Centenary Symposium, Part I
Ayn Rand: Literary and Cultural Impact

Ayn Rand's Influence on American Popular Fiction

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Ann Whitehead, the narrator and protagonist of Helen Knode's first novel, *The Ticket Out* (2003), lives in the pool house behind a venerable 1920s Los Feliz District mansion in Los Angeles, a mansion that is now owned by a consortium of investors who let it sit empty, waiting for occasions when they can rent it out "for parties and film shoots" (4). As part of her rental agreement, Ann has agreed to sleep over in an upstairs bedroom of the main house on evenings when it is rented out, keeping an eye on the party downstairs for as long as it lasts, then quickly going through the house the next morning, looking for any signs of damage. Once she's done that, she's free to go back "home" to the pool house. On the opening Friday evening of the novel, Ann attends a party at the main house, then retires upstairs for the night. The following morning, she does her walk-through, finds no damage, and returns to her pool house nursing thoughts of a hot shower and a change of clothes. That's when she finds the dead, naked woman in her bathtub.

Ann is a journalist, the film critic for the weekly *L.A. Millennium*. The party the night before had been a film industry party. And Ann knows enough about the dead woman in her bathtub to know that she was once an up-and-coming talent fresh out of the USC film school and headed for a brilliant career as a writer or director. What brought her instead to an untimely death in Ann's bathtub? Ann jumps at the chance to investigate the case; this, she thinks, will be her ticket out of film criticism, of which she's tired, perhaps terminally, and into investigative reporting, where she'd much rather be.

Complicating her plans is the sudden appearance on the scene of

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controversial homicide detective Doug Lockwood, whose conduct in a recent siege and shootout in a Burger King restaurant has left him a target for media critics of "over zealous" policing, including Ann's boss at the *Millennium*, who wants her to write an expose on Lockwood before she "wastes" any more time trying to look into the killing of the star who never was. Ann attempts to work on both stories at once, following the leads in the murder case where they lead her—deep into forgotten corners of Hollywood history, replete with secret skeletons in secret closets—while closely observing her unwilling investigative partner, Lockwood, who thinks she should pony up whatever she may know about the murder victim and then butt out of the investigation.

"He hadn't talked at the press conferences I saw," Ann recalls, "and he'd looked to me like the intellectual version of an unrepentant thug. I wanted to believe it, but seeing him in person, I couldn't tell if that were true. He was smart—but there was no clue about the personality or character behind the brains. He held himself straight, the lines of his face were austere, and he had a stern, self-contained manner" (34).

He also has a healthy disrespect for reporters. "People who commit crimes lie," he tells Ann at one point. "I'm used to lying—I'm not only used to it, I expect it." But there are liars and liars, Lockwood tells her.

> "In my experience, it's a rare criminal who isn't aware of his own lies. You see the pathological cases, sure, the guys who've lost touch with reality. But people usually know they're lying when they lie to me. They know what the truth is, they're just choosing to hide it. But they can be trapped with evidence. That's why we have courts and trials—to present evidence to neutral arbitration and prosecute the guilty." (174)

"But the media is a different breed of liar," Lockwood continues.

> "Criminals have fallen from truth, whereas the media doesn't

> seem to give a damn about it. The truth has no power with them unless other considerations make the truth convenient to tell. They run with the herd and call it 'reporting the facts' —even when the herd changes its mind the next day.
>
> "I'm accused of many things by the people I arrest, but I don't dignify them with an answer. If I did, it would give them credibility they don't have. The media would love for me to defend myself because it would give them credibility. It would mean I acknowledged their charges as something that should be dealt with. But I don't acknowledge it." (174–75)

Ineluctably, the reader begins to recall another exchange, from another novel, published many, many long years ago, in which another journalist approached another controversial character, austere, stern, and self-contained. "Mr. Roark, we're alone here," the journalist says. "Why don't you tell me what you think of me? In any words you wish. No one will hear us." Roark replies, "But I don't think of you" (Rand [1943] 2002, 401).

Nor, as it happens, is this comparison between Helen Knode's Doug Lockwood and Ayn Rand's Howard Roark at all far fetched. For, as Knode told an interviewer from the online magazine *Salon* in April 2003

> Ayn Rand wrote an essay called "The Romantic Manifesto." It's the most influential essay, for me, on aesthetics. She makes a difference between naturalism and the romantic. She defines the romantic as the recognition that human beings have a will and they have the capacity to make their own happiness. She contrasts that to naturalism, which has basically triumphed in our cultural world, in which everything is formless, you can't know anything, you can't make your own destiny, you are just prey to all these forces that you can't control. There is no such thing as human will. (O'Dair 2003)

"I'm not a pessimist," Knode told *Salon*. "So I don't believe everything is darkness and shit and then you die." Accordingly, "I have embraced my nature as a romantic" (O'Dair 2003). And in doing so, she has exemplified once again what has long been evident to any serious student of popular culture in this country, namely the surprisingly widespread influence of Ayn Rand on American popular fiction.

That what Knode is writing is popular fiction would seem to go without saying. As Rand (1969, 96) herself notes, "Detective, adventure, science-fiction novels and Westerns belong, for the most part, to the category of popular fiction." Leslie Fiedler (1982, 79) offers a similar list in his *What Was Literature?*—"adventure stories, spy thrillers, mysteries, westerns, hard-core pornography and science fiction." On the other hand, Fiedler also describes Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel, *Gone with the Wind*, as "a chief glory" of American popular fiction (212). "*GWTW*," he writes, "(after a while just its initials were enough to identify it) . . . became the most popular work of the age, rivaled by nothing in the bookstores" (202), and "the most widely circulated and best loved of all American fictions, not merely in the United States but throughout the world" (197).

This is relevant in the present context because of the curious similarity between *GWTW* and Ayn Rand's first novel, *We the Living*, which was published at almost exactly the same time. Mitchell began writing *GWTW* "in the early twenties" and "finished it under the shadow of the great collapse of 1929" (201). It appears that she "had little thought of publication at first, and for six years after it was substantially finished the novel lay unread. But in 1935 Mitchell was persuaded to submit her manuscript for publication" (Margaret Mitchell 2004). In May of the following year—1936—*GWTW* was published. Rand, meanwhile, had been laboring on *We the Living*. Barbara Branden (1986, 96, 112) reports that she began writing it in 1930 and completed her manuscript in 1933. Though she immediately began submitting it for publication, she was unable to sell the novel until 1935. It was published in March of the following year—1936—two months before *GWTW*.

Both books are historical novels. Moreover, both books are

historical novels of the same type. Some historical novels, best typified in the present period by the works of Gore Vidal and William Safire, though they are called "novels" in fact contain few if any fictional characters and few if any fictional events. All their dialogue is carefully drawn from the letters and journals of the historical figures who speak it (and from the reports of writers who knew them at first hand). These "novels" are exhaustively researched and painstakingly accurate *depictions* of *actual* events. Such books deserve, perhaps, to be regarded as works of history. Another sort of historical novel—the more common sort—is a tale of the invented events that make up the lives of invented characters set against an historical backdrop: the U.S. Civil War in Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, the Russian Revolution in Rand's *We the Living*, the French Revolution in Charles Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*. The historical backdrop in such novels can be well or badly, accurately or inaccurately rendered, of course, but a backdrop is a backdrop. The focus of such novels is not on history but on a made-up story.

And the made-up story that is *We the Living* bears a startling resemblance to the made-up story that is *Gone with the Wind*—particularly since, in light of the publishing history of the two books, we know that neither author can have been influenced by the other. Rand (1969, 64) herself summarized *GWTW* as "[t]he romantic conflict of a woman who loves a man representing the old order, and is loved by another man, representing the new." And this is also an excellent brief summary of the central situation in *We the Living*, in which the heroine, Kira Argounova, loves Leo Kovalensky, an aristocrat whose life is endangered by the Bolshevik triumph in the Russian Revolution, and is loved by Andrei Taganov, an idealistic, principled exemplar of the new Communist order. It seems natural to wonder whether the almost simultaneous publication of these two books wasn't an important factor in killing any chance Rand's first novel might have had at healthy sales; might it not have been perceived by readers as too much like the much better publicized *GWTW*? Might not many of them have looked at Rand's novel and said, in effect, "Been there, done that"?

However such questions might be resolved, it is surely notewor-

thy that Rand's first novel was of so close a type with what may well be, as Fiedler insists, the paradigmatic work of American popular fiction. It is similarly noteworthy that her hit Broadway play, *The Night of January 16th*, which ended its run shortly before the publication of *We the Living*, was a murder mystery; that her second novel, *Anthem* (1938), was a work of science fiction; and that her magnum opus, *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), combined elements of both the mystery story and the science fiction story. As for *The Fountainhead* (1943), the novel that made her famous, it is instructive to remember that the readers of popular fiction have many (and often mixed) motives. They seek entertainment, yes; but they also seek easy, superficial knowledge—of the life of some famous person (think of Harold Robbins's book *The Carpetbaggers* [1961], with its thinly fictionalized life of Howard Hughes) or of some currently much-discussed trade or profession or place or period (think of Arthur Hailey's *Hotel* [1965] and *Airport* [1968], or, more recently, the lawyer novels of John Grisham).

Nor is this a recent development in American popular fiction. Jack Woodford, whose bestselling how-to-write manual, *Trial and Error*, was in all the bookstores at around the same time Rand and Mitchell were finishing up their first novels, gave this advice to his Depression-era readers, each of them eager to become a successful writer of commercial fiction: "When you have the chance, ask plumbers how joints are wiped; get them to show you. When new soles are put on your winter-before-last shoes, don't sit around reading the Police Gazette, while you sit shoeless waiting for a hurry-up job on your only pair of shoes. Watch the shoemaker" (Woodford 1933, 202). According to Woodford, careful observation of this kind (and follow-up research) so that when you depict a business or trade in your novel you get the details exactly right "is the second biggest secret of the commercial fiction racketeer" (203). Whether Rand ever read Woodford is unknown, but it is known that she took a temporary job in an architect's office and studied the life stories of Frank Lloyd Wright, William Randolph Hearst, Henry Luce, and Joseph Pulitzer to prepare for the writing of *The Fountainhead*, and that she made a careful study of the steel and railroad industries to prepare for

the writing of *Atlas Shrugged*, reading "a small library of books," including "a technical manual for furnace foremen," conducting "a series of interviews of railroad and steel executives," and driving "between both coasts to visit steel plants and railroad yards" (Branden 1986, 143–44, 140, 218). In effect, in writing her novels, Rand carefully observed many of the defining conventions of American popular fiction. And it is therefore unsurprising that the fiction writers on whom she has exercised the greatest influence, like Helen Knode, are writers of popular fiction.[1]

The Rise of Popular Fiction

To say this, however, is to assume a definition for a term that has yet to be really defined—"popular fiction." What *is* "popular fiction," and how is it different from "serious" or "literary" fiction? Where did this distinction originate? And why?

The distinction between "serious" fiction (or "quality" fiction, or "literary" fiction) and "popular" fiction dates to late eighteenth century England, when it first became possible in Europe to write for a living without having a patron. Printing with moveable type had been perfected by Johannes Gutenberg in Germany three hundred years before, and thereafter it had been possible to print and distribute literature of all kinds more rapidly and more cheaply than ever before. But this breathtaking new technology did not transform Western civilization overnight. At first, too few Europeans were literate.

It is generally agreed that, by sometime in the ninth century, the population of Europe was almost wholly illiterate. Even most priests, the local representatives of the only institution making any systematic effort in those years to preserve ancient writings, were illiterate. Early in the eleventh century, monks of the Benedictine order in England began to reverse this trend, by establishing the first Catholic schools. But even after four hundred years of Catholic schooling, the skills of reading and writing were still not widespread among European populations. Literacy had advanced to the point, by the fifteenth century, that Johannes Gutenberg and his partners could find a ready

market and considerable profit when they published the Bible for which they are still best known. Even so, as the Renaissance dawned, there were relatively few readers in Europe. Aristocrats, apart from those few who patronized poets and dabbled themselves in the literary arts, tended to scorn reading and writing as among the dubious practices of clerics and shopkeepers. The lower classes, which in those days comprised eighty percent or more of the population, could see no advantage in literacy. What did knowing how to read and write have to do with the sorts of work they had to do dawn to dusk to support their meager lives?

This left the clerics and shopkeepers (and various other businessmen and professionals and clerks and all their families) who made up the middle class. It is among these people that the first true market for literature arose. At first their numbers were too small to matter in economic terms, but gradually, as relatively free markets began to spread throughout Europe, and especially in England, their numbers grew—and grew rapidly. And with their numbers grew the popularity of books. In the early years of the fifteenth century, the largest library in Europe contained only nine hundred volumes, and there were no more than a few thousand books on the continent. By the year 1500, at the turn of the sixteenth century, only fifty years after Gutenberg invented his method of printing, there were more than *nine million* books in Europe.

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries encouraged individuals to read their own Bibles for themselves, without consulting a priest, and this, of course, led to reading all sorts of other things, just as the Church had always warned it would. The middle class, meanwhile, continued to grow. And literacy and publishing grew by leaps and bounds—just as the computer industry and the Internet are growing today. Gutenberg's method of printing was a revolutionary technology, and it swept through European society, making large changes as it went.

Still, it took three hundred years before, toward the end of the eighteenth century, readers with enough money and enough time to read had become numerous enough that writers could live by selling to them. At this point, most of the readers were still middle class,

and most of the rest were still upper class, but the lower class was catching up fast. By the time Mary Shelley published *Frankenstein* in 1818, the distinction between "serious" and "popular" fiction had already come into existence. There were newspapers, magazines, and books published for, targeted at, the lower classes.

Fiedler notes that it was at this same time that the novel, the book-length fictional story, first burst upon the scene, establishing itself as it were overnight as an important literary genre, thus creating a problem for the rapidly growing and very status-conscious middle class. According to Fiedler,

> the emergent bourgeoisie . . . remained for a long time unaware that insofar as they controlled the machines which reproduced works of literary art, they controlled that art too. Nor did they suspect that the marketplace, which was also in their hands, would come to determine which of those works would persist and be remembered. They were blinded by obsolescent mythologies, which envisaged "poetry" as the creation of a lonely genius and his Muse, rather than the product of industrial society and its technology. They thought therefore of literary "survival"—or as they still insisted on calling it, "immortality"—as the result of critical consensus rather than the workings of the marketplace. Consequently, they appointed "experts" to prepare themselves by the study of the classics and to tell them (to "brief" them, we would say these days) whether novels were okay in general, and if so, which were more okay than others. (1982, 55)

The new "experts" complied. Their initial judgment was to dismiss "*all* novels as vulgar entertainments for the half-literate, chiefly women and girls." Gradually, though, they warmed to the genre, so that after a few years they only "insisted on dismissing most of them as 'trash,' books to be read quickly and thrown away—as opposed to a very few considered worthy of being analyzed and preserved in libraries" (76).

"Obviously," Fiedler acknowledges, the middle class

> did not always take the good advice they sought. Often, in fact, they continued to read what their critical mentors had taught them to regard as "trash"—defiantly in the case of sentimental trash, shamefacedly and secretly in the case of pornographic trash, even if they did snatch such work from the hands of their children, especially their daughters, when they caught them reading it. In the light of this, it is clear that the function of modern critics was from the start rather like that performed by the writers of etiquette books, dictionaries and grammars: they responded to the cultural insecurity of the eighteenth-century middle classes by providing "rules" or "standards" or guides to "good behavior." The new rich wanted to know which fork to pick up; how to spell things right; when, if at all, it was proper to say "ain't"; and also what books to buy for display in their libraries or on their coffee tables. (55–56)

Nearly a hundred years later, in the last years of the nineteenth century, something seemingly unrelated happened. "[C]ertain 'modernist' writers, beginning with Flaubert in France and Henry James in England and America . . . attempted to produce novels intended not for the marketplace of their own time but for the libraries and, as they did not yet suspect, the classrooms of the future" (64). And so, in time, two groups of writers arose. One wrote for themselves, for "art," for those who could appreciate their work. These writers took it for granted that their readers were educated, and, further, that they were willing to work at the reading of a novel, that they were willing to pause and think and re-read. The other group of writers wrote for money and sought to reach the widest, not the most discerning, readership.[2]

Long-term reputations are earned by both types of writers, both those (like James and Flaubert) who rely on "critical consensus" and those (like Dickens and Mark Twain) who rely on "the marketplace." Some win a large and continuing readership; others win over teachers

and critics. A few do both. During their lifetimes, the "popular writers"—those who frankly write for money—make a lot more money; the "serious writers" enjoy more prestige.

But are these writers actually writing different sorts of books, or are they merely writing books that appeal to different readerships? Recall Fiedler's report that the distinction between "serious" and "popular" fiction began not as a literary but as a *class* distinction: it was deemed necessary to the future of Western Civilization that young ladies be protected from reading the same novels enjoyed by the rabble, the mob, the ruffian in the street. Heed Tyler Cowen (1998, 56), in *In Praise of Commercial Culture*, when he writes that "[t]he split of 'high' literature and 'low,' or popular, literature occurred only when the growth of the market supported high levels of diversity." Is the distinction under discussion, then, more a distinction between types of readers than between types of books? C. S. Lewis argued as much in 1961 in *An Experiment in Criticism*. Among readers of books, he wrote, there is a majority and a minority. And

> the majority never read anything twice. The sure mark of an unliterary man is that he considers 'I've read it already' to be a conclusive argument against reading a work. . . . Those who read great works, on the other hand, will read the same work ten, twenty or thirty times during the course of their life.
>
> Secondly, the majority, though they are sometimes frequent readers, do not set much store by reading. They turn to it as a last resource. They abandon it with alacrity as soon as any alternative pastime comes up. . . . But literary people are always looking for leisure and silence in which to read and do so with their whole attention. . . .
>
> Thirdly, the first reading of some literary work is often, to the literary, an experience so momentous that only experiences of love, religion, or bereavement can furnish a standard of comparison. Their whole consciousness is changed.

> They have become what they were not before. But there is no sign of anything like this among the other sort of readers. When they have finished the story or the novel, nothing much, or nothing at all, seems to have happened to them.
>
> Finally, and as a natural result of their different behavior in reading, what they have read is constantly and prominently present to the mind of the few, but not to that of the many. The former mouth over their favorite lines and stanzas in solitude. Scenes and characters from books provide them with a sort of iconography by which they interpret or sum up their own experience. They talk to one another about books, often and at length. The latter seldom think or talk of their reading. (Lewis 1961, 2–3)

Nor (despite that "finally") is this the entirety of Lewis's distinction between readers and readers. Unliterary readers, he continues, "never, uncompelled, read anything that is not narrative. I do not mean that they all read fiction. The most unliterary reader of all sticks to 'the news'" (28). Moreover, readers of this type "have no ears. They read exclusively by eye. The most horrible cacophonies and the most perfect specimens of rhythm and vocalic melody are to them exactly equal." Worse still, such readers "in every other way . . . are either quite unconscious of style, or even prefer books which we [literary readers] should think badly written" (29). In addition, unliterary readers "enjoy narratives in which the verbal element is reduced to the minimum—'strip' stories told in pictures, or films with the least possible dialogue." They also "demand swift-moving narrative. Something must always be 'happening.' Their favorite terms of condemnation are 'slow,' 'long-winded,' and the like."

"It is not hard," Lewis comments,

> to see the common source of these characteristics. As the unmusical listener wants only the Tune, so the unliterary reader wants only the Event. The one ignores nearly all the

> sounds the orchestra is actually making; he wants to hum the tune. The other ignores nearly all that the words before him are doing; he wants to know what happened next. (30)

Over time, publishers and booksellers have devised strategies to attract the attention and the patronage of these majority readers. Among other things, they have divided the world of fiction into "genres." The science fiction writer Norman Spinrad commented astutely on this aspect of the story in 1974 in his "Introduction" to the splendid anthology *Modern Science Fiction*. "'Science fiction,'" he wrote, "is a publisher's marketing category like 'westerns' or 'Gothics' or 'nurse novels'—a packaging definition."

> When you walk through a supermarket, you can tell the breakfast cereals from the detergents at a glance, even though they come in boxes of roughly the same size and shape. This near-subliminal recognition is accomplished by consistency of packaging style. Otherwise, you might inadvertently pour yourself a bowlful of Bold and throw a cup of Kellogg's Corn Flakes into the washing machine. Thus it is with racks of paperback books on the newsstands, all roughly the same size and shape. People who regularly read westerns don't want to pick up science fiction by mistake, so the publishers package science fiction with space ships, peeled eyeballs, and tentacled goo, and they package westerns with horses, sagebrush, and blazing six-shooters. (2)

This, inevitably, leads to certain anomalies. For example, "at the point of sale, a serious novel by Philip K. Dick looks just like the latest adventure of Brak the Barbarian, and a collection of the outstanding short stories of Theodore Sturgeon looks like *Giant Green Slime from Outer Space*" (2). As a result, "[s]cience fiction writers have complained that serious literary critics automatically ignore their work, no matter what its merits, and sometimes have spun elaborate theories about the snobbishness of the 'literary establishment.'"

> But after all, how *can* a serious critic sort through the year's mountain-high pile of tacky-looking science fiction paperbacks to find a few real jewels buried in this heap of literary mediocrity? He knows what a potentially important book looks like as an artifact, as a physical package, because publishers have consistently packaged most of these books in an identifiable style. He may even realize that one soap box out of twenty contains breakfast cereal, but is he going to chomp through nineteen boxes of soap to find it? Certainly not. He's going to open a box labeled breakfast cereal. (3)

The matter is further complicated by the changes that take place over time in public taste in literature. As Michelle Kamhi (2003) notes,

> popular art, like so-called high art, is primarily concerned with the objectification of the creators' values and life view. It shares essentially the same creative focus, but tends to be more accessible . . . . The lines between "popular" and "high" art, therefore, are far less sharp than those between "entertainment" and "popular art." Since the issue of accessibility is partly culturally determined, however, "high"-"low" status may shift from one period or place to another. (481 n. 41)

Thus it is that when I say, "the fiction writers on whom Ayn Rand has exercised the greatest influence are writers of popular fiction," what I really mean is: "the fiction writers on whom Ayn Rand has exercised the greatest influence are writers whose works have been packaged for sale as popular fiction, whatever the actual characteristics of those works might have been." Some of these writers have written novels that repay re-reading, novels that repay the reader who reads them with his or her "whole attention," novels that are well written, novels in which the words are doing all sorts of things and all of it is well worth the reader's attention, novels that can change the lives of those willing to read them attentively. Yet these

novels have been marketed by their publishers as popular fiction or even genre fiction.

Kay Nolte Smith, Antediluvian

What are these novels? Who are these writers? The writers have come in three waves—or, as I prefer to think of them, in three generations. The Antediluvians began publishing during Rand's lifetime, mostly in the '60s, '70s, and early '80s. The First Generation began publishing in the 1980s, after her death. The Second Generation began publishing in the first years of the new century. Publishing during Rand's lifetime, as the Antediluvians did, was not an easy thing, particularly for those writers who knew Rand personally. Kay Nolte Smith, who wrote for *The Objectivist* under Rand's editorship in the late '60s and early '70s, told an audience at David Kelley's Institute for Objectivist Studies (IOS, now The Objectivist Center) in June 1990 that

> when I decided to seriously try to write novels—this was about twelve years ago—I found that I was seriously blocked, and finally I realized why. In my subconscious was lodged the idea that I must write Romantic fiction with a capital R, which would project moral values and feature a plot with a capital P, and a rational hero. If I didn't do so, ran the insidious subtext, I would be less than a rational artist at best, and at worst, an irrational one. My soul would be found wanting. Fortunately, I was able to sweep those notions out of my subconscious, and the moment I approached writing simply by saying, "What kind of story would interest me? What kind of people would be fun to create?"—from that moment, I was able to begin a novel, which turned out to be *The Watcher*.

"About twelve years" before 1990 was 1978, when Rand was still very much alive. She would still put together two more books—a revised and expanded edition of her *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* and

Philosophy: Who Needs It—and make one of her most famous television appearances, an hour-long interview with Phil Donahue, before her death in 1982. And, as Smith made clear to her IOS audience in June of 1990, that very fact presented problems.

> Did I feel, in effect, free to write novels while I was still associated with her? . . . to tell you truthfully, it's a very mixed bag. She was very encouraging in many ways. In other ways, she was absolutely terrifying—to write for, I mean. When I wrote for her for *The Objectivist*, it was a wonderful experience in many ways. I learned a great deal from her. She was a very good editor, but she had a very strong hand, a very strong, strong guiding hand. And although it isn't that I would disavow anything I ever wrote in *The Objectivist*, because those were in fact my views, no question about it, I know that on my own, I would not have used language as strong as we were encouraged to use in writing for *The Objectivist*. That's not my style. I don't like to be confrontational particularly, but she was a great crusader, as you know. That was her whole style, to go out and fight the world. Could I have written novels while I was associated with her? I actually doubt it, but I can't prove it. I just would feel that it would become an endless series of being edited and advised, and so on and so on, and I felt a great deal freer outside of her aegis, although again I want to be fair and say that she taught me a great deal, and in many ways, she was encouraging.

It is little wonder, then, that Smith found herself able to write her first novel, *The Watcher* (1980), only after ending her personal and professional relationship with Rand late in the 1970s. Her mentor was still alive and at least marginally productive, but was no longer close at hand to initiate "an endless series of being edited and advised."

The Watcher is, at base, a murder mystery. Its publisher, Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, recognized this and packaged it accordingly,

providing it with approving blurbs on its back cover from established crime and mystery writers (Brian Garfield, Robert Bloch, Dorothea Bennett) and entering it in the next year's Edgar Awards of the Mystery Writers of America. It won, in the category of Best First Novel. *The Watcher* is also clearly influenced by Ayn Rand. As Greg Swann (n.d.) notes, more than a few readers have found that Martin Granger, the social scientist whose sudden death sets *The Watcher*'s plot in motion, "too closely parallels Ellsworth Toohey in *The Fountainhead*; in fact, he comes even closer to Walter Breckenridge in Rand's play *Think Twice*." And, as Ronald Merrill (n.d.) notes, the novel's "basic plot device, a heroine who allows herself to be tried for murder to save the man she loves, is borrowed from *Penthouse Legend*." It seems relevant to note also that only a few years before writing *The Watcher*, Smith had co-produced and starred in an off-Broadway revival of *Penthouse Legend*, Rand's best known play, originally produced as *The Night of January 16th*. Merrill argues that *The Watcher*'s "key themes—the evil of envy, the decisive role of self-esteem, the alienation of the good from a corrupt society—mirror those that underly [sic] Rand's fiction." But in fact, these are sub-themes in Smith's novel. As Swann (n.d.) recognizes, the main theme of *The Watcher* is something broader. "The question it asks is: what are the consequences of renunciation of one's life's work? . . . The book is about people who turn their backs on their whole lives, then learn why doing so was a mistake."

Two years after *The Watcher*, in the year of Rand's death, came Smith's followup novel, *Catching Fire*. Another murder story with more than one mystery embedded in it, this tale tells of "Maeve Jerrold, a brilliant playwright who, like Dominique Francon, has given up on the world. The book's hero is her protégé Erik Dante, the slum boy who becomes a successful actor and theatre entrepreneur. He tries to draw her into the fight for her own values, and in the end succeeds in a way he did not expect" (Merrill n.d.). Using his older lover's (Jerrold's) money, Dante opens Poets and Paupers, an off-Broadway theatre in which only plays of artistic merit are produced, whether they were written recently or not. Mob-infiltrated theatrical unions attempt to shut Dante down if he refuses to give in to their

demands. Dante defies them, and enlists in his cause not only Jerrold, but also the crusading TV journalist Jac Sanda. Thus, "[i]n the foreground we have strong arguments about artistic freedom, unions, organized crime and the tragedy of illiteracy. But behind all that is the actual story, a love triangle" (Swann n.d.). For in the process of forming his alliance with Sanda and carrying out the public relations campaign he has in mind, Dante finds he is falling in love with her. Thus, the love triangle around which the novel is built

> almost perfectly duplicates the affair Rand had with Nathaniel Branden (as reported in *The Passion of Ayn Rand*, by Barbara Branden). The passionate artist must choose between his desire for the young intellectual activist and his feeling of duty to the old intellectual passivist. As with any triangle, the story resolves when the hypotenuse embraces one strut, leaving the other to collapse. In *Catching Fire*, it is the passive Maeve Jerrold who dies in a futile defense of her values, and one can read this as a defense both of Branden's competence in the realm of action and of his successful resolution of the conflict between his spirit and Rand's. In the second way, we can look at it as a metaphor for the experience of all of the Objectivists who were cast loose by the formal movement over the years, the ones who succeeded, like the fictional Erik Dante, at separating their own desires from those of Ayn Rand. And following the first line, we can see the story in an even larger context: the activist Libertarian movement versus the passivist Objectivist movement. (Swann n.d.)

In the end, "it is journalist Jac Sanda who is the story's heroine. The author's real sympathies clearly lie with this rough-and-tumble working woman, not the pallid and passive Maeve" (Merrill n.d.).

And thereby hangs a tale. Smith's first two novels were both murder mysteries, one of the most venerable of "popular" genres. Moreover, as Swann notes, "in every one of Smith's [first] five novels, the female protagonist is unmarried, between the ages of 25 and 40,

and, with the exception of Jac Sanda in *Catching Fire*, childless." And "the real-life counterparts of Smith's heroines, unmarried females from 25 to 40, are the best buyers of mid-list hardback books."

Attentiveness to such matters is, of course, widely taken as characteristic of popular novelists and other practitioners of popular fiction, particularly those who ply their trade in Hollywood. And according to Swann, Smith's third novel, *Mindspell* (1983), "was *certainly* written as a prostitution to demographics." This novel, according to Merrill, "moves from the orbit of Rand toward that of Nathaniel Branden."

> Cayla Hayward, CEO of a biotech company, finds her confidence in her own sanity shaken when an apparent reincarnation of one of her ancestors—who was burned as a witch—appears in a simple farm woman. In searching for a rational explanation, she turns to Stefan Veere, a cognitive psychologist and debunker of psychics.
>
> Smith ingeniously integrates biotechnology, mysticism, and even Freudian psychology into her theme of self-acceptance. While the importance of rationality is critical to the story, this book is fundamentally psychological instead of moral in its focus. The emphasis is on the childhood development of the characters and how it influenced their personalities, more than on the ethical choices they make. (Merrill n.d.)

Swann, however, is not so easily persuaded. "Though it is undeniably Smith's work, in the philosophy and in the small touches," he writes,

> it borrows so heavily from the Gothic Horror genre that it becomes a genre work. I can picture the editorial conference that resulted in this book: "Kay, you see, it's not up to me, it's really not. *The Watcher* won the Edgar award and all, but it didn't sell so well . . . And, well, *Catching Fire* is a fine novel, you'll never hear me say otherwise. But—it just didn't

> seem to find an audience. . . . This is your third book we're talking about, and, well . . . They told me upstairs; if this one doesn't sell, I have to drop you.

If anything like this editorial conference ever took place, however, it appears not to have achieved its intended goal, for Smith's original publisher, Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, *did* drop her after *Catching Fire* failed to "find an audience." If she in fact wrote *Mindspell* to please an editor eager to force her work into the procrustean bed of a genre any narrower than "mystery" (the one she had been working all along), the editor in question must not have liked it. For the novel was brought out, not by Coward, McCann, but by William Morrow and Company.[3]

Mindspell, alas, was no more "popular" in the sense of enjoying brisk sales than were Smith's first two novels, and it was (therefore?) her only one for Morrow. By 1985, when her fourth novel appeared, it appeared under the imprint of Villard Books, a division of Random House (publisher of *Atlas Shrugged* and several other works by Rand herself). "It is arguable," Merrill (n.d.) writes, "that *Elegy for a Soprano* (1985) is Smith's finest book." It is also, as Merrill notes, another mystery story, touched off by "the murder of a genius, opera singer Vardis Wolf." This mystery, however, is unique among Smith's novels, because it "best illustrates Smith's . . . connection to Ayn Rand." *Elegy for a Soprano*, Merrill maintains, "gave Smith the opportunity to probe her relationship with her mentor in fiction, just as Barbara Branden did in non-fiction a year later."

> Not that the novel is a *roman a clef*. Though the personality of Vardis Wolf shares much with Rand's, and several incidents from Rand's life are replicated in the plot, Smith is aiming at deeper issues. There are certain great individuals who contribute something unique and irreplaceable to us. What do we owe them? And how much should we tolerate from them? In studying the character of Vardis Wolf—and of her murderer, who is, it turns out, another sort of genius —we learn a new perspective on this question, and perhaps

on how we should view Ayn Rand as a person.

Swann (n.d.) concurs. *Elegy for a Soprano*, he writes, "was published less than a year before Barbara Branden's biography of Rand, and the two can be read as complementary subtexts, each a footnote to the other. The action (of both books) concerns a tyrannical genius and her coterie of sycophants." As for "the soprano of the title, Vardis Wolf," she "is clearly a symbol for Ayn Rand—despite Smith's public denials." Swann also agrees with Merrill in his estimate of the novel's artistic excellence. "Ostensibly a murder mystery," he writes, "*Elegy* is actually about loyalties and the burdens of choice. Although, as with *The Watcher*, it bears too close a resemblance to *Think Twice*, the novel distinguishes itself with brilliant inventiveness and masterful writing."

In 1987 Smith published *Country of the Heart*, again with Villard Books. This novel about "a Soviet composer and his failure to defect when he had the chance" is more open to criticism, in Swann's view. "For the most part," he contends, "the writing is workmanlike and uninspired, and the novel borrows heavily from the espionage genre. On the surface, it seems to be nothing more than Ludlumesque spy-porn." Merrill (n.d.), on the other hand, sees more. In his eyes, *Country of the Heart* is an "experiment with the fusion of psychological and moral themes. . . . On a moral level, the theme is the value of freedom, and, more deeply, of truth and openness." As Hedy Lucas struggles "to understand why her father didn't defect from the Soviet Union when she and her mother did" (Swann n.d.), she "must confront these issues [freedom, truth, and openness] not only in her father's life, but in her own family and sexual relationships" (Merrill n.d.).

In the seven years of her novelistic career up to that time, Smith had published five novels. She had not let more than two years go by without bringing out another one. Now she stepped back from her breakneck production and paused for breath. By the time she had caught it, and was ready to bring out her sixth novel, it was four years later. That novel, *A Tale of the Wind: A Novel of Nineteenth-Century France* (1991), marks a dramatic change in Smith's overall approach to

fiction. She abandons the world of the murder mystery and the international espionage thriller for the world of the historical novel; she abandons the tight, complex plotting of her '80s fiction for what Merrill calls a "sprawling" and "rather plotless narrative." Rand herself was, of course, a fanatical devotee of plot as the sine qua non of book- length fiction. "Once," Nathaniel Branden wrote in 1962, "after having delivered an address to members of the publishing profession, Ayn Rand was asked: 'What are the three most important elements in a novel?' She answered: 'Plot—plot—and plot.' The most beautifully written novel that lacks a plot, she has remarked, is like a superbly outfitted automobile that lacks a motor" ("The Literary Method of Ayn Rand," in Branden and Branden 1962, 105–6). And by "plot," it must be remembered, Rand did not mean anything so simple as whatever series of events makes up a story. No. To Rand (1969, 59–60), a plot was a particular sort of series of events. It was "a purposeful progression of logically connected events leading to the resolution of a climax," a "logical structure of events, a sequence in which every major event is connected with, determined by and proceeds from the preceding events of the story—a sequence in which nothing is irrelevant, arbitrary or accidental, so that the logic of the events leads inevitably to a final resolution."

Smith had reservations about this kind of plot. Asked about it during her 1990 appearance at the Institute for Objectivist Studies conference, she commented that

> I think characterization and story are of equal importance, literarily and even metaphysically, for if you ask which comes first, action or an entity, surely the answer has to be an entity. If man's nature must be expressed through his actions, it's equally true that action is meaningless unless it is the product of or the expression of someone, or at least some thing, human.

In her first five novels, Smith had shown how well she could put together purposeful progressions of logically connected events—as well as anyone then writing fiction in English. In her sixth, she dared

to let character come first and let it lead her where it would, even if that resulted in a sprawling, plotless narrative. The result is, as Merrill (n.d.) rightly calls it, "the climax of Kay Nolte Smith's art." An actor, a dwarf, decides one evening to rescue "a rag-picker's daughter from a life of poverty and prostitution." And thereby hangs a tale. And what a tale! Almost twice the length of any tale she had ever told before, and at least as improbable. Yet brought off with such style, such felicity, such imaginative sweep, such sheer artistic bravado, that —what reader could not lend it his willing suspension of disbelief (and much, much more)? *A Tale of the Wind* is a tour de force, an impassioned fictional discourse on "the value of art and liberty, and the . . . tension between convention and creativity. The efflorescence of Romanticism and other schools of art against the constraints of classical formality . . . reflected in the struggles of the characters to live creative lives despite the protocols of social class and French bourgeois morality."

A Tale of the Wind was not a moneymaker, alas. And it was Smith's last novel to be published by Villard Books. Her final work, *Venetian Song: A Love Story of Sixteenth-Century Venice* (1994), was, like Rand's own *Anthem*, unable to find an American publisher at all. Like *Anthem*, it was first published in England—except that *Anthem* first saw print when its author was in the prime of her life and on the verge of her first great triumph (the publication of *The Fountainhead*), while *Venetian Song* first saw print a few months after its author's death at 61 in September 1993. *Venetian Song* was not well received even by Smith's partisans. Merrill (n.d.) denounces it outright as "no more than a supermarket-rack historical romance"—which is only to say, as we have seen, "no more than a novel marketed by its publishers to readers who often choose their reading matter off of supermarket racks," which tells us nothing at all about the novel itself.

The story is that of Susanna Bardi, "a noblewoman of Sixteenth-Century Venice, . . . a beautiful woman with a scarred face" who is "running away from her repulsive husband"; she "hides as a masked actor in a travelling troupe—thus, like other Smith characters, concealing her flaw in public view on the stage" (Merrill n.d.). I myself consider *Venetian Song* a creditable and at times quite moving

attempt to reconcile the early writer of mysteries and thrillers with the later writer of character-driven historical romances. It contains the sort of tightly, intricately plotted narrative that characterized Smith's earlier novels, combined with a generous dash of the pageantry of *A Tale of the Wind*.

Throughout her career as a novelist, Smith showed unmistakable signs of having been influenced by Rand. But the signs were of several different kinds, since there are a number of ways (perhaps an infinite number of ways) in which the influence of one writer can manifest itself in the works of another writer. In certain of her novels, Smith creates central situations that strikingly resemble central situations in earlier works by Rand. As Swann (n.d.) has noted, she made particularly frequent use of the central situation in Rand's play *Think Twice*, which went unpublished during Rand's lifetime, but finally saw print after her death in *The Early Ayn Rand* (1984), edited by Leonard Peikoff. This might be called Surface Influence, in which a younger writer borrows story ideas, characters, even specific incidents directly from the works of his or her mentor, recasting them only somewhat in the process, so that their source remains recognizable. There is also what might be called Deep Influence, in which not the surface details of the story but rather the philosophical ideas dramatized by the story have clearly been influenced by a younger writer's mentor. This sort of Deep Influence is found throughout Smith's fiction, of course, for she remained to the day of her death in substantial agreement with the essentials of Rand's philosophy.

A third sort of influence might be called Stylistic Influence, in which a younger writer's prose style, or his style of drawing characters, or her style of storytelling, is clearly derived from the works of his or her mentor. Swann (n.d.) notes, for example, that in both Rand's and Smith's novels, "change occurs in secondary and even off-stage characters, so it is easy . . . to hide genuine dramatic problems behind stirring action" (think of Cherryl Taggart in *Atlas Shrugged*). Smith long favored the mystery form, as did Rand, both in her writing (*The Night of January 16th*, *Think Twice*, *Atlas Shrugged)* and in her personal reading. In these respects, Smith's novels may be said to show Rand's Stylistic Influence.

Other Antediluvians: Smith, Levin, and Roddenberry

One or more of these types of influence is also to be spotted in the works (or, sometimes, in the biographies) of the other Antediluvians as well. In the case of the prolific science fiction writer L. Neil Smith, whose first novel, *The Probability Broach*, was first published late in 1979, three years before Rand's death, the influence is primarily of the Deep kind. Several of Smith's novels are set in an alternate universe in which Rand becomes the President of the Confederate States of America (which had come out on the winning, rather than the losing, side in the U.S. Civil War). On his website, Smith describes himself as having discovered Rand's novels "in 1961, when he read *Anthem*, *The Fountainhead*, and *Atlas Shrugged*." By the time he had reached the final page of Rand's magnum opus, he writes, he "knew he had found the worldview that would guide him the rest of his life." More than forty years later he still sees things that way. "Ayn Rand established the formal framework for my personal philosophy," he told me in an email in January 2004. It should come as no surprise, then, to find evidence of Rand's Deep Influence in L. Neil Smith's fiction. It's not so easy to find any evidence of Rand's Surface Influence or Stylistic Influence in Smith's novels, however, because when it comes to the more practical aspects of his art—how to go about telling a story, what kind of story to tell—Smith really follows a different mentor. "Robert Heinlein had a greater influence on me in many ways," he acknowledged in that January 2004 email.

Another Rand-inspired science fiction novel that saw its first publication during Rand's lifetime was Ira Levin's *This Perfect Day* (1970). Levin's first novel, the brilliantly original (and now classic) crime story *A Kiss Before Dying* (1953), must have come to Rand's attention at some point, for she wrote of it in 1969, calling it "an excellent first novel." But she continued, in regard to his even more popular second novel:

> *Rosemary's Baby* . . . goes beyond the physical trappings of the Middle Ages, straight to that era's spirit, and presents (seriously) a story about witchcraft in a modern setting; and,

> since the original version of the Virgin Birth, involving God, would probably be regarded as "camp" by today's intellectual establishment, this story revolves around the obscenity of a Virgin Birth authored by the Devil. (1969, 110)

One guesses that after such a monstrous act of irrationality and range-of-the-moment whim worship on Levin's part, Rand would not have bothered to read his third novel, *This Perfect Day*, at all. I suspect if she had read it, though, she would have been pleased with it. And she could hardly have failed to notice its indebtedness to her ideas. For it is primarily the Deep Influence of Ayn Rand that is noticeable in *This Perfect Day*.

As Ralph Raico (2000) writes, "*This Perfect Day* belongs to the genre of 'dystopian' or anti-utopian novels, like Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*." As for the specifics of Levin's tale,

> The action begins in the year 141 of the Unification, the establishment of global government, which finally led to consolidating all the world's super-computers into one colossal apparatus lodged deep below the Swiss Alps. Uni-Comp classifies and tracks all the "Members" (of the human Family), decides on their work, residence, and consumption goods, whether they will marry and if so whether they will reproduce, and everything else.

There is no warfare in the world of the Family; there is also no poverty. Nor is there any originality or creativity. Nor is there any passion. As Raico notes,

> Uni subjects every Member to monthly "treatments." The injections include vaccines, contraceptives, tranquilizers as prescribed, and a medication that reduces aggressiveness and limits the sex drive to a lackadaisical once-a-week encounter. All of this is mediated by super-caring Psychotherapists ["advisers"], who constantly monitor the Members' mental

health.

Like the architects of "Newspeak" in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*, Uni has tampered with the English language as we readers know it. "Fuck" is a word in daily use in polite society (and thanks to the Members' monthly treatments, *all* society in the world of the Family is *very* polite), but "fight" and "hate" are unutterable obscenities. As Raico puts it, in the world of the Family, "only a very sick Member would utter such a shocker as, 'Fight you, brother-hater!'" "Brother" and "Sister" are preferred modes of address, and everyone is taught from infancy that everyone is his brother's keeper. If anyone sees a Member exhibiting signs of dissent, which is to say, signs of "sickness," he or she should regard it as an obligation to turn the sick Member in to the authorities, which is to say, to "help" him.

Into this nightmare, a young boy is born. His full name—his "nameber"—is Li RM35M4419 (all boys in the Family are named Jesus, Karl, Bob, or Li after Christ, Marx, Wood, and Wei, the four philosophers whose thought underpins this society), but his eccentric grandfather, something of a throwback to the "Pre-Uni" days, calls him Chip, and the nickname sticks. Chip grows up in the Family but not fully of it. As a young adult, he becomes very "sick," joins up with other sick Members to engage in clandestine, forbidden activities, and, ultimately, escapes the Family to an island in the Mediterranean (renamed the Sea of Eternal Peace) where other escaped "incurables" are suspected of living. Once there, he plots the destruction of Uni and the liberation of the Family, and returns with a carefully selected crew of companions to foment revolution.

It is hard to believe that Rand would not respond to this tale of the individual against the totalitarian state, particularly when, late in the novel, Chip confronts one of the masterminds behind the design of the society he has grown up in, demanding to know "whether human perfection might not include a degree of selfishness" (Levin 1970, 294). Given her outlook on modern art, she would probably also respond favorably to Levin's depiction of Chip's friendship with Karl WL35S7497, whom he meets in college. Karl has a passion for drawing, but Uni has assigned him a career as a geneticist. So he

sketches in his spare time. But he sketches so much that Uni begins to deny his requests—his "claims"—for sketching pads and charcoal, and he prevails upon Chip to acquire these things for him. Chip greatly admires one of Karl's drawings, which depicts a "rearing stallion, so alive and wild" that it "surprised Chip with its vitality and power." Karl himself is a little surprised at Chip's enthusiasm for the picture; he tells Chip: "It's not accurate." And when Chip looks more attentively at the real horses to which he has access, he sees that Karl is right. "But," he tells Karl, "it's—it's somehow *better* than accurate" (54, 47).

Later, after Chip has escaped the Family, he runs into Karl again. "Ashi," as Karl now calls himself, is now pursuing a career in art. But he no longer produces pictures of rearing stallions, much less of human figures "taller than normal, beautiful and strangely dignified" (52). He still does representational work, but he does it strictly for money and frankly calls it "awful" (221). His "own work," which he does "three days a week," is quite different. His own work includes one canvas that features "slabs of brown and red on a white background," which Chip finds to be "only a flat design, interesting to look at for a moment but with nothing in it connected to life" (224). He thinks the same of Ashi's other paintings—"slabs of blue and green . . . slabs of brown and orange, blue and purple, purple and black, orange and red" (225). He gets drunk and bursts out at his old friend: "Ashi, you used to draw members without bracelets, and they were so beautiful! And now you're painting *color*, slabs of *color*!" (226).

There can be little doubt that Levin either came by attitudes like this from his association with Rand in the 1960s, or at least had such attitudes dramatically reinforced by his interactions with her. Just how well Levin knew Rand, and how much contact he had with her, is a matter of dispute. Barbara Branden (1986, 310) writes that

> It was during these years, from the publication of *Atlas Shrugged* throughout the sixties, that an influx of new people, drawn to Ayn by her novel and by NBI [the Nathaniel Branden Institute]—people who predominantly were accomplished adults rather than youngsters beginning their

> careers—began to enter the circle of Ayn's friends. Among them were television producer Ted Yates, writers Ira Levin and Al Ramrus, economists Murray Rothbard and Martin Anderson, historian Robert Hessen, artists Daniel Green and Jose Capuletti, businessman Wilfred Schwartz, psychologists Lee and Joyce Shulman and Roger Callahan, journalist Edith Efron, neurophysiologist Robert Efron, actress Kay Nolte Smith, and actor and drama coach Phillip Smith.

Nathaniel Branden, who was also there at the time, remembers Levin's role as being a bit less intimate than "friend." "Ira Levin was never a member of the Objectivist circle," Branden writes, "although he came to my place once or twice for the evening and Rand was there." Also, Branden indicates, "I think he read *Atlas Shrugged*" (personal correspondence, 21 December 2003).

Erika Holzer has similar recollections of the period and the people. "Ira Levin was *not* a member of Ayn Rand's inner circle," she writes. "He may or may not have met Rand—maybe after a lecture, when she'd be there to answer questions, maybe a one-time visitor to her apartment; maybe Levin was acquainted with Nathan [Nathaniel Branden]—but if Levin ever met her at all, I have no personal knowledge one way or the other" (personal correspondence, 28 December 2003). Holzer reports also that her husband, Henry Mark Holzer, who was Rand's personal attorney during the '60s, "recalls that Levin was an alleged fan of *The Fountainhead*." The *Letters of Ayn Rand*, edited by Michael S. Berliner, does include one item of correspondence between Levin and Rand. Levin, who is identified as the "author of *A Kiss Before Dying* (1953) and other novels and plays," wrote to Rand: "Like the very young man who stood beside Howard Roark and looked down on Monadnock Valley, I need say nothing but—thank you." To which Rand replied (on 3 February 1953): "To Mr. Levin: In answer to your letter: Thank *you*" (Rand 1995, 465).

There seems to be no question that Gene Roddenberry never crossed paths with Rand in person. Though they both worked in Hollywood, by the time he launched his career in Tinsel Town as a

writer for television, she had already moved back to New York and given up on writing for pictures. Roddenberry did read Rand, however. "Ayn Rand?" he said to an interviewer in the early '70s. "Oh, yes. I read *The Fountainhead* four or five times, *Atlas Shrugged*, but also some of her nonfiction—her book on art" ("The Goal Effect," in Lichtenberg, Marshak, and Winston 1975, 132). Her "book on art," *The Romantic Manifesto*, did not appear until 1969. But Roddenberry put together his masterpiece, *Star Trek*, several years before that; the show premiered on CBS in the fall of 1967. Still, the sort of Randian influence that is most noticeable in *Star Trek* is Deep Influence, at least of a sort.

It is apparent from even a cursory glance at *Star Trek* programs and films through the years that Roddenberry's political philosophy is not the same as Rand's. As Donna Minkowitz (2002) notes: "[P]eople who don't watch *Star Trek* are probably unaware that its vision of our future is socialistic, anti-imperialist and passionately committed to expanding the list of sentient life forms who are judged to have rights and acknowledged to be persons." In effect, the *Star Trek* vision of the future is that of a tree-hugging Green. Minkowitz continues: "[T]he 'socialism' I'm referring to is limited, more a matter of providing food, housing and medicine to everyone than preventing some from getting richer than others. But it's still pretty damn good to see a popular series proposing that everyone is entitled to health-care and abundant, no-shame-attached welfare." Clearly, she's disappointed.

Just as clearly, most of the commentators who have viewed the world of *Star Trek* through an essentially Randian lens have been disappointed, and quick to condemn its vision of the future as unlibertarian. For Todd Seavey (1997, 65), for example, writing in *Liberty* magazine, "*Star Trek* lacks . . . romantic sweep and moral impact." And, of course, it's (gasp!) "socialist." Yet, as Sondra Marshak noted in 1975,

> When *Star Trek* says, "The universe is a place where the mind *can* know. Success is the result of deliberate actions," to a viewer who actually lives in an environment where

> people say with their every word, expression and deed, "Knowledge cannot cause success. My failure isn't my fault. You're not better than me, you're just lucky!"—then *Star Trek* feeds tremendous, vital energy to the real world. ("The Goal Effect," in Lichtenberg, Marshak, and Winston 1975, 124)

And in feeding such ideas to the real world, *Star Trek* is undeniably passing along, popularizing, a key element of Rand's vision of life.

The First Generation

These were some of the Antediluvians, the American fiction writers influenced by Rand who began publishing during her lifetime. Others, even those who had never been either professionally or personally associated with Rand, waited until after her death to begin their own careers in fiction. Erika Holzer *had* been associated with Rand, both personally and professionally, for years. On her website, she portrays Rand as having taught her how to write fiction and declares: "I acknowledge a profound literary debt" to Rand's memory. Holzer's first novel, *Double Crossing*, originally appeared in 1980, during Rand's lifetime, but was withdrawn shortly thereafter and then reissued in 1983, more than a year after Rand's death. Rand's death actually had little or nothing to do with the novel's peculiar history, however; it was the vagaries of the publishing business, rather than the politics of personal influence, that dictated its brief first appearance, followed by its disappearance, followed by its reappearance three years later. In the end, though, *Double Crossing* made its "final debut" after Rand's death, and so Holzer must be counted among the First Generation of novelists influenced by Rand, rather than among the Antediluvians.

There is irony in this, to be sure, for Holzer was by no means as certain as Kay Nolte Smith that Rand's ongoing vitality might have interfered with her own creativity. "Was everyone who wrote for Ayn Rand's various publications a 'productive writer' who simply couldn't bloom until Rand was officially out of their lives?," she said

recently (personal correspondence, 28–29 December 2003). "Nonsense. Kay and her husband had a falling out with Rand . . . and in retrospect she said, 'well, absolutely.' Maybe in her case it was true —that she was freed up after this. But she's only one person."

"Was Rand 'terrifying' to write for, as Kay put it?" Holzer asked. "Yes, that's true, and I have the scars to show for it . . . but it was always worth it to me and I learned, and grew and matured as a writer."

Could Kay Nolte Smith "have written novels while she was associated with Rand?" Holzer wondered.

> Kay doubted it. Several people who knew me well [in those years] also doubt it in my own case. Frankly, I'm not sure. No question Kay was right that one was more "free" out of Rand's laser-beam inspection, knowing one wouldn't be edited to death. But would I have been "paralyzed" indefinitely? I just don't think so. I'd like to think that, eventually, I would have been OK—but who knows for sure?

There is certainly no paralysis in evidence in *Double Crossing*, as smoothly efficient and consistently surprising a thriller as anyone ever associated with Rand ever wrote or even dreamed of writing. Swann (n.d.) calls it "wonderfully complex and very carefully integrated according to Rand's ideas about plotcraft," but he complains that "there is nothing beneath it, nothing that attacks the reader from behind." Alexandra York (1983) disagrees. Reviewing Holzer's novel for *Aristos*, she described it as pushing "beyond [the] suspense genre into serious fiction," for though it "may be read as a 'page-turner' suspense/escape story . . . for lovers of serious art, it will become, as well, the kind of deeply moving experience only serious fiction can offer" (3). *Double Crossing* is the tale of Dr. Kiril Andreyev, a Soviet heart specialist who has spent years dreaming of escape to the West, only to see his hopes dashed when the close friend with whom he has long planned that escape meets an untimely end "a few inches from freedom" on the bridge between Potsdam and West Berlin (Holzer 1983, 15). It is both a passionate panegyric on the importance of

individual freedom and a fascinatingly well-researched document of the later years of the Cold War. I first read *Double Crossing* in 1983, at the time of its second publication, and the memory of it that has stayed indelibly with me for more than two decades is its riveting description of what was actually entailed in trying to escape East Berlin by crossing or breaching the infamous Berlin Wall. "The Wall," Kiril tells an inquisitive American reporter,

> "is a unique piece of construction because it is in a constant state of flux, always being repaired or rebuilt or added to: stone and brick into concrete slabs, concrete into blocks of cement, cement into solid chunks of wall. The Wall itself is almost thirty kilometers long—roughly eighteen miles. In some places it is only six feet high, in others, twenty.
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> "Most people know about the border patrols between the DDR and Federal Republic of Germany in the West. Few, perhaps, are aware that the patrols are continuous. Fifteen thousand hand-picked guards work the entire border area in two-man sentry units. They carry lightweight submachine guns, tracer ammunition and tear gas bombs, and they have standing orders: Shoot to kill.
>
> "An elaborate obstacle course was designed. It is constantly being improved to make their job easier—at a cost of half a million dollars per mile of improvement. There is a strip of land that no one may enter without a special pass, followed by a strip of beets and potatoes—low-lying crops that cannot obstruct a view of the border, followed by another unobstructed view—the 'security or protection strip'; all buildings and trees have been razed. In some places six-foot boundary posts stake out the border; each stake has an inverted nail on top imbedded in cement. Then there is a strip of barren sand one hundred yards wide that has been raked smooth to capture footprints, and beyond that, a concrete-lined trench —nine feet deep, fifteen feet across; a trap for vehicles.

> Next is a sixty-yard-wide mine field, no warning signs, of course, followed by what I call the 'hunting strip'—I like the irony of the name. Hungry police dogs range back and forth on wire leads that are a hundred meters long—over three hundred feet; it gives the animals great freedom of movement.
>
> "Finally, there is a barbed-wire mesh fence that is ten feet high and three feet underground—to prevent tunnelling. The fence is armed with sophisticated weaponry. Every fifteen feet there is either an 'antipersonnel' explosive device —the most recent, when tripped, hurls shrapnel into the body—or automatically firing machine guns. The guns are triggered by an electronic eye and set up to hit at knee, chest or head level. The fence is studded with watchtowers—over six hundred of them. They used to be made of wood; now they consist of concrete cylinders set one on top of another, crowned by a platform with searchlights and ports for machine guns. There are miles and miles of barbed wire in the fence. People speculate that should the wire strands be laid end to end, they would encircle the globe." (116–17)

All this to prevent people escaping from a workers' paradise.

As intense as *Double Crossing* is, however, it is only an overture to *Eye for an Eye* (1993). This crime novel, filmed in 1996 by the noted director John Schlesinger, with Sally Field, Ed Harris, Kiefer Sutherland, and Joe Mantegna in the major roles, is an impassioned meditation on justice and revenge. When Karen Newman's daughter, a young mother in her twenties, is brutally robbed, raped, and murdered in her own home by a gang of teenage thugs before Karen's horrified ears (the two women had been speaking by cell phone when the attack began and Karen listens to everything as it takes place), she looks to the criminal justice system for recourse. However, "[a]lthough the perpetrators are caught, they are released by a lenient Family Court judge who couldn't bring himself to lock up violent teenage criminals before Christmas." At her daughter's funeral,

Karen is given a card by a stranger. "Victims Anonymous," it reads. Before long, Karen

> is recruited at her most vulnerable by . . . [the] clandestine group . . . whose self-proclaimed mission is to exact swift, violent revenge on hardcore criminals (whom they call "savages") and also to chasten liberal judges who abdicate responsibility (known as "permissives") and whose courtrooms are "the real control center of evil." (Kryvoruka 1994)

From this simple but compelling beginning, the novel fairly hurtles forward toward its resolution, with many surprising twists and turns along the way. The film version, while not at all bad, does not even begin to compare to Holzer's novel when it comes to building and sustaining suspense, or to clarifying the moral context in which Karen must make her choices.

Clearly, Holzer's novels show both the Stylistic Influence of Rand, especially Rand's ideas on plotting, and the Deep Influence of her views on justice, individual freedom, and the Soviet Union. The same cannot be said of Holzer's fellow First Generation scribe, J. Neil Schulman. Schulman freely acknowledges Rand as one of the four principal literary influences on his career. But he also acknowledges that, of the four, Rand exercised the least influence on him. And he must be counted among the First Generation rather than the Antediluvians because, though he began publishing during Rand's lifetime, it was only after her death that he brought out a novel clearly influenced by her.

Schulman's first novel, *Alongside Night* (1979), reads like one of Robert A. Heinlein's juveniles if one of those books had been infused with a radical individualist anarchist ideology. Schulman ranks Heinlein second only to C. S. Lewis among his top literary influences, and acknowledges using Heinlein's juveniles as a model while writing *Alongside Night*.[4] He dedicates this debut novel to the person who taught him that radical individualist anarchist ideology—not Rand, but the longtime libertarian journalist, pamphleteer, educator, and activist Samuel Edward Konkin III (1947–2004), whom Schulman

met in the early 1970s when they were both living in New York City. No one reading *Alongside Night* would have any reason to suspect that Schulman had been influenced by Rand. But with his second novel, *The Rainbow Cadenza* (1983), Rand's influence—both Deep and Stylistic—became noticeable indeed. *The Rainbow Cadenza* is another dystopian novel in the tradition of *We*, *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-four*, *Atlas Shrugged*, and *This Perfect Day*. In the future Earth on which its main action takes place, "Christianity has been eclipsed by Wicca, adults of all races and both sexes are equal, the world is at peace and prosperous, marijuana is legal and socially acceptable and homosexuality is a perfectly legitimate, respectable and powerful state of being, with straight 'commen,' gay 'andromen' and women getting each their own political representation in a democratically elected world government" (MacNaughton n.d.). On the other hand, uncomfortable questions remain: "Who are the new underclass called Touchables, and why are they hunted for sport? What social problems has cloning human beings created, and why are clones treated as inferior? Why do men outnumber women seven-to-one? And why are teenaged women being drafted into government service for three years?" (Schulman n.d.)

The answer to this last question becomes fully evident when the talented young artist who is the novel's protagonist, lasegrapher Joan Darris, is drafted

> into the "Peace Corps," which in that time is an all-female body styled along military lines which requires each woman to give three years of her life in service to the state . . . supplying sexual comfort to every comman who enters her suite at the "Dicteria." . . . [D]ue to a long-term war in the past, sex-selective birth control had been encouraged by the governments of the previous era to provide males as soldiers . . . and as that disparity of numbers became institutionalized as the "normal" state of affairs, the pandemic incidence of sexual assaults resulted in the rationing of sexual contacts between men and women, which evolved into the Peace Corps, i.e., prostitutes for the state. (MacNaughton n.d.)

Clearly, part of what Schulman is up to here is the promotion of an important libertarian idea. As MacNaughton puts it:

> If drafting women for forced prostitution is horrifying in and of itself, then so is any other form of coercion. We have such a system in various parts of the world today; it's called conscription. Conscription is based on the precept of "If you are young and male, the Government owns your hairy little butt and can do anything it wants with it!" Conversely, if the governments of the here and now can compel men to do their bidding, and can dictate to women that once they have a pregnancy they *must* carry it, nothing stops them from shoving anything else down one's throat.

One suspects that Rand, who called conscription "the most blatantly statist violation of a man's right to his own life" (Rand [1966] 1967, 33) would be pleased at this evidence of her Deep Influence on Schulman's fiction writing.

But there is more to *The Rainbow Cadenza* than a brief against Selective Slavery. The novel also reflects on a number of topics relating to the arts and to creativity and to the interrelations among the arts, artists, and politics. It is precisely one of its greatest strengths that it thoughtfully addresses such issues as these, which are usually avoided altogether by authors of political dystopias. And here again, in Schulman's treatment of the arts and those who create them, we can see evidence of Rand's Deep Influence, particularly her view that a work of art reveals or expresses the fundamental values, and thus, in a sense, the soul, of the artist who created it.

There is also evidence in *The Rainbow Cadenza* of Rand's Stylistic Influence. The society Schulman has created is vividly, boldly, memorably imagined, and one of his greatest strengths in capturing this triumphant work of the imagination on paper is his rare facility with words, his gift for clever coinages and turns of phrase. The careful exploitation of just such a verbal flair was also a strategy employed by Rand. Just as the residents of her dystopian society in *Atlas Shrugged* say "Who is John Galt?" so the residents of Schulman's

dystopian society speak of commen and andromen and gaylords and Touchables and so on. As in Rand's novels, the characters in *The Rainbow Cadenza* tend to make speeches to each other from time to time, and as in Rand's novels, the good characters are good and the evil characters are unequivocally evil.

Schulman's second novel met with much admiration among at least some Objectivists. Swann (n.d.) wrote of him, for example, that "*The Rainbow Cadenza* . . . shows a promise that leaves me ravenous for his *next* book." But Schulman's next novel was nearly two decades in coming. And when it came, it was not what many admirers of *The Rainbow Cadenza* probably expected. *Escape from Heaven* (2002) is a satirical fantasy after the fashion of Jonathan Swift, written in a style clearly influenced by Heinlein. No Randian influence is noticeable, to this reader at least—neither Surface nor Deep nor Stylistic.

Another First Generation novelist whose debt to Rand was not immediately evident is Victor Koman. His first novel, *The Jehovah Contract* (1987), imagines a future Los Angeles that is only partially inhabitable in the aftermath of a nuclear attack. In a bombed out and irradiated section of this future City of the Angels lives hired gun Del Ammo. Ammo is approached one day by a fabulously wealthy evangelist who wants to take out a contract on God. The price he offers is compelling, and Ammo takes the job. Koman carries this audacious conceit off with superb style and flair, putting the details of his story into the mouth of his hitman protagonist and delivering up a hardboiled first person narration that is not only in the style of Raymond Chandler and Ross Macdonald but also worthy of comparison with both of their own best work. Anyone who read *The Jehovah Contract* back in the mid '80s knew right away that Koman was a highly skilled writer and a monstrous clever fellow. But it was not particularly evident that he had been influenced in any way by Rand.

Koman's second novel, *Solomon's Knife* (1989), has been described as a "medical thriller," but it might just as easily be called near-future science fiction. An unwed pregnant woman has an abortion, then learns that her fetus has been secretly used to test a revolutionary new medical procedure—it has been transplanted into the womb of an infertile woman, who will carry it to term. She sues for custody, and

the ensuing courtroom drama deftly illuminates the legal and moral issues involved, while also shedding light on a topic that is too little contemplated in contemporary fiction—the extent to which seemingly intractable social problems might be solved by advances in technology. There's nothing in this fine novel that would likely anger or displease Rand, but neither is there anything in it that would suggest her influence.

Koman's third novel, *Kings of the High Frontier* (1998), is another kettle of fish altogether. It is Randian through and through. It is close to *The Fountainhead* in both its size and its ambitions. Like *The Fountainhead*, and like *Atlas Shrugged*, it is a meticulously researched and accurately reported closeup look at a specialized field of endeavor—in this case, the aerospace industry and the government agency, NASA, that virtually controls it. Like *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, *Kings of the High Frontier* addresses important ideas—in this case, human freedom and the role of government in human society. Like *Atlas Shrugged*, *Kings of the High Frontier* is a work of near-future science fiction—though, where Rand envisioned the collapse of civilization, Koman envisions "the death of NASA and a rowdy, energetic, free-enterprise scramble into space—specifically . . . a race to launch the first manned, single-stage-to-orbit rocket" (Wolfe n.d.).

> The book is a scorching indictment of NASA that would, in any just universe, bring that agency to its knees and set off precisely the kind of race to freedom *Kings* posits. Koman describes all the "routine" ways in which NASA has delayed and damaged space exploration while pretending to promote it. Then with gut-twisting truth he tells the grisly, hidden stories behind the deaths of the Challenger crew members and Apollo astronauts Chaffee, Grissom and White. (Wolfe n.d.)

While doing all this investigative reporting, Koman is also telling a wonderfully complex and skillfully plotted story, a "page turner" in the same way *Atlas Shrugged* is. Yet even to say all this is to say nothing about one of the chief delights of the novel: the indelible

portraits it contains of the many and various individuals who figure in its events. As Neil Walsh (n.d.) puts it,

> There is a large cast of characters in this novel, and someone—either author or editor—wisely chose to include a *dramatis personae* at the beginning of the book, for which I was, on several occasions, grateful. Nevertheless, by the end of the book all the characters are so well-defined that the *dramatis personae*, which had earlier been indispensable, is no longer required.

Not a few of these characters are somewhat reminiscent of characters in *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*, for *Kings of the High Frontier* shows the Surface Influence of Rand, in addition to the Deep Influence and the Stylistic Influence it shows in other ways. Koman frankly acknowledged in a July 2003 email (personal correspondence) that "the psychologies of some of the characters in *Kings of the High Frontier* were inspired by those of characters in *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. Both novels influenced me at a critical point in my writing career." Koman states that "[t]he astronaut Tammy Reis could equate with Dagny Taggart" and that "Dr. Gibbon is similar to Ellsworth Toohey in his upfront honesty about his devious evil, with a dash of Dr. Robert Stadler in his efforts to destroy Man's future in Space in order to extend the U.N.'s grip on this world and others." Koman says that the character Paul Volnos in his novel is based in part on John Galt. And Claire Wolfe notes that "[t]here are moments when rocketeer Gerry Cooper could be Howard Roark."[5]

Wolfe (n.d.) writes that "[y]ou'll feel Rand's influence in every chapter," then quickly adds that this "in no way detracts from his accomplishment." And in fact, she's right. The influence of Rand is pervasive in *Kings of the High Frontier*; yet it is in no way imitation Rand. It is the mature expression of a confident, technically proficient writer, who has long since found and developed his own distinctive voice, however great an influence he may once have experienced from reading Rand. *Kings of the High Frontier* is an astonishingly good novel. It may well be the best novel yet produced

by a writer influenced by Rand. Yet few even know of its existence; fewer still have read it. Its obscurity is one of the great tragedies of the past decade in American letters.

One remaining member of the First Generation of writers influenced by Rand deserves at least brief mention, if only because of his phenomenal success in the marketplace. This is Terry Goodkind. Certain of the novels discussed earlier in these pages have enjoyed a commercial success of one kind or another—adopted as book club selections, adapted for motion pictures—but none of them has even approached the levels of sales Goodkind's novels have achieved. When a new Goodkind novel appears (as one does, faithfully, about every eighteen months), his publisher takes out two-page ads in the *New York Times Book Review*, a publication that is unlikely ever to review a Goodkind novel, a publication whose readers are unlikely ever to even pick one up out of curiosity. This is not advertising meant to stimulate sales. This is advertising as conspicuous consumption—as a way of announcing to one's colleagues in the publishing industry: "These books make so much money we can afford to throw some of it away on vanity advertising." Goodkind acknowledges his debt to Rand. "The only writer who played a role in influencing me," he told an interviewer in 1999,

> was Ayn Rand. Reading her work was a revelation because I identified so strongly with the writing; it was a confirmation of my ideas of the nobility of the human mind striving for excellence. Her writing made me realize I wasn't totally alone in the way I felt about the world and writing. It gave me courage. (Goodkind 1999)

At the risk of understatement, there is clear evidence of Rand's influence in Goodkind's novels, which number nine so far—influence both Surface and Deep as well as Stylistic. There is also much declaiming in the manner of Galt's speech and many of Rand's essays: "The only sovereign I can allow to rule me," Richard Cypher declares in *Faith of the Fallen* (2000),

> is reason. The first law of reason is this: what exists, exists; what is, is. From this irreducible, bedrock principle, all knowledge is built. This is the foundation from which life is embraced. Reason is a choice. Wishes and whims are not facts, nor are they a means to discovering them. Reason is our only way of grasping reality—it's our basic tool of survival. We are free to evade the effort of thinking, to reject reason, but we are not free to avoid the penalty of the abyss we refuse to see. (26)

Set aside the charges of outright plagiarism, which have doubtless already occurred to some readers, and which would likely hold up in court in today's climate of opinion. Think of this passage entirely in psychological terms. Unlike Galt's speech, this passage is not addressed to an audience of multitudes. It is *dialogue*. Richard is speaking to the woman in his life, a person he knows intimately, has lived with. One doesn't know whether to laugh or cry.

One is reminded, inescapably, of *Eric Flame* (1970), a mercifully forgotten novel by Frank R. Wallace of Las Vegas, the celebrated author of *Poker: A Guaranteed Income for Life by Using the Advanced Concepts of Poker*. At some point, Wallace seems to have come upon the works of Rand and been deeply affected by what he read; it inspired him to create a philosophy known as "Neotech." *Eric Flame* is even more crudely and laughably derivative of Rand than Goodkind's fiction (which, indeed, is highly sophisticated by comparison).[6]

Second Generation

If Goodkind's work is a more sophisticated example than *Eric Flame* of what I have called fiction *derivative* of Ayn Rand, as opposed to fiction *influenced* by her, Alexandra York's *Crosspoints* (2004) is an even more sophisticated example of the same thing. Subtitled "A Novel of Choice," *Crosspoints* tells the story of the love triangle among sculptor Leon Skillman, archaeologist Tara Niforous, and her colleague and former teacher Dimitrios Kokonas. The novel's other characters are mostly artists, art dealers, art collectors, and other

denizens of what Louis Torres and Michelle Kamhi (2000, 325) call "the artworld," a term they say they employ "pejoratively, to refer to the arts establishment which rejects 'traditional' contemporary art in favor of avant-garde work." York portrays the artworld every bit as pejoratively as do Torres and Kamhi. The artworld as she depicts it is filled with amoral hustlers, depraved drug addicts, fakes, and frauds. One typical figure is Denise "Denny" Sommers, who "serves" on something called the "Arts Council" and arranges funding for avant garde "artists" of all sorts. "Innovation," she says,

> "has been and still is all that counts in the big art world. Confronting and breaking convention. Iconoclasm. If you don't bash and trash the status quo first, you can't weaken the more deeply rooted traditions, which have to be destroyed before any real social progress can be made. Luckily, in today's precarious political and corporate climate, it's easier than ever before to aesthetically prepare Americans, whatever their professed persuasion, for a truly global government overseeing a truly New World Order. If an artist is doing any of that, and their work has no commercial market, they should be subsidized by every enlightened government, including ours. Period. It's an investment in the future." (York 2004, 154)

York's artists are, of course, no more attractive than her arts administrators. Nor are their works. One of her painters, Adria Cass, is responsible for creating "a sticky mess of swirling, bleeding colors" that "took up nearly a quarter of an entire wall" and "looked like the battlefield of a war going on in some poor psychotic's demented brain" (138–39). Her sculptor, Leon Skillman, is famous for, among other works, "a long piece of iron or something" that "spanned the room across its center, an I-beam of sorts that looked to be left over from recent construction work" (246).

This last piece—it's called *Eternity*—occasions a major crisis in the novel, for by the time she sees it, Tara has fallen in love with Leon and has repeatedly heard his work described as "heroic." The

experience of seeing his I-beam shakes her to the very foundation of her being, leaves her almost bereft of her senses. "Tara walked. I must be walking, she thought; my feet are moving one after the other and I'm not falling down. And I'm seeing: I must be seeing because I'm not tripping over anything" (251). Then "[a] silent scream tore through her body. *This* is Leon's 'heroic' artwork!" (252). A short time later, she confronts Leon, pointing numbly to a photograph of the temple at Delphi. "Either you love this art and me or you love your brand of art and *not* me," she tells him (260).

This is imitation Rand. It stands in relation to Rand's fiction as, say, the egregious "Sword of Shannara Trilogy" of Terry Brooks stands in relation to J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. A novelist who has been influenced by Rand writes a novel in his or her own voice, out of his or her own unique vision of the human condition, informed by his or her own particular quirks and prejudices. Reading such a novel, one is reminded of Rand perhaps, but if one knows Rand's fiction, one would never believe for a moment that it might in fact have been written by Rand herself. Reading *Eric Flame* and the works of Terry Goodkind, by contrast, one feels that what one is reading might well have been stolen in manuscript from Ayn Rand's wastebasket.

Alexandra York's *Crosspoints*, as indicated earlier, is brought off on a much higher, much more sophisticated level than this. York possesses genuine skill as a writer: her descriptions of physical action, as in the undersea archaeological dive that dominates the opening chapter, are particularly noteworthy. One senses, on every page of this, her first novel, the sort of intelligence that *could* do impressive things with fictional narrative. If she ever fully defines her own voice, she could be a force to contend with.

Are these writers fairly representative of the Second Generation of fiction writers influenced by Rand—those who began publishing only with the dawn of the new century? Happily, the answer is no. Already at least two other members of this group have distinguished themselves by the unusual quality of their work. One of these is Karen Michalson, whose first novel, *Enemy Glory*, appeared in 2001. *Enemy Glory* takes place in an unrecognizable world, divided up into

countries the reader has never heard of before, like Sunna and Threle. Technology as we know it scarcely exists in this world: people undertake lengthy journeys either on foot or in conveyances pulled by animals. Magic, on the other hand, is a highly developed art with an equally highly developed body of theory to account for and elucidate its undeniably real effects. It is taught, systematically and rigorously, in schools established for that express purpose. In short, *Enemy Glory* is a fantasy.

Now fantasy is a type of literature that is conventionally classed as "popular fiction," but it is not a literary genre for which Rand could be said to have felt any sort of uncontrollable enthusiasm. On the contrary: in her posthumously published lectures on *The Art of Fiction*, which date to the late 1950s, shortly after the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*, she announces with evident disapproval that works of fantasy can only be "justified" or regarded as "rational when they serve some abstract purpose applicable to reality." After due consideration, she grudgingly gives a passing score to "[s]tories like *The Magic Carpet* and *Cinderella* . . . even though the events are metaphysically impossible, because those events are used to project some idea which *is* rationally applicable to human beings. The author indulges in metaphysical exaggeration, but the *meaning* of the story is applicable to human life" (Rand 2000, 169).

A similar general air of suspiciousness about fantasy pervades Nathaniel Branden's remarks only a few years later, in 1962, in his essay on "The Literary Method of Ayn Rand" (which also served as part of the "Basic Principles of Objectivism" course offered at that time by the newly organized Nathaniel Branden Institute). Rand, Branden wrote,

> is a *Romantic Realist*. "Romantic"—because her work is concerned with *values*, with the essential, the abstract, the universal in human life, and with the projection of man as a heroic being. "Realist"—because the values she selects pertain to this earth and to man's actual nature, and because the issues with which she deals are the crucial and fundamental ones of our age. Her novels do not represent a flight

> into mystical fantasy or the historical past or into concerns that have little if any bearing on man's actual existence. Her heroes are not knights, gladiators or adventurers in some impossible kingdom, but engineers, scientists, industrialists, men who belong on earth, men who function in modern society. (in Branden and Branden 1962, 88)

Seven years later, in 1969, when she addressed the question "What Is Romanticism?" in her own words, Rand (1969, 109) noted that "today's Romanticists are escaping . . . into the supernatural—explicitly giving up reality and this earth. The exciting, the dramatic, the unusual—their policy is declaring, in effect—do not exist; please don't take us seriously, what we're offering is only a spooky day-dream."

Well, spooky *Enemy Glory* certainly is, and just as certainly it is very dreamlike—though whether in a diurnal or nocturnal fashion I cannot with confidence say. But no one could read very far into its pages without encountering plenty of evidence that this book does indeed address issues that "pertain to this earth and to man's actual nature." One of those issues is the role and legitimacy of government. The theocratic state that governs Sunna, whence the novel's main character, the student wizard Llewelyn, hails, is devoted to principles that would seem as familiar and comfortable as an old shoe to Gerald and Ivy Starnes.[7] "[W]e allow no wealth," says a high priestess at the very pinnacle of power in Sunna's government. "We take from all and give equally to all, each according to his needs" (Michalson 2001, 148). It is illegal to go armed within the bounds of Sunnashiven, the capital city. If, having surrendered one's weapon as required upon entering the city, one is subsequently attacked and injured, "[i]t is illegal to heal yourself without a city license" (141). It is also illegal to get high: Sunnashiven has a War on Drugs. To be more exact, it has a war on

> chaiaweed, dried flowers that were supposed to bring on visions or drunkenness or pleasant sensations—I was never sure which—when smoked in a hollow reed pipe. The

> flowers grew wild all over the city, and so . . . the authorities . . . had quite a time trying to prosecute a pleasure they couldn't control. I remember that . . . the bodies of a boy and a girl who had fasted for three days and smoked a good deal of chaia were found by a city guard under Sunnashiven's northern gate. I also remember thinking with all the logic of childhood how safe chaia must be if only two people died out of the thousands who used it, how death came only if you were stupid enough to fast for days before smoking ten times the normal amount. But the government seized the ammunition it needed, declared that chaiaweed was deadly in "some cases," and poisoned all the city flowers. No one could smoke *any* flower without risking death. Three hundred people died. My father repeated the official line on how much progress we were making toward public safety. (34)

But politics is not all Michalson has on her mind. She is also concerned about a broader, more fundamental sort of freedom, which has little or nothing to do with other people's efforts to control you, but much more to do with gaining mastery over your own natural tendency to limit your own mind—by unthinkingly accepting the conventional wisdom, for example, or by accepting some religion's imposition of restrictions on your freedom to think for yourself. Llewelyn reflects contemptuously that "my father only 'thought' the way he was told to" (54), and the young witch Caethne, who befriends him after his escape from Sunnashiven, feels similarly about those who bind themselves to a particular faith. "I like aligning myself with natural forces who know no stupid handed-down-forever-from-the-gods-and-jump-three-times-boundaries," she tells Llewelyn. "I'll create and disperse my own boundaries as they suit me, thank you, and I'll harm none doing it." Then she adds a question: "Have you ever met a religious person who was truly free?"

Ayn Rand, who considered religion to be primitive superstition whose persistence in modern society reflected poorly on her fellow men, would doubtless have approved of both these themes. She

might not have approved so avidly of Michalson's methods of working out and dramatizing her ideas on these and her various other themes, however. For, by her own admission, Michalson's "largest influence is Byronic—a Romantic attraction to darkness, beauty, strangeness—coupled with a strong element of satire and cynicism" (personal correspondence, 13 April 2004). Hers, she acknowledges, is "a rather dark, pessimistic Romanticism." And this sort of writing was not exactly Rand's cup of tea. As she grumbled in *The Romantic Manifesto*,

> there are Romanticists whose basic premise, in effect, is that man possesses volition *in regard to consciousness, but not to existence*, i.e., in regard to his own character and choice of values, but not in regard to the possibility of achieving his goals in the physical world. The distinguishing characteristics of such writers are grand-scale themes and characters, no plots and an overwhelming sense of tragedy, the sense of a "malevolent universe." (Rand 1969, 94)

As Rand saw it, the "essence" of "this particular, 'Byronic,' view of existence" is "the belief that man must lead a heroic life and fight for his values even though he is doomed to defeat by a malevolent fate over which he has no control" (94).

So Michalson's literary method is not Rand's. Rand's Deep Influence is much more noticeable in Michalson's fiction than her Surface or Stylistic Influence. Still, Michalson's work is brought off with such a high finish and such an overall level of craftsmanship that I believe the author of *Atlas Shrugged* could not help but admire it. It was Rand, remember, whose character Dagny Taggart cried out, "I'm so hungry for any sight of anyone who's able to do whatever it is he's doing!" (Rand 1957, 329).

And Michalson is definitely able to do what she's doing. As one brief but splendid example of her cleverness and her flair with words, consider the following passage, in which Llewelyn, now a refugee from Sunna living in a foreign land, marvels at his new teacher, the wizard Mirand:

> I was completely taken aback by the casual way he spoke to me of magical practices that I had thought would take me years to accomplish in Sunnashiven. Even though manifesting words on blank paper was a fairly standard magical practice, my other teachers had always done their best to convince us we weren't ready to learn this practice yet. . . . Even more restricting was their insistence that any words worth manifesting had to express ideas that either were derived from everybody else's studies or fit into other people's work. I'd learned to fear word magic because I was taught to feel inadequate concerning it, and I'd always suspected I'd end up being harshly criticized for writing my own words, especially in forms that the school considered unwizardly. But here Mirand was telling me to manifest *my own thoughts*, as if that was the most logical and natural next step in the world! (Michalson 2001, 115)

"Manifesting words on blank paper." Writing. That's what she's really talking about, isn't it? All you have to do to see the connection to "this earth and to man's actual nature" is understand the metaphor.

Or consider Michalson's very Byronic description of what awaits many a young person suited to a life of scholarship and writing:

> Your parents will be intellectual clods who denigrate your love of ideas, and so the only comfort you will find will be in the works of other scholars. Only your masters will honor your learning, and their honor will be joy to you, for you will know no other praise. The regard of the masters shall gift you with pride, serving to make you disliked by your peers, driving you deeper into learning and so earning more praise and increasing your pride. . . . For years you will not have time to watch the leaves uncurl in spring, or turn rainbow shades in fall, or even read the books you once loved, for if you break from your studies, you will fail at your chosen profession, so fierce is the competition. Your pride will fall to a stunning desperation. You will sacrifice all to complete

> your training in a discipline you have forgotten how to love. You will finish your studies with high distinction and you will be considered completely worthless by your society. Your pride falls lower and the sword of sacrifice is drawn. No monastery will hire you, for there shall be many competitors with better connections. No merchant will hire you, for fear your high learning shall unfit you for commerce. You shall earn your bread clumsily, tilling the soil or herding goats. You shall be scorned for your incompetence at peasantry and mocked for trying to be better than your visible station should you dare to show your book learning. You shall keep yourself alive in a long blessed hatred of yourself and the world. Your mind shall rot and go soft before your body does and you shall never forget what you were and what you are. You shall live to be a hundred. (56–57)

Or consider this:

> Getting to Threle via the woodland paths is like getting back to some familiar place you've never been to before. For me it was like reading a lengthy treatise by some famous wizard of yesteryear, a treatise so thick and heavily wooded that nobody reads it but everybody knows what it says because its shadows usurp so much of the landscape—the kind of book you don't want to bother reading because you *do* already know the major points and high places. But when you finally read it on a once-in-a-lifetime impulse on a hazy summer afternoon you discover that the leaves are a slightly different color from what you heard or remembered, the paths have moved, your map is accurate only in the outlines, and the details of the landscape surprise and delight. You're glad you've come. (74)

Visit the strange (yet eerily familiar) world Karen Michalson has created in *Enemy Glory* and further elaborated in its sequel, *Hecate's*

Glory (2003); you'll be glad you came—just as you will be if you visit the more familiar (yet unexpectedly strange) Los Angeles of Helen Knode's *The Ticket Out*.

Michalson and Knode aren't the only Second Generationers out there, of course. Among the others: Beth Elliott, whose first novel —the satirical science fiction story *Don't Call It "Virtual"*—was published in 2003; and Andrew Bernstein, the philosophy professor and publicist (closely affiliated with the Ayn Rand Institute) who wrote the CliffsNotes on *Anthem*, *The Fountainhead*, and *Atlas Shrugged* and published his first novel, *Heart of a Pagan* in 2002. There are other Antediluvians as well: Edward Cline, who began publishing crime fiction in the late 1980s after a number of years in journalism, then apparently found his true niche with the publication in 2001 of the first volume of his *Sparrowhawk*, a series of novels set in the time of the American Revolution; James P. Hogan, whose first novel appeared as long ago as 1977 but who first came to the attention of readers interested in Rand with the publication of his award-winning science fiction novel *Voyage from Yesteryear* in 1982; and F. Paul Wilson, whose first novel, *Healer*, was published in 1976. But constraints of both time and space make it impossible to discuss every contemporary writer of American popular fiction who has been influenced by Ayn Rand. There are simply too many of them.

And this is perhaps the most significant fact that emerges from any serious investigation of the subject at hand—that Ayn Rand has exercised a truly decisive influence on a surprisingly large number of both well- and lesser-known authors of American popular fiction over the last forty years. If her impact is not exactly what might be called pervasive, still, it is very widely dispersed; one never knows, in reading through contemporary American popular fiction, where her often unexpected influence will turn up next.

Notes

1. There were few bestseller lists in the modern sense of the term in the early 1930s, and none which could claim to reflect nationwide sales. Today's most authoritative such list, the one compiled by *The New York Times*, was first published in 1942. It is evident, however, that Woodford's *Trial and Error* sold briskly during these years. It went through more than a dozen printings in five years in its original

edition; then went through another ten printings in a single year in a revised and enlarged second edition (1938) with a new introduction by Arnold Gingrich, founding editor of *Esquire*, the hottest new magazine of the decade. Then, nearly twenty years after its original publication, it went through a final dozen printings in a cheap hardcover reprint edition released by Garden City Publishing just before the paperback revolution swallowed up the reprint market in its entirety. The number of copies of this work that are available today in the used book trade is further testimony to the large number of copies that must have been sold during the '30s and '40s.

2. Fiedler oversimplifies things somewhat here, as is his wont, for it is misleading at best to speak of the novels of Henry James as not "intended . . . for the marketplace of their own time." James most certainly did seek success in the marketplace of his time, and he achieved a fair share of it too, earning a comfortable living from his writing. The validity of Fiedler's larger point—the relative novelty of James's commitment to writing for Eternity and Art rather than just for the marketplace—is unimpaired by this lapse.

3. Interestingly, Smith told an Institute for Objectivist Studies Forum audience on 25 October 1992: "My third novel, *Mindspell*, was requested by a publisher who said to me: 'We'd like you to write a novel about the supernatural and some family that has a curse hanging over it. Like the Kennedys.' And I said, 'Well . . . okay; but . . . do I have to have a supernatural explanation?' And he said, 'No, you don't.' So I went off and mulled a great deal, and wandered through the library, which is what I usually do when I'm trying to get started, and somehow found some books on witchcraft, and some books on spiritualism, and somehow they all came together in my mind" (Smith 1993, 7). I am indebted to Ellen Stuttle for this bit of arcana.

4. Should anyone be wondering who the fourth of Schulman's major influences is, the name is J. D. Salinger. A "juvenile" is a short novel intended for teenage readers.

5. Howard Roark was played on screen, of course, by the actor Gary Cooper.

6. I had hoped to quote a few unintentionally funny passages in this article, but search as I would for more than a year, I have been unable to find a single copy for sale or available for loan at any library, public or private. This suggests that the novel never found a readership of any size. If it had, there would be copies in circulation. There are plenty of second-hand copies of Goodkind's novels in circulation. Some of them are such a glut on the market, in fact, that they may be had online for considerably less than the cost of shipping. As C. S. Lewis noted, the sorts of readers who are most likely to find novels such as Goodkind's worth reading "never read anything twice." Once they've read it, they sell it to a dealer in second-hand books and find something else to read. Hence the aforementioned glut.

7. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Gerald and Ivy Starnes are the worthless heirs to the Twentieth Century Motor Company fortune who attempt to run the factory on the basis of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need," thereby driving it into ruin and touching off John Galt's crusade to "stop the motor of the world."

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