resolve capitalism’s alleged inherent contradictions through proletarian revolution and the overthrow of the bourgeois capitalist order. Bolshevism, however, tempers the Marxist view of history. Marx had viewed revolution as the outcome of large, impersonal sociological forces: something that would come about on its own, when the time was right, regardless of the actions of individual members of society. In this model, the role – or even the necessity – of political action in the service of the coming revolution is left ambiguous. (Clark 17-18)

Lenin, in an attempt to solve the problem of having a proletarian revolution in a Russia that lacked developed capitalism or a true proletariat, emphasized the role of a revolutionary “vanguard,” a select group of highly “conscious” political leaders who will

show the working classes the way to revolution, and this emphasis became crucial to Bolshevism. (Clark 17-18) In orthodox Marxism, the Socialist State is only a temporary stopover, and will eventually wither away. The Soviet State had no such intention. To Clark, this distinction between orthodox Marxism and Bolshevism is essential to understanding the most important function of Socialist Realism: generating myths that legitimize continued Soviet rule, by “rationalizing the Bolshevik position in the perennial radical controversy over the role of consciousness and spontaneity in history.” (19) This mythological function means that in many respects Socialist Realism has more in common with religious art than it does with the liberal Western conception of literature as free and individualistic aesthetic expression: the role of the Socialist Realist artist is, above all, the glorification of Soviet power through the dignified reproduction of official myths.

The underlying justification for Socialist Realism was Marxist: culture reflects consciousness. A bourgeois or aristocratic consciousness can and will produce nothing but bourgeois or aristocratic literature. With the coming of socialism such literature no longer served a purpose, and it was necessary to produce a new, proletarian literature – a literature that reflected the consciousness of the revolutionary proletariat. Vladimir Lenin himself spelled this ambition out in a seminal 1905 article in *Novaya Zhizn*:

In contradiction to the bourgeois customs, to the profit-making, commercialized bourgeois press, to bourgeois literary careerism and individualism, “aristocratic anarchism” and drive for profit, the socialist proletariat must put forward the

principle of *party literature*, must develop this principle and put it into practice as fully and completely as possible. (Lenin 180)

Although Socialist Realism as an official doctrine was not formulated until the early 1930s, earlier Russian novels would come to be included in the Socialist Realist canon and thereby exert influence on the work of later doctrinaire writers. Though these novels were written before the formation of the Writers' Union and the official formulation of Socialist Realist doctrine, "once the tradition of Socialist Realism had been 'created' in the thirties, [...] it could be 'perceived' in the official precursors because the tradition *was* these works." (29) As prime examples of such Socialist Realist "precursors" Clark lists Maxim Gorky's *Mother* (1906), Dmitry Furmanov's *Chapaev* (1923), Fyodor Gladkov's *Cement* (1925), and Alexander Fadeev's *The Route* (1927).

One of the most important voices in the development of the Socialist Realist literary school was Maxim Gorky, the "original master" of Socialist Realist fiction. (28) At the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, Gorky was a veteran Party member, writer, and editor. His most important novel in terms of the future development of Socialist Realism, *Mother*, is about labor strife in pre-Revolutionary Russia and the heroic and sacrificial role played by women revolutionaries. A young proletarian develops class consciousness and becomes a leader in the socialist movement. Having become politically conscious, he is able to raise the consciousness of his illiterate mother, who also joins the struggle. There is a large May Day strike; workers are put on trial, including the young worker. Despite a stirring courtroom speech, he is sentenced to exile. His mother, now a member of the revolutionary movement, decides to illegally publish and distribute her son's

speech to stir the workers to inspire continued resistance, but is caught and beaten to death by gendarmes. Though her death is tragic, the novel is no tragedy: her martyrdom is a step on the way to the future triumph of socialism, having in this sense a grand, historical purpose.

Chapaev is about the exploits of a famous Civil War commander, an uneducated peasant who rose from humble roots to become a fierce and respected military leader. The story is told through the eyes of the young political commissar Klichkov, a stand-in for Furmanov himself, and is about the commissar's attempts to raise the political consciousness of the brave commander. He has some success with this, though in the end Chapaev dies heroically in battle: another worthy sacrifice on the road to socialism.

The Route is another story of heroic Civil War exploits. *Cement* is somewhat different: it is a production novel, and its plot concerns a dedicated young communist who has just returned home from the Civil War. The local cement factory is plagued by organizational problems, including the incompetence and indifference of local bureaucrats who slavishly follow directives, and it is the young hero's duty to overcome these obstacles and act out, in miniature, the post-Civil War reconstruction of the Soviet economy.

In practice, the dominant view came to be that Socialist Realism was to combine romanticism with realism: the novel was to present actual reality, and actual human experience, in faithful, journalistic fashion, but it was not to limit itself to the recording of this reality. On the contrary, Socialist Realist fiction was supposed to present an idealized view of the world and idealized characters with whom the reader was to identify and who

could serve as positive role models and teachers. It was also, in keeping with its function as the art of the proletariat, to be broadly accessible, even to the uneducated working-class reader: “the Socialist Realist novel was intended to be a form of popular literature (or, at most, middlebrow),” with the result that, “like most varieties of popular literature[,] it is formulaic.” (Clark xi) Based on her extensive study of the Socialist Realist novel, Clark has identified several key components of this “formula.” I will present each in turn, and show how most of these elements of Socialist Realism are also present in Rand’s novels. I will draw, further, on the work of Vladimir Shlapentokh, who from his position as a dissident Soviet intellectual identifies additional elements of Socialist Realist fiction that are also present in Rand’s fiction.

3 - THE POSITIVE HERO

One of the most central features of the Socialist Realist novel is the *positive hero*. The Socialist Realist positive hero differs dramatically from the protagonist who populates other kinds of novels, such as those of modernists like Nabokov. He is very explicitly an “emblem of Bolshevik virtue” and a role model for the reader to emulate. In the Socialist Realist novel, the positive hero stands for “what ought to be,” while lesser figures represent “what is.” (Clark 46) The positive hero did not, however, appear with Socialist Realism: his heritage can be traced back to the literature of the 19th century radical intelligentsia novel, especially to Rakhmetov, Chernyshevsky’s noble and cartoonishly ascetic revolutionary hero of *What Is to Be Done?* The Socialist Realist positive hero is de-individualized: more so than his 19th century counterpart, he can “be transplanted wholesale from book to book, regardless of the subject matter.” (47) The

hero has several important personal traits: first and foremost, he must “lead an ascetic life of extraordinary dedication and deprivation.” (49) He is also stern, calm, and serious, with bright eyes, and typically undergoes some sort of martyrdom in the service of the cause. (60-61)

Ayn Rand’s fiction also employs the positive hero. Howard Roark and Dominique Francon of *The Fountainhead*; Dagny Taggart, Henry Rearden, Francisco D’Anconia, and John Galt of *Atlas Shrugged* – these figures are not merely *characters*, they are Rand’s representations of idealized human beings, and their function in the novels is to inspire the reader to emulation. Rand says as much in her introduction to *The Fountainhead*, where she states that “my purpose is the presentation of an ideal man.” (ix) It is no accident that Ayn Rand, in her later non-fictional books and essays, would fall into the habit of “quoting John Galt as an independent authority who proved her points.” (Heller 336)

For the positive hero “there are no inner doubts and hesitations, no unanswerable questions, and no impenetrable secrets.” (Tertz 49) In the face of the enemy he is proud and insolent. In discussing Leonid Leonov’s *Russian Forest* (1953), Tertz (the pseudonym of dissident writer Andrei Sinyavsky) provides an excellent example of this quality. The setting is the Second World War. A young girl, Poly, takes on a dangerous mission for the Russian partisans, requiring her to act the role of Nazi collaborator. While speaking to a German officer, she finds it “morally painful” to speak “the enemy’s language,” and launches into an indignant tirade asserting her moral superiority as a patriot: “Take me to the place where Soviet girls are shot!” It is a foolish act that

endangers both her life and her mission, but a chance passerby is moved and kills the German, saving Polya at the cost of his own life. (qtd. in Tertz 54-55)

This principled arrogance in the face of danger (rooted in a profound ideological *certainty*) is also an essential feature of Rand's positive heroes. In an early scene in *The Fountainhead*, a young Roark is called in for a meeting with his Dean after having been expelled from architecture school. The Dean, who considers Roark highly promising but hot-tempered and insubordinate, offers him a way out: Roark may "take a year off, to rest, to think it over – shall we say to grow up?" and will be given the opportunity to return and finish his studies. Roark will not accept the compromise: "I don't think you understood me. [...] What made you suppose that I want to come back? [...] I have nothing further to learn here." (Rand, *Fountainhead* 10)

Knowing full well that a degree would make it easier to get business as an architect and pursue his calling, Roark arrogantly and defiantly rejects any compromise in the face of evil. It is not the last time he does so: when clients come to him later in the novel, offering good money for work he doesn't believe in, he criticizes their taste and drives them away. As a consequence of this and of his refusal to take work with one of the established firms, Roark is left with no choice but to close his office and become a manual laborer in a granite quarry. Once again, as in *Russian Forest*, this seemingly irrational act of self-sacrifice is what causes him to meet Dominique, the woman he loves, and with his triumph at the end of the novel (as compared to the initially successful sell-out Peter Keating's eventual fall from grace) his principled stand is vindicated at last. For the positive heroes of both Rand and the Socialist Realists, these acts of mad,

principled heroism serve a primarily mythic function, glorifying the revolutionary idealist's ascetic self-deprivation in the service of the Cause.

More explicit acts of revolutionary martyrdom can also be seen in Rand's novels. Henry Cameron, aging modernist architect and mentor to Howard Roark, had his brilliant career destroyed because he refused to bend to the ignorant wishes of the masses when the fashion for neo-Classicism rendered his visionary designs unmarketable. He falls, though by inspiring and mentoring Roark, his intellectual successor, Cameron ensures that his sacrifice was not in vain: the Cause lives on, just as in the Socialist Realist novel and in its 19th-century and early Soviet revolutionary precursors. Likewise, John Galt undergoes excruciating electrical torture at the hands of American federal bureaucrats, but refuses to submit and provide the government with his expertise. The essentially heroic nature of his martyrdom is emphasized by his being strapped naked to a mattress: "The long lines of his body, running from his ankles to the flat hips, to the angle of the waist, to the straight shoulders, looked like a statue of ancient Greece, sharing that statue's meaning, but stylized to a longer, lighter, more active form and a gaunter strength, suggesting more restless an energy – the body, not of a chariot driver, but of a builder of airplanes. [... a] statue of man as a god." (Rand, *Atlas* 1141) Though the Randian positive hero does suffer for the cause, his suffering is a demonstration, not of his weakness, but of the rightness of his cause and the evil and inferiority of its enemies – just as in the Socialist Realist novel.

4 - SPONTANEITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS

In *Chapaev*, Lenin's spontaneity/consciousness dialectic is in the foreground: Chapaev symbolizes spontaneity, the commissar: consciousness. While consciousness was considered an admirable trait and an important element in the proletariat's strength, Socialist Realism treats it with some suspicion: under Bolshevism, the Party's politically conscious intellectual vanguard is of paramount importance, because without consciousness, revolutionary impulses will often fail to express themselves in useful revolutionary work, and may even be dangerous. As Klichkov notes after his first meeting with Chapaev:

Chapayev is a hero[...] He personifies all that is irrepressible and spontaneous, all the wrath and protest that has accumulated within the peasantry. But the devil knows how such spontaneous elements may manifest themselves. We have had cases (can they be called few?) when just such a fine commander has suddenly gone and knocked his commissar on the head! And not some rogue, blabber-mouth or coward, but a fine, brave revolutionary! And it even happened that they went over to the Whites with their 'spontaneous' bands." (Furmanov 83)

The dialectical struggle between spontaneity and consciousness is paramount, because in the Leninist historical model, it is this conflict that determines the course of social history. Social changes lead to more and more advanced syntheses, culminating in the final revolutionary synthesis under Communism. In this synthesis consciousness triumphs, but the synthesis also resolves the dialectic such that the two forces are no longer in opposition. The Socialist Realist hero illustrates this dialectical model of change

by going through a series of personal revolutions, leading him to a higher and higher level of political consciousness. (Clark 16)

This spontaneity/consciousness dialectic is also at work in the work of Ayn Rand, though it expresses itself somewhat differently. In Rand's novels, the conflict between spontaneity and consciousness is less stark. The negative characters are endowed with low consciousness and low spontaneity: in addition to being philosophically and morally bankrupt, they are soft, cowardly, and slovenly, and certainly not given to acts of irrational or childlike heroism. The positive heroes tend to possess both spontaneity and consciousness. They are not, however, equally conscious – at least not to start. For instance, Dominique Francon of *The Fountainhead* and Dagny Taggart and Hank Rearden of *Atlas Shrugged* begin as relatively “unconscious” figures. They are both highly effective managers of their respective businesses, but they are weighed down by guilt and the feeling that they are obliged to subjugate themselves to some extent to the people around them. Dagny puts up with her lazy and myopic brother, the nominal President of the family railroad, and is content to do well in the area she has control over: day-to-day business operations. Likewise, Rearden is stuck with a wife and family who live off of his success, all the while judging him for being greedy and callous and offering him no thanks for the financial support he provides them.

In Rand's terms, the two industrialists are giving the “sanction of the victim.” they are voluntarily giving people permission to take advantage of them because they

have not yet become conscious of their moral right and duty to say no.⁴ In the course of the novel, Dagny and Rearden undergo a transformation, aided by the superior John Galt, that heightens their political consciousness. By the end, they have realized the necessity of overthrowing the system, and are willing to withdraw their talents from the world, let their businesses collapse under the weight of bureaucratic incompetence and government iniquity, and join the strikers in Galt's Gulch. Similar processes occur with other strikers: they are initially reluctant, bound by a sense of duty to keep their businesses running despite the obstacles they face. After repeated conversations with Galt, they realize what must be done and disappear. By continuing to work, these industrialists were perpetuating injustice, because the system was completely dependent on their talents. Only through heightened consciousness is it possible for them to be useful servants of the revolution: a concept that, while somewhat different in emphasis, is quite close to the Socialist Realist use of the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic.

5 - "WHAT IS" AND "WHAT OUGHT TO BE"

Ayn Rand called her philosophy of fiction "romantic realism," a philosophy she laid out in her *Romantic Manifesto*. (1969) It can be boiled down to this: art should be *realistic* in the sense that it should concern itself with things that exist in reality; it should be *romantic* in the sense that it should seek not merely to record reality as it might appear to a casual observer, nor to seek out reality's vile and ugly aspects, but rather to select only its best, most idealized aspects. She saw the novelist as "a combination of prospector and jeweler," who "must discover the potential, the gold mine, of man's soul, must

⁴ For an explanation of Rand's concept of "the sanction of the victim," see John Galt's speech (Rand, *Atlas* 1009-1069; especially 1048)

extract the gold and then fashion as magnificent a crown as his ability and vision permit.” (Rand, *Manifesto* 158-159) As inspiration for her stance, she refers to Aristotle, “who said that fiction is of greater philosophical importance than history, because history represents things only as they are, while fiction represents things ‘as they *might be* and *ought to be.*’” (Rand, *Manifesto* 162) One is reminded of Chernyshevsky’s near-identical statement on the subject: “that creature is beautiful in which we see life as it should be in accordance with our conceptions of it.” (qtd. in Moser 7)

As far as this aspect is concerned, Socialist Realism and Rand’s “Romantic Realism” are practically interchangeable. In fact, when Andrei Sinyavsky explains the romantic character of Socialist Realism in *On Socialist Realism*, it is difficult to shake the suspicion that, were the word “socialist” replaced with the word “romantic,” Rand would have agreed wholeheartedly:

The art of socialist realism [...] represents the world and man as they should be. [...] Socialist realism starts from an ideal image to which it adapts the living reality. Our demand ‘to represent life truthfully in its revolutionary development’ is really nothing but a summons to view truth in the light of the ideal, to give an ideal interpretation of reality, to present what should be as what is. (Tertz 76)

To this juxtaposition it might be objected that Sinyavsky was a dissident who spent several years in the Gulag for his “anti-Soviet activity,” rather than a promulgator or producer of Socialist Realist fiction. Similar statements, however, were made by leading Party officials during the official codification of Socialist Realism, including Andrei Zhdanov (Clark 34) and Anatoly Lunacharsky. The latter – a Bolshevik revolutionary and

the first Soviet People's Commissar of Enlightenment – states in an important 1933 article (“On Socialist Realism”) that “[Bourgeois] romanticism arose from dissatisfaction with life accompanied by no programme for reshaping it and no hope of combating it. Bourgeois romanticism yearns for an unattainable dream. [...] our Soviet art is also dissatisfied with the present, hence its kinship with romanticism. But besides being dissatisfied with reality, it wishes to change it and knows that it can do so.” (Lunacharsky 58)

Lunacharsky makes a clear distinction between “bourgeois” and socialist romanticism: bourgeois romanticism is escapist, in that it offers the reader a respite from reality without offering a workable critique of that reality or offering alternatives. The romanticism of Socialist Realism has, in this sense, an important didactic function: by providing revolutionary positive heroes, with backgrounds recognizable to the ordinary reader, the Socialist Realist novel provides models of ideal behavior and seeks to induce its readers to live more heroic, “Party-minded” lives. This differs somewhat from the above statement by Rand, and in the *Romantic Manifesto* she makes a point of distancing herself somewhat from charges of didacticism: “Let me stress this: my purpose is *not* the philosophical enlightenment of my readers, it is *not* the beneficial influence which my novels may have on people, it is *not* the fact that my novels may help a reader’s intellectual development. All these matters are important, but they are secondary considerations.” (Rand, *Manifesto* 155)

In the context of her morality-tale novels, with their verbose speechifying and pedantic hammering-home of philosophical and political lessons, this statement is

somewhat mystifying, and it is not clear that we need to take her word for it. Indeed, the libertarian academic Stephen Cox, in his analysis of the relationship between Rand's fiction and her own *philosophy* of fiction, is quite blunt about the fact that Rand often "violates her own literary sensibilities [...] she is known as a preacher, [...] and – despite her contentions to the contrary – a narrow propagandist." (Cox 23-24) Her novels are so plainly, openly didactic that her comments on the issue in essay form may, perhaps, be more fruitfully read as an echo of the deep discomfort that the 19th-century Russian intelligentsia critics displayed in trying to fashion a social justification for art. This question had been at the forefront of Russian cultural debate in the 1860s. Though this debate was convoluted and simplification carries the risk of trivializing the various arguments, some sort of summary is called for. One group of critics, the aesthetic camp, felt that art should exist for its own sake, on purely aesthetic grounds. It was argued that subordinating art to revolutionary and didactic purposes would mean the death of art: only awkward and vulgar pamphlets could hope to pass the test. This group included Ivan Turgenev and Aleksei Tolstoy, who in a private letter of 1870 that,

Anything you wish to prove can be successfully proven only when *you abandon the desire to prove something*; ... a work of art as such bears within itself the best demonstration of all those truths which can never be proven by those who sit down at their desks intending to set them forth in an artistic work. (qtd. in Moser 94)

Certain radicals, such as Dobrolyubov, Chernyshevsky, Shelgunov, and Pisarev, believed that didacticism was a central and justified element of literature, with Pisarev rejecting

even Pushkin for the crime of “dull[ing] that social consciousness which a true poet should stimulate and guide through his writings,” (qtd. in Moser 54) and Dobrylubov writing that,

In its essence literature has no active significance: it merely either imagines what it is necessary to do, or else depicts that which is being done or has already been done. In the first instance ... it derives its foundations and materials from pure science; in the second, from the very facts of life. Thus, generally speaking, literature is an ancillary force whose significance lies in propaganda, and whose worth is determined by what it propagandizes, and how. (qtd. in Moser 109)

But the debate was more complicated than this. Among the aesthetic critics, there were two rough groups: “those like Aleksey Tolstoy who held that art might be didactic only if it were not intentionally so, and those who maintained that art should not be didactic under any circumstances.” (Moser 109) There were also radical critics, such as Maksim Antonovich, who were uncomfortable with the implications of their own camp’s arguments and “agreed with the esthetic critics that art should not be openly didactic.” (Moser 109) It is immaterial whether we assign Rand to the company of Aleksey Tolstoy or Maksim Antonovich because the result is much the same: both Rand’s didacticism and her concomitant unwillingness to be labeled didactic have a strong precedent in the Russian debate over aesthetics in the 1860s – a debate that left a lasting impression in the educated Russian consciousness. In this sense, the difference between Rand and the Socialist Realists may lie more in her greater sensitivity to charges of vulgar didacticism than in a substantively different literary approach to reality.

6 - PRODUCERS AND PARASITES

Rand's philosophy of Objectivism divides humankind into two groups: the productive and the unproductive. The division is equivalent to that made by Marxists, only reversed, with (roughly speaking) parasitic workers taking the place of parasitic capitalists. Members of the parasitic group, depending on their methods, are referred to as either "moochers" or "looters." Moochers extract unearned rewards from the productive by emotional means, mainly by appealing to their guilt. They include unproductive, the poor who live off of others' charity, and corporate special interest groups that appeal to government for special treatment and subsidies rather than earning money by productive industry. Looters are those who attempt to seize the product of others' productive labor by force: tax collectors and the governments they represent are the prime examples (especially governments that practice outright expropriation of industry). Rand's novels are replete with examples of both types. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rearden's wife, mother, and brother, along with James Taggart, are prime examples of moochers. Important looters are Dr. Floyd Ferris, a prominent government scientist who designs the torture device used on John Galt, and Mr. Thompson, the "Head of the State," who leads the country to ruin by destroying the free market system.

The contempt for such characters is searing, and often approaches the homicidal. The scene at the end of the novel, in which the triumphant heroes watch from their airplane as New York City, its streets filled with desperate, fleeing people, is plunged into darkness and "disappears," is particularly brutal. To Rand, this disaster is not so much a tragic and unfair consequence of bad policies enacted by well-meaning people: it

is fair retribution for anybody who is complicit in depriving the productive geniuses of their right to make money without paying taxes. It was to this scene, which he likened to a “holocaust” – that Granville Hicks was responding when he wrote that “the book [was] written out of hate,” and that “the destruction [Ignatius] Donnelly and [Jack] London⁵ described – not without relish – was trivial compared with the disaster Miss Rand so cheerfully envisages.” (Hicks 266)

The point is driven home still more grotesquely in an earlier scene. Things have already begun to fall apart, and the US has become an authoritarian planned economy. An express train – the renowned Taggart Comet – is headed for Washington when it gets stuck at a small side station. There is an eight-mile tunnel ahead, and the engineers at the station know that with the coal-fired engine they have on hand, it would be fatal to send the train into the tunnel. It is suggested that the train wait overnight so that a more modern diesel engine can be brought in to continue the journey. However, there is an important government official on board, and he insists that the train cannot be late. Because none of the people in charge of the station want to take responsibility for making a decision either way – knowing that they will be punished whether they delay the train or send it through – the buck gets passed down to a lowly employee, who a cowardly superior tricks into authorizing the train’s fatal steam-powered venture into the tunnel.

Rand could have stopped there. In terms of her philosophy, she has made her point: when people refuse to recognize reality, or evade responsibility for their own decisions, bad things happen. But she is not content with this. She must show that the

⁵ In, respectively, *Caesar’s Column* (1890) and *The Iron Heel* (1908).

people on the train – random travelers who know nothing of what is happening – are complicit in the actions of the moochers and the looters, and that they, in fact, *deserve* to die. The result is exceedingly chilling. The sixteen passengers are listed in turn, along with their philosophical crimes against reason, and the three pages read, more than anything, like excerpts from some inverted Stalinist show trial; her manner of referring to them only by their location on the train, stripped of all personality, is eerily reminiscent of the numbers tattooed on prisoners in Nazi death camps. A handful of examples will suffice to illustrate the coolly methodical cruelty with which Rand would mete out death by asphyxiation to those who refuse to see the Truth:

The man in Bedroom A, Car No. 1, was a professor of sociology who taught that individual ability is of no consequence, that individual effort is futile, that an individual conscience is a useless luxury, that there is no individual mind or character or achievement, that everything is achieved collectively, and that it's masses that count, not men.

[...] The man in Bedroom H, Car No. 5, was a businessman who had acquired his business, an ore mine, with the help of a government loan, under the Equalization of Opportunity Act.

[...] The man in Seat 5, Car No. 7, was a worker who believed that he had “a right” to a job, whether his employer wanted him or not.

[...] The woman in Bedroom D, Car No. 10, was a mother who had put her two children to sleep in the berth above her, carefully tucking them in, protecting them from drafts and jolts; a mother whose husband held a government

job enforcing directives, which she defended by saying, “I don’t care, it’s only the rich that they hurt. After all, I must think of my children.”

The man in Roomette 3, Car No. 11, was a sniveling little neurotic who wrote cheap little plays into which, as a social message, he inserted cowardly little obscenities to the effect that all businessmen were scoundrels.

The woman in Roomette 9, Car No. 12, was a housewife who believed that she had the right to elect politicians, of whom she knew nothing, to control giant industries, of which she had no knowledge. (Rand, *Atlas* 605-606)

As if she has not made her point clear enough already, Rand disposes of these parasites once and for all in the chapter’s final paragraph: “These passengers were awake; there was not a man aboard who did not share one or more of their ideas. As the train went into the tunnel, the flame of Wyatt’s Torch⁶ was the last thing they saw on earth.” (Rand, *Atlas* 607) After reading this passage, one is hard-pressed to disagree with Whittaker Chambers’ assertion that “from every page of *Atlas Shrugged*, a voice can be heard, from painful necessity, commanding: ‘To a gas chamber – go!’” (Chambers 5) It is rather striking that a writer, who wishes such a painful death on people guilty only of holding different opinions, or of the crime of voting in elections, should be so popular with American readers.

What unites the disparate victims of the destruction of New York and the Taggart Comet accident is this: under Rand’s system of values, they are all parasites. Their

⁶ The oilman Ellis Wyatt, before abandoning his business to join the strikers, had set fire to his oil wells, one of which proved impossible for government engineers to extinguish. Known as Wyatt’s Torch, it burns for the rest of the novel, a symbol of the strikers’ defiance, and is visible from many miles away.

income is illegitimately earned, and they live, however indirectly, off the backs of their betters (or they may be ideological defenders of parasitism, which comes down to more or less the same thing). In his review of Rand's work, Vladimir Shlapentokh argues that this homicidal contempt for parasites had its Soviet equivalent, citing a slogan popular under Stalin: "Кто не работает, тот не ест!" ("He who does not work, does not eat!"). Shlapentokh writes that "the main pathos of Rand's major books is an echo of this slogan in the form of the uncompromising condemnation of "unearned income" and parasites of all kind[s]." (Shlapentokh) Rand, like the Bolsheviks, does not recognize income earned in ways she deems illegitimate – the only difference is that to her, it is only income not derived from free-market business, without government support, that is legitimate. As Shlapentokh points out, the contempt for the unproductive that is so evident in Rand's work was a commonplace in Soviet culture: speeches in the 1920s and 1930s were "filled with hatred for [...] parasites evading 'socially useful work.'" He concludes that, if anything, this hatred of the weak is *even more* pronounced in Rand than it was in the work of the Socialist Realists. (ibid)

7 - "FATHERS" AND "SONS"

Clark writes that, in the Socialist Realist novel, "if there was any conflict between the state's interests and the nuclear family, citizens were urged to jettison their sense of family, based on blood ties, and replace it with a higher one, based on political kinship." (Clark 115) This principled rejection of traditional family ties in favor of "the higher order bonds of political community" had been advocated before, by the 19th-century Russian radicals, and under Stalin was merely adapted to the exigencies of a one-Party

state. (115) The conception of Soviet society as one large family entered fiction as well: in the Socialist Realist novel, “Soviet society’s leaders became ‘fathers’ (with Stalin as the patriarch); the national heroes, model ‘sons.’” (114)

This father-son relation was not, however, quite like the relation between biological fathers and sons. The “sons” of Socialist Realism were not the successors of the “fathers” – no matter their heroism, they were not scheduled to replace the Party leadership and become “fathers” themselves. (Clark 119) Given the Socialist Realist novel’s primary aim – the justification of the power of the Soviet state – this should not be surprising. A succession of “fathers” and “sons” would risk giving the (unacceptable) impression that there might come a time when the “fathers” – Stalin and other high Soviet officials – would need to step aside to ensure future growth and prosperity.

In Rand’s fiction, the 19th-century Russian radical view of family bonds as subordinate to the higher kinship afforded by ideological affinity is very clearly present. In *The Fountainhead*, it is made clear that Roark has no meaningful family – where he came from and who his parents were simply does not matter. The closest thing Roark gets to a “family” in the novel is the “fatherhood” of his mentor Henry Cameron, and a collection of “brothers” in the form of the small circle of clients who share his creative (ideological) vision and commission his buildings. The relationship between Roark and Cameron is not quite like the “father”-“son” relationship in Socialist Realism, because Roark *is* Cameron’s successor. Cameron’s health fails after decades of struggle, and he is forced to retire and leave the field of battle. Roark continues the struggle, and it is Roark who is victorious.

In terms of father-son relationships, and more broadly in terms of family, *Atlas Shrugged* is very different from *The Fountainhead*. Where Roark had no family, both Henry Rearden and Dagny Taggart in *Atlas Shrugged* have biological relatives. Both ultimately sever these relationships in order to join the greater family of the striking Atlases, illustrating Rand's closeness to the 19th-century Russian radical literary tradition. What is perhaps more striking is that one of the key features of the Socialist Realist father-son relationship, the timeless sense that the "sons" are not going to replace the "father," is present in *Atlas Shrugged*. John Galt, Rand's portrait of the ideal human being, is so far above the other positive heroes – in terms of consciousness, ability, and revolutionary commitment – that he is the unquestioned leader of the strikers, even those significantly older than he. There is no question of his being a dictator – the strikers have all voluntarily come to his side, and their utopia is predicated on individual liberty – but he nonetheless serves as a form of revolutionary "father," a figure capable of raising the political consciousness of the initially reluctant "sons" and leading them onto the right path: the strike of the mind.

8 - HOW THE WEST WAS TEMPERED

In the Socialist Realist novel, one of the most important "myths" on which the positive hero is patterned is that of the *bogatyr*, the "mythical knight of the Russian oral epic or *bylina*."⁷ (Clark 73) The Socialist Realist positive hero, because he is modeled on this *bogatyr* figure of Russian oral tradition, is "all 'struggle,' 'vigilance,' heroic achievement, energy, and another cluster of characteristics rather like the 'true grit' of the

⁷ A traditional form of Russian "folk epic." (Clark 48)

American frontier: ‘stickability,’ [...] ‘hard as flint,’ [...] and ‘will.’ (ibid) “*Bogatyr*” had been used by the tsarist military as “a standard term of commendation for military distinction,” and as a result its “fantastic” connotations had been weakened. (ibid) The term was picked up by Bolshevik writers, who “recaptured some of its old aura,” and became a mainstay of Socialist Realist fiction in the 1920s and 1930 (ibid)

In addition to his strength, the *bogatyr*’ of Socialist Realism “was not merely a man who performed amazing feats; he was also defiant and high-spirited [...] these modern *bogatyri* were, like their antecedents, essentially rebels.” (Clark 138-139) Clark quotes a short late-1930s passage about the famous aviation hero Chkalov:

... limited and malicious people tried to force him into the dead-end of old norms [for flying], of limits to the possible, regulations, etc.; nevertheless, he – true Soviet man that he was! – shattered all these impediments with one *bogatyr*’-like thrust from the shoulder. (qtd. in Clark 139)

The Soviet Socialist Realist novel relies on particularly Russian myths about heroes, drawing largely on folklore. Due to the early Soviet period’s “concern for establishing lines of continuity reaching back into past,” the heroes that populate its fiction were “not totally new creations,” but rather “harked back to the great epic heroes – some real, like Pugachev or the Civil War heroes, others purely legendary, from Russia’s past.” (Clark 138)

In the Randian novel something similar is at work. Most notably in *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand draws repeatedly on two important and distinctly American myths, both of which stem from the late 19th century: first, the myth of the “cowboy” of the Old

West; second, what can perhaps best be described as the myth of Horatio Alger. The latter is the most important of the two. Horatio Alger Jr. was a late-19th century writer who wrote formulaic novels of rags-to-riches-success, in which young men with no money or education achieved the American Dream through hard work, determination, and honorable behavior. This myth had its real-life inspirations: Cornelius Vanderbilt, Andrew Carnegie, and John D. Rockefeller, arguably the three most powerful men in America in the late 19th century, were all born poor and built massive business empires by sheer ability, cunning, and ruthlessness. Dagny Taggart's grandfather, Nathaniel Taggart, the founder of Taggart Transcontinental, embodies this mythic figure, and seems to have been patterned most closely on Cornelius Vanderbilt, a major railroad owner:

Nathaniel Taggart had been a penniless adventurer who had come from somewhere in New England and built a railroad across a continent, in the days of the first steel mills. His railroad still stood; his battle to build it had dissolved into a legend, because people preferred not to understand it or to believe it possible. [...] He was a man who had never accepted the creed that others had the right to stop him. (Rand, *Atlas* 59)

Nathaniel Taggart is not a character in *Atlas Shrugged*, so it might be objected that this marks a serious difference from the Socialist Realist novel, where positive heroes active in the narrative exhibit *bogatyr*'-like characteristics.

Nathaniel Taggart is, however, very important in the book despite his being long-dead. His biography is provided early in the novel, with an emphasis on the moral rules by which he lived. It is no accident that they are precisely the rules that the story's

heroes, once they have attained full consciousness, will adopt. In addition to the obvious Objectivist traits, such as the fact that Nathaniel Taggart received no government loans or handouts, promised his investors a return on their investment rather than speaking vaguely about the “public good,” and built a highly successful business where before there had been nothing, a particularly saucy legend about is him related. This legend, and its moral implications for his granddaughter Dagny, will come to foreshadow events later in the novel:

Many stories were whispered about him. It was said that in the wilderness of the Middle West, he murdered a state legislator who attempted to revoke a charter granted to him, to revoke it when his rail was laid halfway across the state; some legislators had planned to make a fortune on Taggart stock – by selling it short. Nat Taggart was indicted for the murder, but the charge could never be proved. He had no trouble with legislators from then on. (Rand, *Atlas* 60)

Though Nathaniel Taggart is dead, he is nonetheless present in Dagny’s life: there is a large statue of him in Taggart Transcontinental’s main New York terminal, a statue to which Dagny often turns when she needs inspiration and emotional support: “Dominating the concourse, but ignored by the travelers as a habitual sight, stood a statue of Nathaniel Taggart,⁸ the founder of the railroad. Dagny was the only one who remained aware of it and had never been able to take it for granted. To look at that statue whenever she crossed the concourse, was the only form of prayer she knew.” (Rand, *Atlas* 59)

⁸ Just such a statue of Cornelius Vanderbilt stands outside the real Grand Central Terminal in New York City.

When Dagny, after Galt's speech and capture by the authorities, finally decides to abandon Taggart Transcontinental, join the strikers, and assist in Galt's rescue, she draws strength from the memory of her grandfather. Arriving at her office for the last time to collect some documents, she surveys her belongings: "there was nothing else that she wanted to take from her office – except the picture of Nathaniel Taggart and the map of Taggart Transcontinental." (Rand, *Atlas* 1137) On her way out of the terminal, she passes the statue:

[...] she glanced at the statue of Nathaniel Taggart – and remembered a promise she had made. It would be only a symbol now, she thought, but it would be the kind of farewell that Nathaniel Taggart deserved. She had no other writing instrument, so she took the lipstick from her bag and, smiling up at the marble face of the man who would have understood, she drew a large sign of the dollar on the pedestal under his feet." (Rand, *Atlas* 1139)

That such intimate moments with the statue bookend the novel is significant. The statue and myth of Nathaniel Taggart function as a sort of father-figure for Dagny. When, only a few pages after the last encounter, Dagny coldly and calmly executes a government guard during Galt's rescue, she is acting, finally, like her grandfather, who had had no qualms about killing a corrupt state official who threatened his property. The statue and associated legend, then, play two roles: on the one hand, they are important, spiritually, in Dagny's personal path toward heightened political consciousness. On the other, they help de-historicize the novel's central conflict, with the rhetorical effect that the reader comes

to identify Rand's positive heroes with the people and events that formed modern industrial America.

The other, related American myth is that of the "cowboy" of the old West. This is not, of course, the actual historical cowboy, who was a poorly-paid combination of shepherd and security guard. Rather, it is the "cowboy" of comics, dime romance novels, and classic Western films: the rugged, self-reliant horseman, the man who speaks little, drinks much, and shoots faster than anybody, the lawman who wears a tin star and fights evil on civilization's dusty outskirts. In *Atlas Shrugged*, such a figure makes his appearance as a kind of avenging angel, riding in from nowhere, guns blazing, when one of the positive heroes – Hank Rearden – is threatened.

The scene is Henry Rearden's steel mill, just over midway through the novel. The government has organized an armed band of thugs to attack and seize the mill, but Rearden is alerted to the plot by a lesser government official, the "Wet Nurse" – a young man whose views on private business have changed dramatically after sustained personal interaction with Rearden (he is killed in the process of alerting Rearden). The mill's employees organize to defend it, and there is a fierce gun battle on the factory grounds. In the midst of the confusion, Rearden notices a stranger:

"On the roof of a structure above the gate, he saw, as he came closer, the slim silhouette of a man who held a gun in each hand and, from behind the protection of a chimney, kept firing at intervals into the mob, firing swiftly and, it seemed, in two directions at once, like a sentinel protecting the approaches to the gate. The confident skill of his movements, his manner of firing, with no time wasted to

take aim, but with the kind of casual abruptness that never misses a target, made him look like a hero of Western legend – and Rearden watched him with detached, impersonal pleasure, as if the battle of the mills were not his any longer, but he could still enjoy the sight of the competence and certainty with which men of that distant age had once combated evil.” (Rand, *Atlas* 995-996)

This mysterious figure later saves Rearden’s life after he is beaten unconscious by government thugs. After the battle, Rearden is told that he was saved by one of his own employees, a young furnace foreman named Frank Adams. This turns out to be none other than Francisco D’Anconia, Dagny’s childhood friend, former lover, and one of the strikers. Even as his identity is revealed, the romantic image of the old West is maintained: “The man standing on the threshold, with disheveled hair, a soot-streaked face and furnace-smudged arms, dressed in scorched overalls and bloodstained shirt, standing as if he wore a cape waving behind him in the wind, was Francisco D’Anconia.” (Rand, *Atlas*, 998) Francisco has been undercover at the mill as Rearden’s bodyguard, and now it is time to go. That night, after a long talk with Francisco (thankfully omitted in the book) Rearden finally disappears.

As with the Horatio Alger myth, the appearance of the “cowboy” figure in *Atlas Shrugged* has great symbolic significance in that it ties the economic and political issues of Rand’s contemporary America back to myths about the country’s founding: myths of self-reliance, strength, and merciless justice whose continued resonance requires no further proof than America’s ceaseless fascination with the old West. In short, this use of American mythical imagery in *Atlas Shrugged* serves a similar function to the use of the

bogatyr' in the Soviet Socialist Realist novel: the glorification of the cause of Revolution by comparison to the struggles of mythic figures familiar to the popular reader.

9 - EARNESTNESS

The Socialist Realist novel was in important respects an anti-modernist art form. They generally have omniscient, infallible narrators; narrators whom the reader is expected to take at their word. They do not, in the way modernist novels do, explore the creative possibilities offered by linguistic play and experimentation with the distinction between author and narrator: "what sets the Soviet novel apart from most other serious modern novels is the absence in it of those features that can be seen as exploration or celebration of the objective/subjective split: parody, irony, literary self-consciousness, and creative or complex use of point of view." (Clark 39)

Because the Socialist Realist novel is an exercise in myth-building and in the glorification of heroic revolutionary exploits, such literary experimentation would be disrespectful and would sabotage the larger project. The seriousness of purpose of Socialist Realism produced, inevitably, a suffocating seriousness of tone: this explains the preachiness, hyperbole, banality, and kitsch that so typify the typical Socialist Realist novel. As Sinyavsky writes, "laughter ceased to be indecent and disrespectful; it acquired a Purpose. [...] It is laughter with a serious face and with a pointing finger: 'This is not the way to do things!' It is a laughter free from the acidity of irony. [...] Irony was replaced by pathos, the emotional element of the positive hero." (Tertz 76)

This same seriousness of purpose, this same insistence on exaltation, and opposition to literary experimentation and even irony, typify Rand's novels as well. To the extent that there is humor in Rand, it is precisely as Sinyavsky observes: *laughter with a serious face and with a pointing finger*. The villains are occasionally mocked for their incompetence or physical unattractiveness, but even this is rare. The positive heroes, however, are completely exempt from humorous treatment: it is all accolades, either somber or high-spirited. This follows naturally from Rand's philosophy of fiction, as presented in *The Romantic Manifesto*, where she writes: "Humor is not an unconditional virtue; its moral character depends on its object. To laugh at the contemptible, is a virtue; to laugh at the good, is a hideous vice. Too often, humor is used as the camouflage of moral cowardice." (Rand, *Manifesto* 126) To Rand, humor is merely an excuse not to take a moral position, and moral courage requires a reverent posture. Once again, Rand's fiction strongly parallels the aesthetics of the Socialist Realists.

CONCLUSION

Throughout her career Ayn Rand would remain an essentially Russian thinker, in the mold of 19th-century Russian intelligentsia writers like Nikolai Chernyshevsky, Nikolai Dobrolyubov, and Dmitry Pisarev. Though she adamantly refused to acknowledge any intellectual debts – with an exception for Aristotle – her writing draws on a whole range of conscious and unconscious influences. Like her literary precursors she viewed art, especially literature, as a medium for expressing philosophical and political ideas. And like many of the radicals, she was a romantic, holding that art should present idealized (heroic) characters worth emulating and an idealized reality worth fighting for. Where Chernyshevsky had written that “that creature is beautiful in which we see life as it should be in accordance with our conceptions of it,” (qtd. in Moser 7) Rand could write that “fiction represents [things] ‘as they *might be* and *ought to be*.’” (*Romantic Manifesto* 162) Indeed, the kinship between Rand – the “radical for capitalism” – and Chernyshevsky is so strong that British critic Anthony Daniels has called her “the Chernyshevsky of individualism.” (9)

Ayn Rand’s fiction is similar not only to that of Chernyshevsky. Because it traces its development to many of the same formative texts, it also has much in common with the Socialist Realist fiction that developed in the Soviet Union and became formalized under Stalin. As Daniels points out, Rand’s theory of literature is “virtually indistinguishable” from that promoted by leading Soviet literary theorists like Andrei Zhdanov, with the curious result that her larger-than-life heroes, though they may be heroic capitalists rather than heroic proletarians, are “not American but Soviet.” (Daniels)

As I have shown in this paper, many of the main aesthetic elements of the formulaic Socialist Realist novel can also be found in Rand's work. These include the "positive hero," modeled closely on common precursors in 19th-century Russian radical fiction; the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic, a Bolshevik idea that Rand would have been exposed to in her studies at the University of Petrograd (Shlapentokh); the myth of "fathers" and "sons," a Bolshevik development of 19th-century ideas about ideological kinship superseding blood ties; a vehement hatred of social "parasites" that was standard in Soviet culture (*ibid*); a resort to mythical figures like the Russian *bogatyr*'; and a theory of fiction based on combining "what *is*" and "what *ought to be*" in order to present an idealized literary vision of reality. These are tropes that Rand would have picked up both from her reading of the 19th-century canon, and from her certain exposure to those major works of Socialist Realism published before her emigration in 1926.

Ayn Rand's natural position in this particular Russian, rather than American, literary tradition seems strange. Why is Rand's fictional work so similar to the work of 20th-century Soviet Communists when her ideology, with its rejection of "altruism" and the "social good" in favor of the freedom and glory of the productive individual, is so opposed to theirs? The answer seems to be that what Rand inherited was not so much a set of explicit ideas as an *intellectual style*: that of the radical intelligentsia. This style is what marks her, despite her beliefs and subject matter, as a Russian, rather than American, novelist.

Why, then, was she able to attain such fame and influence in the United States? One would think that a conservative audience, already highly opposed to left-

wing ideas, would be the first to detect the non-too-subtle similarities between Rand's novels and the standard Socialist Realist novel. In order to answer this question, it may be fruitful to ask the opposite: why didn't Rand's work achieve enormous success as *samizdat* in the Soviet Union? Vladimir Shlapentokh, a Russian intellectual who was a dissident in the 1960s and 1970s, reflecting on why he was never exposed to Rand's work in Russia (despite the obvious appeal of her anti-Communist ideas), comes up with the following answer:

The greatest lovers of philosophic chatter in Soviet books pale in comparison to Galt. The behavior of the characters in works of socialist realism and Rand are completely devoid of any convincing psychological study. Edification of them does not disappear with any page. It is possible that those Americans who supplied us with books banned in Russia during the Cold war understood that the literary quality of Rand's novels is very low. Soviet intellectuals, who hated socialist realism and propaganda pseudo-literature, would simply be unable to read novels full of philosophical and usually trivial maxims." (Shlapentokh)

If one turns this on its head, one can't help but wonder if the reason Rand was able to reach such a large America audience, without readers noticing her Bolshevik and 19th-century Russian radical aesthetic baggage, may simply been that to the American reader, unacquainted with these Russian traditions, these tropes would have been unfamiliar, their source (in the 19th-century Russian tradition) and parallel (in Socialist Realism) unrecognizable.

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