

Ayn Rand Literary Criticism

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The year was 1973. The class was "Women and Literature," then a relatively new offering not only at the University of Texas at El Paso, but also at most major universities. Those of us who were pioneers in the field of Women's Studies were developing reading lists, exchanging syllabi for possible ideas. My students were not comfortable with the received canon; they were becoming decidedly depressed with a reading fare that provided a seemingly endless vision of women as victims—women going mad, women dying in childbirth, women giving up their dreams. My solution was to add *Atlas Shrugged* to the semester syllabus.¹

Thus began an unanticipated journey for me as a literary scholar, a course that took me in directions I never could have foreseen. The world of Ayn Rand studies was unknown to me. I had only read two Rand novels, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. Objectivism and Objectivists were unfamiliar terms. Therefore, I was unprepared for the difficulties that I would encounter in what I expected to be a routine library search to prepare for teaching the novel. Standard practice for a professor about to teach a new text is to go to the library to do some investigation. One wants to learn about the life of the author, read some reviews to assess the initial reception of the work, and to identify what readers, other than oneself, consider significant questions about the novel's literary merits. This practice is not reserved for new assignments; even for works I have been teaching for years, I like to go and read the latest publications, see if there are any new perspectives. One can get stale in one's approaches and often another scholar will find motifs or themes in the work I may have missed. Sometimes it is a good exercise to present students not only with your own, but also with alternative readings and ask

them to support one or the other interpretations. It helps to sharpen their analytical skills.

My library search, as most readers of this essay have probably anticipated, turned out to be one of great frustration. Remember that the date of this search was the early seventies. In those pre-computer days, the main tools for research were the card catalog and heavy bound indices. My first search was for books in the card catalog. There was only one that had essays about Rand's novels, a book titled *Who Is Ayn Rand?* So, I moved to the indices. The *MLA Bibliography* provided no listings of articles. I looked next in the more general *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*. It produced articles with some information about the author, but was no help in finding literary analyses. I turned to other indices and found a smattering of articles about her philosophy, but that was not what I wanted. What interested me were literary critiques, analyses of her plot structures, major themes, character development, and use of symbolism. *The Book Review Index* turned out to be my major source. At least the works had been reviewed, if not written about, in a more sustained analytical manner. I gave up the search at that point, figuring that there was sufficient material in the text itself to stimulate class discussion. I was right. Luckily, lack of critical sources was not to be a great problem in this instance. Even without secondary sources, the students wrote good papers about the novel's relevance to feminist issues.

Now, I must admit that I had not expected to find a great deal. Many of the texts that I was teaching were relatively new and there was not much that had been published about them either. This is often the case when one is doing research on living authors, unless the author is a Nobel Prizewinner such as Toni Morrison or Saul Bellow. Still, though I had not expected abundance, I was unprepared for the absolute dearth of material. There is a difference between not much and next to nothing. In the early 1970s my only library sources for reaction to the novel were reviews and while reviews can be of some interest, they do not serve the same purpose as full-fledged articles. A review may be written in haste and does not need to reflect research or scholarship. Reviews are sometimes

written by people who are not well versed in the author's previous writing or reputation. Opinions and generalizations are often unsubstantiated or underdeveloped. I don't often use reviews for class preparation or for reference in my writing.

It was not until some years later, after I had written an article about my perceptions of the significance of Rand's novel for Women's Studies courses, that I was to encounter the problem again. Greenwood Press approached me about writing *The Ayn Rand Companion*. Preparation required a thorough bibliographical investigation and though my initial foray into Rand criticism had yielded little, I expected that with time and the ability to search beyond the confines of our local libraries, I would reap a richer harvest of sources. The results were not encouraging. I searched in areas and looked in indices that were far afield from my usual sources. Much of the material I eventually found was not indexed.

It was then that I learned that I was not alone in my difficulty with finding literary criticism of Rand's work. In fact, lamenting the lack of critical attention paid to Rand's creative writing is almost a cliché. It is a standard opening for critical articles that are generally favorable toward her work. John Cody initiates his 1973 study of Rand's Promethean heroes with the statement that "Ayn Rand is virtually a literary outcast, ignored and scorned in scholarly journals, books, and dissertations" (30). Taking a different tack two years later, Robert Greenwood argues that the literary press has failed to pass intelligent judgment on her novels, substituting opinion for responsible literary criticism. Obviously, his definition of the "literary press" meant reviewers. His article, "Ayn Rand and the Literary Critics," is based almost entirely on reviews, not articles. I suppose that is because he had so few articles to work with.

On the other hand, antagonistic critics are concerned about the opposite problem. They too complain about numbers, but numbers of a different sort. While admirers lament how little is written about Rand, detractors grumble about how much she is read. They express horror at the popularity of Rand's work. For them, there is too much Rand in print and if the literary establishment pays not enough attention, the reading public pays too much attention to her work.

Corollary with bemoaning the lack of attention to Rand's work is remonstrance about the hostility evident in much of the critical attention that is paid. Certainly, the shrillness and hysteria evidenced by many of her detractors is so extreme as to be almost comic. Still, one must remember that authors, like prophets, are often least appreciated in their own countries. Many of our greatest writers have suffered denunciation and attack. Some blatant examples come to mind. William Faulkner was called "Count No Count" in Oxford, Mississippi, his hometown, and much of the citizenry was outraged by what they perceived as his treasonous depiction of the south. He became a valued citizen only after winning the Nobel Prize and even that was questioned, some feeling that the reason he was awarded the prize was that his decadent portrayal of his homeland reinforced European prejudices. He was denounced in his home state as "the propagandist of degradation" who "properly belongs in the privy school of literature" (quoted in Blomer 1974, 528). Ernest Hemingway never returned to Oak Park, his home and birthplace, but a place he considered restrictive and narrow-minded. The citizens of Oak Park were not enamored of his work either. Even his family was not supportive. The publication of the classic *The Sun Also Rises* elicited the response from his mother that it was "a doubtful honor" to have written "the filthiest book of the year" (quoted in Baker 1969, 180). *A Farewell to Arms* was banned in Boston. John Steinbeck could not get a license to remodel a home he bought in Monterey because the citizens there found his work so offensive. He was hated in not one, but two communities. The people of Salinas, his birthplace, were equally appalled by the content and nature of his writing.

Today, safely dead, these despised pariahs and black sheep, have become community darlings and favorite sons, the foci of Chamber of Commerce promotions and magnets for tourist dollars. The communities that rejected these writers during their lifetimes now mark the birthplaces as Historical Buildings and promote annual festivals or conferences in their honor. The rejection was not limited to their local communities. In their lifetimes the F.B.I. investigated both Steinbeck and Hemingway with disastrous results.² Over time, the sanitizing effect of death and distance make it possible for these,

once disreputable writers, to be honored with United States postage stamps issued in their likenesses. So Rand too, with time passed and her impact reassessed, has a stamp issued in her honor.

The point I am trying to make is that the trajectory of Rand's critical reputation is not that different from many writers who challenge the mores and thinking of their times. Such writers often encounter vehement opposition. It is also not unexpected that a critical reputation will experience an upsurge once the writer is dead. During the final years of his life, F. Scott Fitzgerald was a relatively forgotten writer. Only after his death did the reevaluation begin. Now that Rand, like the aforementioned writers, is dead, books are being written, films made, and more articles published than ever in her lifetime. Also, now that some of her ideas have gained currency, there is a willingness to reassess them. A new generation brings new attitudes. Hemingway, who pioneered a writing style that was ridiculed as simple-minded, lived to see many emulating him.³ Steinbeck has the dubious distinction of having more works banned from school libraries than any other major writer of his time. Students reading those works today have difficulty figuring out why. Faulkner, whose attitude toward blacks was too liberal for his community in the thirties, lived long enough to take up with those who wished to slow the progress of civil rights. Times change, attitudes change, and writers are constantly being reevaluated. So, the pattern of rejection, resistance, and reevaluation that Rand's work has experienced is not unique.

Another issue, one that is often blamed for the paucity of critical response to Rand's work, is the problem of access and sanction. This would seem more extreme in the case of Rand than with most writers, though I must point out that most writers resent negative criticism and their proponents often react quite harshly. Also, the sanctioned biographers are subject to censorship by author, family, or literary executors. So, it takes not only the death of the author, but also the death of the widow, widower or literary executor, for greater access to critical materials to be granted. This too stimulates more scholarship.

Notwithstanding all the above provisos, it must be acknowledged

that if not different in kind, there is still a marked difference in quantity between the critical reaction to Rand's literary output and that of other acclaimed and widely read authors. For, even if Rand's critical reception is not totally unprecedented, there are still distinct characteristics that separate it from those of the aforementioned authors. For starters, there is the marked disparity between her popularity as a novelist and the number of articles of literary criticism written about her work, though this too is not without precedent. It took some time for John Steinbeck to achieve recognition by certain sectors of the critical establishment. His work was disdained for its popularity, sentimentality, and the fact that it is accessible even to high school students. To this day, the critical bibliography for Steinbeck studies is decidedly smaller than that of his contemporary Nobel laureates, although no list of the greatest or most important novels of the twentieth century is without one or two of his novels.

A popular response to a question about the state of things is that there is bad news and good news. Up to now, this essay has surveyed much of the bad news. However, my argument that it sometimes takes the death of the author to stimulate critical reevaluations and attention suggests that such could be the case for Rand. Thus, the good news. Since Rand's death in 1982, there has been a growing body of attention by literary scholars. It started in the mid-eighties, but burgeoned in the 1990s. Getting to that breakthrough decade requires some survey of the barren path between the two periods. Between the bad news of the earliest neglect to the good news of the breakthrough lies a perplexing mix of single attempts, prophetic forays, and the requisite groundwork for what was to come.

Among the earliest attempts by a non-Objectivist publication to subject Rand's novels to analyses of a literary bent were three articles published in a special issue of *Reason* in November of 1973. The authors were: Kathleen Collins, whose academic work was in English/Creative Writing; John Cody, a classics professor at Northwestern; and Douglas Den Uyl, then a graduate student in Philosophy. Unfortunately, neither Collins nor Cody followed up on these promising beginnings as analysts of Rand's literary techniques. Den Uyl, though he did not continue in a literary vein, flourished as a

Rand scholar, publishing articles in philosophy journals and co-editing an anthology on Rand's philosophical thought, the first to be published by a respected university press. He only recently returned to literary analysis in his Twayne Masterwork volume *The Fountainhead: An American Novel* (1999), a book that is a significant milestone in Rand criticism and part of the breakthrough I am arguing.

The *Reason* articles, though brief, contribute interesting perspectives on Rand's work. Collins's essay, "The Girder and the Trellis," compares Rand with Iris Murdoch, one of the few other women writers who is accepted as both a philosopher and a novelist. There are two problems with these articles in terms of their worth as part of a body of critical literature. One is that *Reason* had a limited circulation at that time. Few libraries outside of major metropolitan areas carried it. Few indices catalog it; certainly not MLA or the Humanities Index, the primary sources for literary research. A major problem is that *Reason* is not, in the academic sense, a refereed publication. A current affairs magazine, identified with a particular ideology, but unlike many of the better-known works of that ilk, *Reason* is not commonly available at newsstands in airports or popular chain bookstores.

In mainstream academic journals, the 1970s were generally devoid of Rand literary criticism. The little that was there is worth mentioning since it is so rare. Paul Deane's "Ayn Rand's Neurotic Personalities of Our Times" (1970) in *Revue des Langues Vivantes* argues for the psychological validity of the characters in *The Fountainhead*. His is a favorable treatment of Rand's characterizations. Unfortunately, it, like the *Reason* articles, is brief, only four pages long. My own "Ayn Rand and Feminism: An Unlikely Alliance," was published in a mainline journal, *College English*, which is the official journal of the National Council of Teachers of English. The article posits coherence between some of Rand's main themes and a current feminist issues, arguing that feminists can find much of worth in *Atlas Shrugged*. Except for Judith Wilt's response to my article, no one else was moved to address the issue of Rand's novels as possible sources for Women's Studies or feminist criticism. It took a generation and an invitation from Pennsylvania State Univer-

sity Press to co-edit an anthology on feminist interpretations of Ayn Rand for other scholars to respond to that initial proposition. But then, that too was part of the breakthrough.

Reading about the critical response to Rand, one encounters many accusations against academe and mainstream academic journals. There are those who suggest that the reason so little was published about Rand was that the liberal leaning of academic departments and the editorial staff of journals created a bias against her. This was never my experience. I remember when I sent the above article to *College English*. It was one of the first I had ever submitted to a refereed journal and I fully expected that it might be turned down and that I would have to submit to a less prestigious journal. No one in my department had ever had anything published in *College English*. Their rate of acceptance was daunting. They received some 156 articles for each one they published. But I thought I would aim high. In short order, I received a letter back from the editor Richard Ohmann telling me how much some of the staff of the journal wanted to publish something on Rand and encouraging me to make a few additions and revisions and resubmit. Looking back on that experience after all the complaints I read in Objectivist publications about how difficult it is to get work about Rand published in academe, I am perplexed.⁴ I wonder if people actually submitted articles to academic journals or just assumed they would be rejected and therefore sent their works to receptive sources. Reading articles published in in-house publications that complain about the lack of attention accorded Rand, I wonder why those articles aren't submitted to scholarly journals instead.⁵

Returning to the literary criticism of the seventies, let me add the caveat that scholarly attention need not be positive to be of value. The fact of the attention has a merit of its own. It can be a catalyst for critical dialogue. *The Journal of Popular Culture* published a piece by Philip Gordon on "The Extroflexive Hero." Gordon is put off by the egoism of Rand's heroes. Kevin McGann's evaluation of Rand's translation of her novel *The Fountainhead* into a movie is a chapter in a book published by Frederic Ungar Publishing Co. He faults Rand's screenplay for undermining some of the key issues in the novel. It is

worth remarking that to my knowledge neither Deane, Gordon, nor McGann published any further work on Rand. Their articles did not provoke response and, while significant in and of themselves, one book chapter and three articles is a pitifully inadequate body of responsa, even for a live author. Still, except for Objectivist or libertarian publications, that is it in the 1970s.

As I noted above, the one-article critic is a problem in Rand literary scholarship. It is generally the case that academic scholars specialize in one or two writers. A professor who publishes on Dickens is likely to have a series of articles and then perhaps a book on the author. Ph.D. dissertations are written with the expectation that they can either be turned into a book or mined for articles. Many literary dissertations are author specific. To a lesser extent, M.A. theses are seen as either preparation for the dissertation or a resource for article publication. In most literature departments, there are people who make careers in publishing about one author or a group of authors. One becomes a Shakespeare specialist or a Victorian literature scholar. This does not seem to be the case for many academics who write about Rand. Rand bibliographies are replete with one-item authors. Even if one would not want to make Rand the sole focus of a career, I would expect that success in publishing one article about a writer would inspire further exploration.

Ayn Rand died in 1982. After her death, there was a slight upsurge in critical attention. One must not, however, fall prey to the post hoc, ergo propter hoc fallacy here and suggest that her death was the sole cause of the upsurge. Several of the projects that came out after her death were underway when she was alive. Although, if other writers who were interested in writing about her received similar responses to the one my request for an interview elicited, it may be that some writers were put off by Rand's litigiousness.⁶

In the mid-eighties my *Ayn Rand Companion* was published. It had several chapters devoted to literary analysis. *The Companion* provides a "Compendium of Characters" and a detailed "Bibliography," both important contributions for other scholarly work, but there is minimal development in it of ideas that add to or provoke a critical dialogue. The chapter on the fiction is mostly descriptive. The

chapter on the critical response has information that would be helpful for scholars assessing some history of the criticism.

It was followed shortly thereafter by James Baker's *Ayn Rand*. Both works were parts of series, notable in that mainline publishing houses produced them. These series are staples in many libraries. Greenwood's Companion series put Rand in a grouping with writers such as Flannery O'Connor, Joseph Conrad, and Dashiell Hammett. Baker's work is one of the Twayne United States Authors Series that includes, among others, Dorothy Parker, Emma Goldman, and Rand's conservative enemy, William F. Buckley, Jr. Baker is a history professor and there is no record of his having ever written about Rand either prior to or since this volume. The pattern of *Ayn Rand* is similar to that of the *Companion*. There are chapters on the biography, the creative work, the nonfiction and the critical response.

For the purposes of this review, it is the chapter on "Rand as Creative Writer" that is of interest. Baker is in agreement with most critics that Rand's fame rests on her fiction: "She wrote at least one stage play and two novels that deserve to be counted among the landmarks of twentieth-century American literature" (Baker 1987, 29). In this chapter, however, Baker presents some odd assessments of Rand's fictional creations. He names Joan Volkontez of "Red Pawn," Kira Argounova of *We the Living*, and Karen Andre of *Penthouse Legend* "the best female characters of all her fiction," citing their courage, love of strong men and resistance to injustice. He does not explain why Dagny Taggart is left out of this list, yet unaccountably in a later chapter names her the "brightest and best" (117) when compared to Kira and Karen. Baker's assessment of *Night of January 16th* is that its inaccurate portrayal of an American courtroom trial strains the audience's willing suspension of disbelief, while its main characters' actions bring into question their morality and hence the whole question of the superiority of their "sense of life." According to Baker, "it is held together by an enormously attractive woman and a gimmick" (40). What is so attractive about Karen Andre he does not illuminate. An analysis of why he considers Karen such an appealing character would have been most helpful.⁷ Most of Baker's chapter on the literature is more descriptive than evaluative. Still, some sen-

tences cry for elaboration. He assesses *Anthem* as "the overture for the Rand symphony composed of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*" (46). That would be a wonderful thesis for an article or even topic sentence for a long paragraph, but Baker never takes up the analysis of how or why that is so.

In his analysis of *The Fountainhead*, Baker introduces some discussion of what he calls the "strange nonphysical homoerotic relationship between Roark and Wynand" (55). For Baker, it dwarfs any heterosexual affair in all of Rand's fiction.⁸ Concluding his discussion of the novel he names as part of a Rand symphony, Baker states: "*The Fountainhead* advocates chaos by romancing anarchy, sadomasochism and infidelity" (57). In his assessment, *Atlas Shrugged* is "a huge burst of ideological wind" (64). The fact of Baker's book is of note in a context of surveying the critical landscape, but the content is negligible in terms of contribution to analyses of Rand's literary techniques and creations.

There are other kinds of contributions to the critical oeuvre besides textual analyses of the works. One important field is the study of sources and influences. Chris Matthew Sciabarra's *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical* is noteworthy in that respect. Sciabarra provides intellectual and literary context for the development of Rand's creative works. His analysis of the dialectical methods of her university course of study and her acquaintance with the writers of the Russian Silver Age are useful material for further exploration of her creative writing, particularly the early works.⁹

An important article in the 1980s was Stephen Cox's "Ayn Rand: Theory versus Creative Life." Cox reiterates the problem in finding literary analysis of Rand's work, complaining that both her friendly and hostile critics "scarcely regard her as a novelist at all" (Cox 1986, 19). He explains that her political and moral theories so absorb the bulk of the analytical attention paid her that "the quality of her imaginative writing is almost entirely ignored" (19). The bulk of the article is a detailing of how allowing theory to master creative decisions sometimes works to the detriment of her fiction. Cox finds fault with Rand's interpretation of Aristotle's distinction between history and fiction, and notes in particular that one of the most

important elements of her theory of literature is "the projection of an ideal man."

Anthem is a work that has garnered a bit of attention in academic journals. This may be because its length makes it more accessible for high school readers. For example, Tamara Stadnychenko presents a brief proposal for teaching the book in an *English Journal* article published in February of 1983.

What started as a slow sprinkle, at times a trickle, erupted into a steady stream of attention in the last decade of the millennium. The 1990s was a breakthrough decade for Rand literary studies. Let me define my terms. How do I define "breakthrough"? One aspect of the breakthrough for literary studies is the fact that the 1990s produced the first book dedicated solely to a Rand novel. In other words, it is a book of literary criticism in a series dedicated to works of fiction. That is, of course, Douglas J. Den Uyl's *The Fountainhead: An American Novel*. A second book dedicated to the study of a Rand novel, my *Atlas Shrugged: Manifesto of the Mind* is also part of this breakthrough. Another factor in the breakthrough is that the impetus for both of these volumes came from sources independent of and unconnected to any of the usual venues for Rand study. Both Den Uyl and I were invited to write these volumes by the General Editor of the series, Professor Robert Lecker of McGill University. Neither of us anticipated the invitation. Lecker's letter to me indicated that the invitation came on the basis of the quality of my previous work, which I assume is also the reason Den Uyl was picked. Thus, the attention to Rand as a creative writer came from an independent academic source, divorced from the usual partisan venues. This is also significant in a breakthrough.

Another factor in the breakthrough is its universality. In the 1990s, Rand literary criticism took on a decidedly international look. New scholars from all over the globe took up the challenges of analyzing Rand, the creative writer. This is a key aspect of a critical breakthrough—attention beyond national borders. There is a perceptible global flavor to the contributors to *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand*. From the northern climes of Norway, Thomas Gramstad formulates his analysis of Rand's mistaken Platonic view of

gender, suggesting an extension of Rand's position that would effect a female hero who is the result of a Randian-feminist synthesis. Valérie Loiret-Prunet is a Professor of Linguistics and Literature in France, having earned her Ph.D. from the University of Paris. Loiret-Prunet develops a reading of *We The Living* that positions the character of Kira as the repudiation of dualism. Challenging leftist feminists to rethink their political positions, Loiret-Prunet sees Kira as a model for the "integrated female hero, who seeks a triumph over dualities and who yearns for *human* synthesis that ultimately transcends gender" (Loiret-Prunet 1999, 109). From the southern hemisphere comes the work of Melissa Jane Hardie, a University of Sydney Ph.D. Hardie invokes camp aesthetics, to suggest "the recuperative potential of a camp reading" and a "reconsideration of Rand's work on the *labor* of representation and identification in the aesthetic domain" (Hardie 1999, 186). Arguing for reconsideration, Hardie calls Rand's work a "paradox of sublime and yet contingent value" (186).

As of this writing, *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand* accommodates the greatest number of literary critiques of Rand published so far. Besides the aforementioned international scholars, there are noteworthy deliberations on Rand's literary methods and meanings by Judith Wilt and Karen Michalson, and a quasi-literary analysis of *The Fountainhead* by Barry Vacker. Wilt's considerable credentials in fields as disparate as Sir Walter Scott, George Meredith, the Gothic novel and popular culture give her contribution a singular distinction. She is probably the most widely published in mainline academia among the Rand literary critics. In "The Romances of Ayn Rand," Wilt posits the "sublime equipoise" of the correlative environment of romantic reader and writer, seeing in the shared fantasy life of the reading public and the writer an explanation for Rand's "stubborn best sellerdom" (Wilt 1999, 174). Wilt employs psychological and biographical approaches to Rand's creative works, as well as delving into the meaning of the recurrent romantic triangles and utopian/apocalyptic motifs. The questions raised by what Wilt calls the "hallmark qualities of the philosophical romance" are, for her, "familiar paradoxes of our century" and part of the reason that

Rand's works deserve a "stricter hearing" (195). Karen Michalson argues the lack in Western culture of an archetypal myth for the female hero, a deficiency that is addressed by Rand's creation of Dagny Taggart in *Atlas Shrugged*. Michalson posits Dagny as an epic hero who fulfills all the traditional criteria. She is a figure of national importance, embodies the highest values in the world she inhabits, and achieves superhuman feats. Michalson is not unmindful of the tensions created between Dagny's heroism and her willingness to assume the traditional subservient female role in relation to three of the heroic male characters. She also addresses the tension created by Rand's problematic definition of the "feminine."

Another in the cast of international stars of Rand criticism is Kirsti Minsaas, a literary scholar affiliated with the University of Oslo. Minsaas's first major contribution to the field was not in print, but in audio-cassette. In *Structure and Meaning in Ayn Rand's Novels* (1994) she moves Rand literary criticism in a fertile and much-needed direction.¹⁰ That is, she does a text-based close reading that demonstrates the structural integration among theme, plot and symbols in *Atlas Shrugged*. A particular strength of this detailed analysis is Minsaas's dissection of the consistency and integration of Rand's premises into the details of the plot. One example she uses is the chapter, "The Top and the Bottom." Rand's premise is that in an irrational society the best are at the bottom and the worst are at the top. Therefore, such bottom-feeders as James Taggart meet their friends at a bar on the top of a skyscraper, whereas Eddie Willers and John Galt meet in an underground cafeteria. Of course, the skyscraper bar is designed to look like a cellar, so literally the bottom is at the top, and the underground cafeteria is spacious and light. Only a perceptive and careful reading would illuminate these often missed aspects of Rand's art. Only the best literary criticism helps the reader to these discoveries.

Three other audio cassettes are of note for their contributions to the critical canon. Andrew Bernstein's *The Mind as Hero in Atlas Shrugged*, Susan McCloskey's *Odysseus, Jesus and Dagny* and Shoshana Milgram's *Ayn Rand's Drafts: The Labors of a Literary Genius* were all released in the 1990s. Each is distinct in its approach. Bernstein's

thesis is that the human mind is so glorified and exalted in *Atlas Shrugged* that it becomes, in effect, the actual hero of the work. His is more the approach of a philosopher than a literary critic. McCloskey compares Odysseus, Jesus and Dagny as epic protagonists, seeing analogies in their quests. In her reading, Francisco is Odysseus in a tux, Ragnar, Francisco, and Galt the three Musketeers, and Rearden, initially a type of Christian hero. Among her most provocative interpretations is her comparison of Galt and Jesus. Evidence from Rand's journals suggests that the sign of the dollar is like the sign of the cross. Galt's torture scene is like the crucifixion. Finally, McCloskey argues that Galt and Dagny move beyond the classical and Christian heroic ideals to modern ones. Milgram's is the only cassette in this group that comes complete with a scholarly apparatus. Her two-cassette package contains a written outline and citations. It is the result of her study of the drafts of Rand manuscripts housed in the Library of Congress. All the cassettes are recordings of lectures presented at workshops or seminars and include question-and-answer sessions.

There is much of worth in these cassettes. Still, in terms of qualifying as part of a traditional oeuvre of critical acceptance, they do not have the same cachet as refereed and published work. An analogy can be made to books published by vanity presses. There is no reason such works can't be good; they often are. However, in academe and elsewhere the general assumption is that there is something less than rigorous in such publications or that they would not pass editorial scrutiny.

In 2001, Milgram's material was published as a two-part series titled, "Artist at Work: Ayn Rand's Drafts for *The Fountainhead*." It appeared in *The Intellectual Activist*. Among the interesting edits Milgram uncovered in Rand's early drafts of the novel are references in Roark's trial speech to a list of creators who had suffered for their abilities. The list includes Socrates, Jesus Christ, Joan of Arc, Spinoza, Luther, and Nietzsche. Rand sharpened her focus on Roark and curtailed allusions to religion and Nietzsche by excising the entire list. Throughout this two-part article, Milgram demonstrates the precision of thought and improvement of text accomplished in

Rand's careful editing process.

The appearance of *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* in the Fall of 1999 is a promising indicator that the breakthrough in literary criticism will continue. The first volume contains an article by Stephen Cox that explores how the negative image of capitalism that dominated early twentieth-century fiction is countered in Rand's fiction. In "Outsides and Insides: Reimagining American Capitalism," Cox argues that an outsider such as Rand was "best equipped to see a familiar object freshly and intensely" (Cox 1999, 30). Cox contends that the ironies implicit in how ideas are developed in *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* meant more to cultural outsiders than they did to cultural insiders. He asserts that though Rand was vilified by her critics, the market system supported her success. Cox concludes that "no matter how far outside the mainstream it [Rand's perspective] may currently appear—[it] is always capable of working its way to the center" (54).

The Spring 2000 issue of *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* contains Kirsti Minsaas's article, "The Role of Tragedy in Ayn Rand's Fiction." In it, Minsaas illustrates how, despite her professed rejection of the "tragic" view of life, Rand's work is infused with the tragic spirit. In trying to determine why Rand would reject certain great works of tragedy, Minsaas concludes that Rand does not comprehend much of the literature she dismisses. This argument is similar to many made by feminist scholars who explore the dissonance between Rand's stated antipathy to feminism and the underlying feminist themes in her works. So, Rand's antipathy to tragedy belies the tragic undertones in her work. Of course, as Minsaas explains, it is only one set of theorists about tragedy who see it as pessimistic. An alternative and prevalent reading by classical scholars is that tragedy posits an optimistic view of human beings, as creatures who would contend with the gods and battle the fates. In that view, the tragic hero does not fall because he or she is flawed, but because of an error in judgment. Minsaas concludes that in spite of her theories, Rand's art is of such complexity and inner tension that it does offer "moving and thought-provoking portraits of the tragic dimension of human existence" (Minsaas 2000, 206).

D. Barton Johnson first wrote about Ayn Rand and Vladimir Nabokov in *Cynos*, a French journal. His article, "Ayn Rand, Vladimir Nabokov, and Russian-American Literature or, the Odd Couple" (1995), updated, expanded, and retitled for *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* (2000), is another significant contribution to this breakthrough. Johnson reviews correspondences in the careers and influences of these two Russian-born authors. He proposes that Nikolai Chernyshevsky, the progenitor of Socialist Realism, was part of their shared milieu and that both Nabokov and Rand, though they rejected Chernyshevsky's socialism, were shaped, in part, by their response to his tradition. He also develops a provocative comparison between Gorky's *Mother*, the premier novel of Socialist Realism, and *Atlas Shrugged*, its Capitalist Realist equivalent. Johnson wittily argues the many striking parallels in the lives of Rand and Nabokov, including a shared revival, characterized by biographies with scandalous tidbits, societies and journals devoted to study of their works, and ranking on lists of best books of the century. Nabokov's *Lolita* and Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* have become icons of popular culture, their heroines "stock reference points for feminist critics" (Johnson 2000, 61).

Not all of the works that contribute to this breakthrough can be given equal attention; brief mention will have to suffice. Stacy Olster's chapter on Rand in *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons* is noteworthy in its tacit acknowledgment of Rand's status as one of those icons, in company with Saul Bellow, Joseph Heller, Norman Mailer, and Ralph Ellison. Laura Rift contributes her insightful reading, "The Sound of Silence: The Disappearance of Female Sexuality in *Anthem*." Thomas Reed Whissen includes a chapter on *The Fountainhead* in his study *Classic Cult Fiction*. Also of note is Zina Gimpelvich's comparative study "'We' and 'I' in Zamyatin's *We* and Rand's *Anthem*." Even the publication of *CliffsNotes* (Bernstein 2000), though disdained by haute critics, is an affirmation of sorts.

Michelle Fram-Cohen's analysis of Rand's introduction to Victor Hugo's *Ninety-Three* demonstrates how Rand imposed her interpretation of Romanticism on Hugo's works. She contends that contrary

to Hugo's explicit statements about the need to understand the historical context of his work, Rand "attempts to impose on his novel her own view of Romanticism, which divorces literature from history" (Fram-Cohen 2001, 50). Fram-Cohen argues the significant philosophical import of the novel, correctly applauded by Rand, while also pointing out Rand's idiosyncratic interpretation of Aristotle and Romanticism.

In an extended response to D. Barton Johnson's pairing of Rand and Nabokov, Gene H. Bell-Villada, the author of *The Pianist Who Liked Ayn Rand: A Novella & 13 Stories*, focuses on how the biographies of the two, one an ideologue, the other an aesthete, more often than not, underscore not their similarities, but their marked differences. A few similarities of technique are presented: both glorified the nobility and portrayed adversaries in physically repugnant images; both showed a commitment to individual genius as the only thing that mattered; both were harsh and uncompromising toward the Soviet Union.

The Spring 2002 issue of *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* contains two articles that continue the variety evidenced by the expanding critical attention to Rand's fiction. One, another example of the international character of Rand's appeal, is Slavoj Žižek's "The Actuality of Ayn Rand." Žižek's idiosyncratic Lacanian construction of Rand's depiction of subjectivity and drive concludes that the "Randian hero is not 'phallogocentric' . . . [but] a feminine figure" (Žižek 2002, 225). The trickster figure provides the archetypal context for a discussion of not only Rand's characters, but also her life. Joseph Maurone (2002) sees Francisco d'Anconia, Kira Argounova, Howard Roark, Equality 7-2521, John Galt and even Rand herself as trickster figures.

Works by Milgram, Minsaas, Hardie, McCloskey, Den Uyl, Wilt, Johnson, Gimpelvich, Cox, and others, are the bedrock of burgeoning attention to Rand's corpus. The variety and scope of the books, articles, and cassettes published over the last decade suggest a breadth heretofore missing from Rand literary studies, a pattern for what is to come. While generally favorable, these authors do not hesitate to explore the contradictions, dissonances and complexities of Rand's

writing. It is those very problem areas that provide rich resources for the literary critic. The nature of classic works is that they are endlessly provocative, providing opportunities for rereading and new questions for ensuing generations of criticism.

What has suffocated so much early Rand scholarship is the tendency to fall prey to the intentional fallacy. Too many critics are seduced into evaluating her work through the lens of her statements about it. They substitute what she "intended" for independent assessment of what she actually accomplished. By treating Rand as they would any other writer, a new generation of literary critics accord her the best kind of academic respect, a respect that says the work is rich and complex enough to merit further study.

Notes

1. I have detailed this experience in Gladstein 1978, which was reprinted in Gladstein and Sciabarra 1999, 47-62.

2. The result for Hemingway may have contributed to his suicide. He was convinced that he was being watched by the F.B.I. and that his phone was being bugged. His friends and family, who could not believe that an admired and beloved author would be under surveillance, attributed this to Hemingway's paranoia and insisted to him that he was not in his right mind. It was not until J. Edgar Hoover's death that the existence of a Hemingway dossier came to light. He *was* being watched and his phone *was* tapped. The suspicions against Steinbeck may have had a deleterious effect for our fighting forces. Steinbeck and his friend Ed Ricketts wrote President Franklin D. Roosevelt, offering help in preparation for American invasions of the Pacific islands. As they explained in their letter, scientists share information and therefore they could provide maps and data about beaches and the best landing sites. Hoover convinced Roosevelt that Steinbeck was a suspicious source whose offer should be ignored; Steinbeck's advice was not heeded.

3. Perhaps the most telling evidence of the success of Hemingway's style is the annual Bad Hemingway contest. When a style becomes so distinctive that it is parodied, it is obviously very well known. There is also a Faux Faulkner annual contest. So it is not insignificant that Rand's style is also the subject of parody. See King 1994.

4. In Robert Campbell's view (in a personal correspondence), there may be different responses in different disciplines. He states that he has never had any problem in academe when he has published articles that have referenced Rand. He notes: "Rand is just not a reference point for academic psychologists, and therefore not feared as a rival to anyone's formulations or threat to the visibility of somebody's research program. By contrast, I have caught major flak for citing Jean Piaget favorably."

5. This issue inspires a number of questions. For example: Does an author whose article on Rand is turned down by a particular journal have a right to assume that the reason is political? Might there not be other reasons an article is not accepted? Could it be that some authors explain their deficiencies as writers with excuses of prejudice? My experience with some of the partisan publication about

Rand is that it is deficient in those characteristics that define publishable scholarship. For instance, there is the issue of bibliography. Comprehensive bibliography should be the hallmark of publications issued by author institutes or societies. Yet, it was left to me, an independent scholar, to publish the most complete bibliographies on Rand. Also, it may be that works published by Rand-partisan groups do not go through the same rigorous refereeing as the blind refereeing practiced at most scholarly presses and journals. See Gladstein 1999, 96 for more detail on the lack of academic rigor evident in Ayn Rand Institute-sanctioned publications. A caveat: Independent publishers do not always assure scholarly-quality. The recent *CliffsNotes* editions of *Anthem*, *The Fountainhead*, and *Atlas Shrugged* (Bernstein 2000) evidence the same sort of self-referential bibliographic practices as ARI in-house publications. Under the heading of "Critical Works About Rand," there are only ARI-sanctioned works listed and those are not critical works. One can hardly claim that *Letters of Ayn Rand* is a critical work about her. I do not understand how the editors at IDG Books Worldwide allowed such an egregious lapse to occur. See Minsaas 2001 for a detailed review of these *CliffsNotes*.

6. When I began work on the *Companion*, I wrote Rand, sent her a copy of my earlier article and requested an interview. The response was a letter from her lawyer accusing me of temerity, copyright invasion, and equally heinous crimes. They threatened to sue me if I went on with my project. Since I had written little at that point, and since they had not seen anything of the *Companion*, I thought it bizarre to threaten copyright invasion and continued my work without the interview. It was my first clue to the problems attendant to writing about Rand.

7. Her attraction eludes me. It strikes me that she, like Kira Argounova, is an example of a woman who idolizes the wrong man. Kira, at least, has accomplishments, dreams, and goals of her own. She dies trying to fulfill them. Karen Andre's response to the loss of her lover is suicide.

8. This idea was developed later by Wilt (1999) and Hardie (1999) in their essays in *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand*. Chris Matthew Sciabarra also discusses this aspect of Rand's fiction in the conclusion of his five-part series on "Objectivism and Homosexuality." See Sciabarra 2002-03, 38-39.

9. Sciabarra's investigation of Rand's university course of study continues in Sciabarra 1999.

10. For purposes of this article, I am using the audio-cassette version of Minsaas's work. A printed text was not available during this writing.

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