

Ayn Rand in England

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Ayn Rand in England

Nicholas Dykes

Introduction

Ayn Rand's literary success and philosophical influence occurred mostly in the United States, but since her books were written in English it is natural to wonder how they have fared in England, the home of her adopted language. Given the ease with which so many novels, films, and television shows have crossed the Atlantic, in both directions, one might reasonably expect Rand to have enjoyed a similar success 'across the pond.'

It may thus be disappointing for Rand's American fans to learn that her work has had relatively little impact in Britain. Whereas most high school graduates in the U.S. will know of Rand and many will have read her novels, virtually none will have heard of her in England. Similarly in philosophy: while American professors of philosophy may dislike or scoff at Rand, they will at least know of her ideas. The same cannot be said of their British counterparts. Most tellingly, perhaps, while in 1991 the Library of Congress found *Atlas Shrugged* to be the most influential book after the Bible in twentieth-century U.S.A., a 2003 poll by the BBC for Britain's 100 best-loved novels featured no Rand title at all.¹

Nonetheless, over the decades, Rand's work has established a small but definite presence in Britain (though not an especially comfortable one, as we shall see). As one indication of this, virtually all the major bookstores in Britain still carry Rand's novels, or will obtain them in a day or two. Rand has also inspired groups of devoted followers; found her way into British studies in literary criticism and philosophical analysis; is listed in British guides to literature, film and philosophy; has indirectly influenced British politics; has featured from time to time on radio and television, and in 'Letters

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to the Editor' and, recently, has been the subject of lengthy and not necessarily unfavorable articles in the press.

1937–1947: Not the Warmest of Welcomes

The most valuable source of basic information about the publication of books in England is *The Bookseller*, a weekly magazine for publishers and booksellers established in 1858. As for book reviews, the best-known source is the venerable *Times Literary Supplement*, or *TLS*. It can be found in huge bound volumes in the larger public libraries, and more recently has become partly available online. Both *Bookseller* and *TLS* are well indexed, so they are the natural places to begin a search for references to any writer.

The first mention in England of Ayn Rand as an author came in *The Bookseller* on 6 January 1937, when *We the Living* was announced in their regular column "Forthcoming Books" (13). The novel was launched the next day by Cassell, a famous and old-established British publishing house, at the sum of eight shillings and sixpence, a fairly upmarket price in those days. The first review appeared in *The Spectator* (a conservative intellectual magazine) on 15 January 1937. The writer, William Plomer, was unimpressed:

One often wishes that writers would yield a little more to their satirical inclinations, and that goes for Miss Ayn Rand. From internal evidence one would guess her to be a middle-class White or Whitish Russian living in exile in America, and *We the Living* (a title of no particular significance) is so frankly counter-revolutionary that it ought to annoy readers of Red or Reddish sympathies. Writing, often graphically, of life in Leningrad in the 'twenties she seems anxious to show the corruption of those newly-raised to positions of authority. The story is simple. Kira, her bourgeoisie heroine, falls in love with a surviving young man of upper-class origins and White sympathies, and in order to get money to send him to the Crimea and so save him from tuberculosis she prostitutes herself to an admirer in the GPU. The difficulties of obtaining board and lodging during the period of the story are entered into at great length and with every appearance of verisimilitude: "Vasili sold the mosaic table from the drawing room . . . fifty million roubles and four pounds of lard. I

made an omelette with the egg powder we got at the cooperative.”

Miss Rand’s account of the social upset following the Revolution is detailed and likely enough; she makes a certain amount of rather bitter fun of the workings of the new bureaucracy and of the lapses of the new orthodox [sic] into such unorthodoxies as private trading. But towards Kira, who stands for individualism and those little things like scent and lipstick which Mean So Much to a woman, Miss Rand is altogether too partial. If Kira had played the game with nice Red Andrei instead of nasty White Leo (who had “a slow, contemptuous smile, and a swift gait, and in his hand a lost whip he had been born to carry”) we might have liked her better. Just listen to Miss Rand on Kira’s mouth: “When silent, it was cold, indomitable, and men thought of a Valkyrie with lance and winged helmet in the sweep of battle. But a slight movement made a wrinkle in the corners of her lips—and men thought of an imp perched on top of a toadstool, laughing into the faces of daisies.” What’s in a mouth? An opera, it seems, or a silly symphony. (98)

The novel was also reviewed, briefly, in the *TLS* on 27 February 1937. Given the literary temper of the times—Naturalism was in and Romanticism out, and T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf were regarded as great writers—the review is quite mild, and only mildly patronizing. It is chiefly interesting for the extent to which it misses the point of the novel. The reviewer is anonymous:

This is a long and elaborate story of Russian conditions during the period 1922–25 by a Russian woman who writes irreproachable English. It opens very promisingly with the account of a train journey, lasting a fortnight, from the Crimea to Petrograd. The opening, however, is easily the best thing in the book. Although there are occasional descriptions of a vivid and suggestive character still to come, the interest of things evidently witnessed and experienced at first hand is swamped by an inexhaustible flow of conventional romanticism. The chief source of trouble is the young heroine, Kira Argounova, who is all charm, wisdom, suffering, originality and so on. The temptation to make her as glamorous as possible was apparently hard to resist.

There follows a brief outline of the plot, including the rather quaint expression that Kira “was ready to count the world well lost” for Leo, before the all-too-brief review closes with: “The material at the author’s disposal afforded the opportunity for a more interesting and certainly more revealing story” (150).

I could not find any other reviews or information on how the book fared. Leonard Peikoff, in his “Introduction” to the Sixtieth Anniversary paperback edition, says that the book achieved “great success” in England. Cassell’s themselves would seem to have agreed, for in the company’s official history, *The House of Cassell*, there is this comment for 1937: “Another important novel which appeared in that year was *We The Living* by Ayn Rand” (Nowell-Smith 1958, 221). The sentence was probably written by the company’s then-retired Chief Editor, Arthur Hayward, who wrote the bulk of the chapter on the twentieth century, so the remark is doubly significant. As Chief Editor, Hayward would hardly call a book “important” if he did not think it merited such an assessment and, as a publisher, he would be unlikely to remember a book published twenty years before if it had not sold.

In any case, Cassell was evidently pleased with their new author for they accepted her next book the following year, even though Rand had been unable to find a publisher for it in the United States. *Anthem* was duly announced in *The Bookseller* and was published on 5 May 1938, once again at a fairly upmarket price for such a short book, six shillings. The again anonymous *TLS* review appeared two days later, but was even briefer than that of *We The Living*, more patronizing, and missed not just the point of the book but its beauty as a prose poem:

This is a fantasia with a moral. The moral is that the collective tyranny threatening us, whether labeled Communism, Fascism or less candidly, will kill not only freedom but most of man’s power to guide nature. In the world of the early chapters science is dead and candles are the best lights. Individuals are so merged in the People that the words “I” or “she” are unknown. It is “we” or “they.” The atavistic freak who tells the story was born into this uniform world, but

rebelled and escaped. To enable him to do so, with the “they” who in chapter 11 becomes “she,” details have to be treated carelessly, but fantasias are allowed to be fanciful. The title seems pure caprice. (321)

Unfortunately, *The Spectator* let the book pass unnoticed, and I have not been able to find any other reviews.

It was nine years before another Rand title allowed a third anonymous British reviewer to wield a waspish pen. Although *The Fountainhead* had begun its long journey to becoming an American classic in 1943, wartime exigencies delayed publication in England until 23 October 1947. Once again Cassell was the publisher, and once again brothers Newman and Desmond Flower, respectively Cassell’s Managing and Literary Director, pitched the book upmarket at the very respectable price of fifteen shillings. Three weeks later, on 15 November 1947, the *TLS* published a trademark, unflattering, missing-the-point review, lumped together under the title “Varieties of Complaint” with reviews of books by two other American authors, Ernest Brace and H. Allen Smith:

In spite of the loyalty drive, the “American way of life” remains a highly controversial topic inside, as well as outside, the United States, where dissatisfaction seems to be a prevailing mood. It is the only feature which these three books . . . have in common, and they are all too manifestly commercial fiction to be treated as significant . . . In some respects *The Fountainhead* belongs rather to the category of Americana than to responsible fiction. It is an immensely long romance, thickly padded with concrete, about a preposterous scarlet-haired architect named (perhaps on account of his habit of roaring hoarsely) Howard Roark. He is one of those overpoweringly natural home-grown geniuses who set every man against them at the drop of a hat. His love affair with Dominique Francon, a supercharged succubus who writes an architectural gossip-column, reaches peaks of Ouida-esque absurdity. They do not make love; they “violate,” “abomi-

nate” and “desecrate” each other. Dominique is, herself, the daughter of an immensely successful venal architect, of the kind not averse to defacing the “clean lines” of skyscraper or factory with Gothic incrustations and rings of Tudor roses to gratify the whims of Philistine clients. It is a kind which constitutes the natural enemies of Roark, over whom he triumphs only after terrible vicissitudes. A precise idea of Roark’s own style is hard to obtain, but he obviously sponsors an avant-garde school of ultra-functional, skeletal modernism. . . .

And yet, in spite of all its pretentiousness and affectation, its total humourlessness, the book does impart a feeling of sincerity, a genuine concern for architecture. And although Miss Rand only creates gargoyles, not characters, she contrives from somewhere a surprising amount of readability. (589)

Rand certainly fared better in terms of space than the other two writers, who got a half, and a quarter, as many words, respectively; and she was spared this comment about Brace, reading whom was “like eating a partly woolly apple.”

And that, I’m afraid, is that. I was not able to find any other reviews or any direct information about *The Fountainhead*’s progress. It is worth noting here that best-seller lists did not come into vogue in Britain until 1974. British publishers thought books should complement one another, not compete, and looked rather askance at the Darwinian struggle in America for the coveted #1 best-seller spot (Sutherland 2002, 83). However, as in the U.S., *The Fountainhead* does seem to have sold itself by word of mouth. A 1994 paperback edition in the possession of U.K. Objectivist John Webb asserts that the book has been reprinted twenty times, apparently referring to U.K. editions. And, as already noted, the book is still in print and available anywhere in Britain today.

The Mystery of *Atlas Shrugged*

Having found announcements and reviews in *The Bookseller* and *The Times Literary Supplement* for Rand's first three novels without difficulty, I pressed ahead to 1957 confident of finding the same for *Atlas Shrugged*. There was nothing. Again and again I went over indexes and leafed through pages thinking I must have missed something. But of the two A. Rands listed, one wrote for children and the other about New Guinea. Thus, Ayn Rand's most important novel seems to have arrived in England without any fanfare whatsoever. Eventually, I did find a reference in a *Bookseller* article on 25 January 1958 to the effect that *Atlas* was featured on the *New York Times* best-seller list; otherwise, there was silence.

I next got in touch with Random House U.K., but they advised that they did not have a London office in 1957. On my behalf, they contacted Random House New York, who regretted that they had no information to hand—all their old records were archived at Columbia University. I then tried Curtis-Brown, Rand's agents, who have a large London office. They kindly went through their present files, but found only a note about a Spanish translation. They added that all their inactive files were in a suburban warehouse, inaccessible and confidential.

Michelle Marder Kamhi then came to my rescue, kindly agreeing to visit Columbia and have a look through the Random House and Curtis-Brown Ltd. Manuscript Collections in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Alas, two visits and several hours' work yielded very little information. The most significant document she found was a letter on 27 July 1956 from Rand's agent at Curtis-Brown, Alan Collins, who wrote that the London C-B office was "pleading" for a duplicate copy of the *Atlas* manuscript for Cassell since sale in England would be helped by a publication date close to the American one. Cassell must have assumed that, having published Rand's first three novels, they would be offered her new one. Unfortunately, this did not take place. If it had, the information would have appeared in *The Bookseller*. Random House must rather have elected merely to enter into a distribution agreement with another British publisher.

Two further documents discovered by Kamhi seem to confirm

this. On 17 September 1979, Curtis-Brown wrote Rand that New English Library (NEL) was interested in the hardcover rights to all Rand's novels because it already distributed the paperback edition of *Atlas Shrugged* in the U.K. However, on 16 June 1980, Perry Knowlton of C-B wrote that Simon Scott of NEL had failed to convince his colleagues to issue hardcover editions of the novels though they would continue as paperback distributor.

Why Random House should shun Cassell, who had done far more for Rand than her previous American publishers, Macmillan and Bobbs-Merrill, is a total mystery. One can only hope that documents will someday be discovered that shed light on the matter. That said, Cassell's Flower brothers may actually have seen the manuscript and decided, as did some U.S. publishers, that it was too rich for their blood. They were after all pretty 'establishment' figures, Newman having been knighted Sir Newman the year after he published *We The Living* (I doubt any connection!). However, that is pure speculation. Of course, at the end of the day, it doesn't really matter. *Atlas Shrugged* still sells in Britain nearly fifty years after its original publication and, as we shall see, perhaps excites more attention today than it did in 1957.

The Fountainhead: The Movie

The Warner Brothers film version of *The Fountainhead* seems to have been released in England not long after its Hollywood premiere in July 1949. The *Spectator* review (2 September 1949) was hardly sympathetic:

The Fountainhead is a pretentious film with characters who speak in riddles with tremendous gravity and whose search for personal integrity is carried on without one relieving ray of humour. The message this film has to offer is that the creative man must at all costs be true to himself, absolutely and always; that on no occasion must he sacrifice his ideals to the community.

Mr Gary Cooper, as solemn as fifty owls, is the architect of

genius who on finding that in his absence his recently-erected buildings have been tampered with to conform to popular taste, blows them up with dynamite. It was indeed courageous of Mr King Vidor, the director, to show us so many of Mr Cooper's architectural feats, for though it is true they have no bearing on the ethical problem in hand, they are so very dreadful that with the best will in the world one cannot but dread the day when architects with as rampant an individualism as his will be given their freedom. In a way this is an interesting film and the cause it pleads is a worthy one, but however true it is that the real artist only creates to please himself and is therefore a supreme egotist, and however true it is that the community-spirit requires a man to sacrifice his ideals; it cannot be necessary to propound these truths with such intense solemnity. The photography, the music and the extraordinarily unnatural dialogue aid each other in creating an atmosphere of sombre harshness more suited to high melodrama, and neither Miss Patricia Neal, who incomprehensibly marries Mr Raymond Massey so that Mr Cooper, who loves her, shall not get hurt, nor Mr Robert Douglas, who has a sinister power-complex, bring any fresh air to the general suffocation. Integrity is a sacred thing no doubt, but one can die for it without a two-hours memorial service. (295)

Despite the negative review, the film seems to have done quite well in Britain (perhaps not many cinema goers at that time read the highbrow *Spectator*). Barbara Branden, in her superb biography *The Passion of Ayn Rand*, draws attention to a *Variety* report from 1950: "Politically intriguing is the word from London that the 'The Fountainhead,' which preaches rugged individualism, is mopping up in the United Kingdom's industrial areas, where the government is nationalising the steel industry" (Branden [1986] 1987, 212).

Just as Rand's novel keeps being reprinted, so the film version of *The Fountainhead* reappears every few years as a late-night movie on British TV. The critics who write the listing blurbs are usually

dismissive, but this one by George Perry in *The Sunday Times* (Culture section, 22 August 1993) is reasonably sympathetic:

There are not many films where the hero is an uncompromising modern architect, but this spirited and excessive version of Ayn Rand's novel has Gary Cooper as an eccentric genius who dynamites a housing project because his plans have been altered. . . . The ending, with Cooper standing atop the uncompleted world's tallest building awaiting [Patricia] Neal's ascent in the open hoist, is one of cinema's finest kitsch moments. (39)

The film has also found its way into several British film guides, though the compilers' reviews are seldom friendly. Vide this one from the *Timeout Film Guide*: "The most bizarre movie in both Vidor's and Cooper's filmographies, this adaptation mutes Ms Rand's neo-Nietzschean philosophy of Objectivism but lays on the expressionist symbolism with a 'free enterprise' trowel . . . as berserk as it sounds" (Pym 2003, 417). Another, *Halliwel's Film & Video Guide*, opines: "Overripe adaptation of a rather silly novel, full of Freudian symbols and expressionist techniques with which the star really can't cope, but an enjoyable field day for the director and the rest of the cast." It then quotes the *Timeout* review above but, to provide some balance, contrasts it with a favorable one from *Screenland*: "If you like deep thinking, hidden meanings, plus pure modern architecture, then this is something for which you have been waiting for a long time" (Walker 2002, 304).

Halliwel's also makes up for its "silly" insult by including a relatively long entry on Rand in their *Who's Who in the Movies*. This covers her film career in some detail and includes a real gem from the producer Henry Blanke: "She told us she would blow up the Warner Brothers lot if we changed one word, and we believed her. Even Jack Warner believed her" (Walker 2003, 385). The article undoes further harm by closing with the line from Roark's courtroom speech that was cut from the final version of the film without Rand's knowledge: "I wished to come here and say that I am a man who does not exist for

others” (cf. Branden [1986] 1987, 212).

Another interesting aspect of the film’s treatment in movie guides is an entry in *The Radio Times Guide to Films*: “This entertaining adaptation by Ayn Rand of her novel . . .”—which seems to suggest that the reader should be familiar with Rand. Alas, the review soon turns nasty: “The script is a crazed cocktail of stilted dialogue, libertarian platitudes and unhinged innuendo. Not quite qualifying as bizarre, the film certainly operates on its own near-ridiculous level . . .” (Fane-Saunders 2003, 511).

The Dorling Kinderley anthology *Cinema Yearby Year: 1894–2003* has also added a substantial reference, including a contemporary review date-lined New York, 8 July 1949, plus an attractive photo of Cooper and Neal (Karney 2003, 388).

Not all reviewers have disliked the film. David Thomson, in his *New Biographical Dictionary of Film*, mentions *The Fountainhead* respectfully no less than seven times in his biography of King Vidor, and concludes: “It is a tragedy that Vidor . . . is not more widely recognized. *The Fountainhead* is one of the most beautiful and mysterious of films” (Thomson 2003, 899–900).

A further point worth noting is that the several architects and architectural librarians I spoke to in the course of my research had either seen the film, or had read, or were familiar with, Rand’s novel. The movie version also seems to have embedded itself in the vocabulary of architectural critics. Writing in *The Times* (22 July 2003, Arts Section, 18), Tom Dyckhoff used the film to kick off an attack on British architecture, which is “hopelessly outdated” and “riddled with institutional racism and sexism.”

“HAVE YOU EVER seen the movie *The Fountainhead* (1949)?” he begins,

King Vidor’s adaptation of Ayn Rand’s hysterical anti-communist novel is the only Hollywood film about architecture, and the only one to make staircase design the least bit exciting. But it’s the hyperbolic image of the macho architect that’s most ridiculous. The hero, Howard Roark, is played by Gary Cooper as a modern-day lone frontiersman, armed only

with a pencil, bravely setting off to deliver Modernism to a Conservative mob who'd rather have pediments and pilasters. The love interest (Patricia Neal) is, naturally, irresistibly drawn to Roark's erections . . . *The Fountainhead's* camp melodrama is risible. But its stereotype of the heroic architect . . . isn't that ridiculous at all . . .

The piece concludes: "A new type of architect needs to be born. And it'll be nothing like Gary Cooper." A huge picture, over a foot high, of Gary Cooper drilling in the quarry illustrates the article.

Though it is not relevant to *The Fountainhead* movie, there is an interesting reference to Rand in Tony Shaw's study *British Cinema and the Cold War*, which describes and quotes from her pamphlet *Screen Guide for Americans* (Shaw 2001, 168).²

The Fans

Rand being largely unknown in Britain, British readers tend to discover her work by word of mouth or by accident. John Webb came across a copy of *The Fountainhead* about 1980 without ever having heard of its author. Fifteen-year-old Chris Tame found descriptions of Rand's books in a publisher's catalogue and instantly thought 'this is for me.' Writer/engineer Kevin McFarlane, then "not remotely a libertarian," heard the name Ayn Rand in a song by the Canadian pop group Rush, so was intrigued when he saw one of her books in a shop. British historian Stephen Davies, a major contributor to the Independent Institute's *The Voluntary City*, has written: "By the age of 17 I had already decided that I had 'right' views on economics, 'left' views on social issues. Then [I discovered] . . . two authors who not only introduced me to a whole new world of ideas but also clarified my own beliefs. One was . . . Robert A. Heinlein. . . . The other author, whom I discovered quite by chance, was Ayn Rand. Her books . . . had a shattering impact on me" (Seldon 1985, 27). As for myself, a copy of *Anthem* found by chance on a friend's bookshelf in Montreal in 1963 radically altered the course of my life.

The most important Rand fan in Britain has undoubtedly been Chris Tame. He has not just been an admirer; he has translated his

admiration into action and has been beating the drum for Rand and Objectivism for over 30 years. His longest-lasting achievement was to found the British Libertarian Alliance (LA) in 1967–68. In a *Full Context* interview, Tame (2001) said: “Virtually everyone who was involved with me in establishing the LA was either Objectivist or had been overwhelmingly converted to Libertarianism by Objectivism. Indeed, there was some talk about making it an explicitly Objectivist body, but we decided against that on the very clear tactical view that there were always going to be more general Libertarians than Objectivists.” Tame also pointed to a significant difference between Rand’s influence in America and Britain: “[T]he whole influence of Objectivism in Britain seems to have been different. The British Libertarian movement imbibed Objectivism as part of its general outlook. . . . So there are lots of people influenced by Objectivism, who are Objectivists in fact, but who don’t call themselves Objectivists, or think of themselves as such. Its influence has been far more diffuse here” (5).

Historically, the LA’s greatest significance was its influence on the British Conservative Party in Margaret Thatcher’s early years. Asked if Rand, via the Libertarian Alliance, had influenced the creation of Thatcherism, Tame answered:

Yes. But in the broadest sense. Not through influencing Thatcher herself, but by influencing a whole generation of people who flocked to her banner. But those people were also influenced by Arthur Seldon, the Institute of Economic Affairs, Milton Friedman, Hayek, von Mises, Murray Rothbard and so on . . . (6)

During its existence, the Libertarian Alliance has published some 700 pamphlets and booklets by dozens of different authors, and recently a full-length book. In 1979, Tame wrote a brief essay discussing Rand’s ideas, the first to be published in a book on politics in the U.K.: “It was supposed to be part of a Conservative Party election campaign. Sir Keith Joseph, who was one of the more intellectual supporters of Margaret Thatcher . . . wanted to have a book of ideological pro-free-enterprise essays put out to coincide with her first

election campaign as Conservative leader. The book was called *The Case for Private Enterprise* and I was asked to write one of the essays. I wrote 'The Moral Case for Private Enterprise' which expounded Objectivism. Unfortunately, the publishers were so inefficient they managed not to publish the book till after the election. But she won anyway!" (7)³

Tame's essay, expounding the 'virtue of selfishness,' horrified many British Conservatives. There is just as deep a moral divide between Conservatives and Randians in Britain as there is in the United States. One consequence was a debate in the Conservative magazine *The Free Nation* between Tame and Michael Ivens, head of Aims for Industry, an influential, pro-market businessmen's organization. Ivens took sharp exception to anyone calling selfishness moral and, during some rather incoherent criticism of Tame's essay, disparaged Rand as "that tiresome woman," and as "a debased Nietzschean" who wrote "unattractive and superficial books" of which Ivens had read "as much . . . as I can stand." Tame answered calmly and rationally and won the debate hands down. One reader wrote to the editor: "It was unfair of you to pit Michael Ivens against so clear a thinker as Chris Tame." Another wrote: "In his last contribution to the Grand Rand Debate Michael Ivens states that his case rests. Alas, it seems to be resting on its back, with its legs waving feebly in the air!" (Tame [1979] 1985, 4).

Another important English fan of Ayn Rand is Yorkshireman John Webb, who took over as President of the U.K. Objectivist Association from its founder, Godfrey Joseph, about ten years ago. The Association has about 100 members, 60 of whom are linked online. The UKOA, which has its own Web site under that acronym, was founded circa 1980.⁴

Literary Guides

Given the widespread ignorance of Rand's work in Britain, literary guides are especially important. TV night owls struck by Roark's courtroom speech while watching *The Fountainhead* might easily head for their local library to find out more about her. Fortunately, there is a reasonable chance they will find at least some of what they are

looking for—Rand does feature in several British literary guides. Sadly, however, the entries are usually neither particularly accurate nor especially friendly.

The Oxford Companion to 20th Century Literature in English is typical. *We the Living*, it states, was “largely dismissed by the critics, as was *Anthem* (1938) a futuristic fantasy.” The piece continues: “A self-styled philosopher who attempted, through her fiction, to theorize her belief in the supremacy of rationalism, individualism, and entrepreneurial capitalism, Rand built her reputation on the enormous popular success of her novels *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957). Her works appealed to the imagination not only of a mass readership but of a group of intellectuals who detected in her narratives the seeds of a right-wing ideology of monetarism and hegemony. After 1957 she abandoned fiction in pursuit of a quasi-academic career.” Barbara Branden’s biography is mentioned as is “a novel by Mary Gaitskill, *Two Girls, Fat and Thin* (1991), [which] skilfully satirizes [Rand’s] theories and considerable influence” (Strupe 1996, 558).

Another, *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*, refers to *Night of January 16th* as a “mystery play,” which is mysterious indeed. Rand’s later works “show her deep concern with the theme of extreme individualism” which is fair enough. However, *The Fountainhead* is “a long biographical novel” ostensibly “modelled” on Frank Lloyd Wright. *For the New Intellectual* presents “her theory of Objectivism, which is antiromantic and antialtruistic in its fervent appeal to a code of ‘rational self-interest’” (Hart 1983, 625). Rand, antiromantic?!

Some entries suggest a complete lack of familiarity with Rand’s work. For example, the brief entry in *Cassell’s Encyclopaedia of World Literature* describes her novels as “somewhat sentimental packages of life” (Buchanan-Brown 1973, 384). What!?

Rand also features in some British guides to science fiction. *The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction* has a reasonable entry, though inaccurate and hardly enthusiastic: “Her ‘objectivist’ philosophy, as expounded in most of her work, had an influence in the USA mainly during the 1950s, and mainly upon college students, for whom her arguments about the need for rational self-interest, against altruism, and about the SUPERMAN [sic] potential within us may have seemed particularly

compelling” (Nicholls 1979, 490).

In W. Armytage’s *Yesterday’s Tomorrows*, a survey of ‘future societies,’ Rand earned a one-page section more or less to herself. “The New Right: Ayn Rand” begins: “Dark pictures of tomorrow are thrown up by Ayn Rand . . .” and includes short accounts of *Anthem* and *Atlas* and good quotes from Galt’s Speech. Galt himself is described rather oddly as “a post-Christian secularist” (Armytage 1968, 188–89). *The Good Fiction Guide* also treats Rand more or less as a science fiction writer. True to current British form, it is dreadfully inaccurate but, happily, ends with some rare praise: “However you orient yourself to the political implications of Rand’s work, its moral verve and vivid sense of heroism demand admiration” (Page 2001, 403).

To conclude here on a further more friendly note, we turn to John Sutherland’s highly enjoyable history of British bestsellers, *Reading the Decades*. Taking us through the period 1945–59, Sutherland writes: “In 1957–58, three heavyweight novels fought it out at the top of the charts. The most influential, in terms of ideas, was Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged*. Rand, a youthful exile from the Soviet Union, loathed everything that had happened in her native country since 1917. Her book is a ferocious vindication of market capitalism. Vaguely science fiction, and overwhelmingly a treatise, it fantasizes the ‘wealth creators’ of America . . . going on strike. They will no longer, like Atlas, carry the load” (45–46).⁵ Charmingly, Sutherland later uses Rand’s title in a literary allusion. When discussing Terry Pratchett, whose Discworld is supported on the back of four giant elephants standing on the back of a giant space turtle, he quips: “Unlike Atlas, the turtle never shrugs” (155).

Literary Criticism: Colin Wilson

The only literary *study* of Ayn Rand by an English writer I have come across is the essay, “The Work of Ayn Rand” by Colin Wilson, an English novelist, critic and philosopher. In the early 1960s, while lecturing in the U.S., Wilson was asked what he thought about Ayn Rand. He didn’t. He hadn’t heard of her. Someone obliged with copies of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas*: “I opened *The Fountainhead*—

and was immediately put off by the rhetorical tone of its opening page. . . . I turned to *Atlas Shrugged*. Then I remembered I had seen some of this book before. A correspondent had sent me its last hundred pages: an immensely long radio speech by a man called John Galt. . . . I had found it too wordy and had given it up. So when, after lectures, students asked my opinion of Ayn Rand I was inclined to be dismissive—a typical female writer, a kind of modern Marie Corelli,⁶ much given to preaching and grandiose language” (Wilson 1965, 210).

A year later, confined to bed with flu, Wilson made another attempt to read *Atlas*: “This time I persisted beyond the first twenty pages, determined to give it a fair trial. The result was that I read the book from cover to cover in two days and immediately followed it with *The Fountainhead*. I had to admit I had done Miss Rand a considerable injustice. . . . [O]ne thing was immediately obvious from *Atlas Shrugged*. Miss Rand has the ability to tell a story, and she can tell it with the minimum of clichés. . . . Ayn Rand’s book has a romantic sweep, an undeniable grandeur, and one is not surprised to learn that one of her favourite writers is Victor Hugo. . . . There is no doubt that this book is an astounding feat, and deserved to become a best-seller on the strength of its narrative power alone. Its picture of a collapsing society has a kind of *Götterdämmerung* splendour, like an erupting volcano. One reads it with a kind of destructive delight, as one goes to see films depicting monstrous disasters” (211–12).

Further on, Wilson comments: “It seems to me that Miss Rand is a writer of extraordinary perception—probably of genius. Like Shaw, she instinctively recoils from the decadence and pessimistic romanticism of our age, and declares that the motor of society is individual greatness, not ‘the wisdom of the majority.’ One cannot help admiring the way in which she has stood alone for more than twenty-five years, preaching her own revolt against nihilism” (215). Later, Wilson again acknowledges Rand’s courage: “It takes a person of quite exceptional character to live in opposition to the whole trend and metaphysic of the age, and not to be broken or embittered” (217). However, he remains unconvinced by her thinking and spends several pages elaborating what he thinks wrong with Rand’s position.

While it is gratifying to find a well-known and successful British

author praising Ayn Rand, there is nonetheless much to criticize in Wilson's essay. Unfortunately, space does not permit more than two brief comments. First, Wilson seems to have missed something rather obvious. In another essay in the collection, he laments: "In all twentieth-century literature there is not one true portrait of a hero" (34). He elaborates further on: "No creator has appeared who can face the political and spiritual chaos of our time and produce a positive, heroic, sympathetic figure who is not swamped by it all" (53). But, surely, if Rand did nothing else, did she not create 'positive, heroic figures' such as Roark, Dagny and Galt who were *not* 'swamped by it all'?

Second, although Wilson is, or was at that time, an Existentialist, there are intriguing hints in his essays of some points of agreement with Objectivism. He is bitterly critical, for instance, of the modern "denial of the importance of the individual" (73 and *passim*). In his Introduction, he writes: "We are still soaked in the Platonic world-rejection, which is the worst part of our Christian heritage; hence modern pessimism" (20). Earlier he had written of detecting a change, a hint of optimism: "William Blake was perhaps the first expression of the new spirit: the rejection of the dualism, the assertion that spirit and matter are somehow in this struggle together, and that to separate them is no solution" (19). Elsewhere Wilson writes in almost Objectivist terms: "The existential critic challenges the author's overall sense of life" (68) and "to be conscious is to be conscious of something" (43).

Philosophy: Guides and Introductions

The general failure of the British literary establishment to take serious note of Rand's novels is matched by the failure of British philosophy departments to consider her ideas. Happily, there are a few exceptions. For instance, Rand's name does occasionally crop up in footnotes. There is a reference to *The Virtue of Selfishness* as "a recent defense of egoism" in David Miller's *Anarchism* (1984), which notes: "Strictly speaking Rand's position is minimal-statist rather than anarchist but she has influenced a number of latter-day anarcho-individualists" (187).

In the mid-1980s, Rand did more than ‘feature in the footnotes.’ A group of twenty young writers “mustered” by Arthur Seldon of the Institute of Economic Affairs, London’s well-known free market think-tank, and “heralded” by F. A. Hayek, published a collection of essays celebrating the demise of socialism and the revival of classical liberalism and libertarianism, under the title *The New Right Enlightenment* (Seldon 1986). More than a quarter of the essays contain respectful references to Rand, acknowledging her influence both personally and generally on the rebirth of libertarian thought, some running to 200 words or more.

Moving on to philosophical guides, the good news is that the latest edition of the popular *Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* has an entry on Rand, albeit short and almost caustic: “American writer of Russian origin. Her so-called philosophy of objectivism condemns altruism and extolls selfishness and individual achievement” (Mautner 2000, 469).

The *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, written by Chandran Kukathas,⁷ is more generous: “Ayn Rand was a Russian-born US novelist and philosopher who exerted considerable influence in the conservative and libertarian intellectual movements in the post-war USA. Rand’s ideas were expressed mainly through her novels; she set forth a view of morality as based in rational self interest and in political philosophy defended an unrestrained form of capitalism” (Kukathas 2000, 738).

More intriguing is Rand’s inclusion in an apparently popular modern British introduction to philosophy first published in 1991 (third edition 1999) co-written by a Cambridge philosopher, Jenny Teichman. Alas, the several mentions of Rand are marred by inaccuracies. The most glaring is the lumping together of Rand with Robert Nozick: “The American author Robert Nozick has been deeply influenced by the political philosophy of Ayn Rand” (128). Nozick is even referred to as a “disciple of Ayn Rand” (264). These statements clearly conflict with the published record. Nozick certainly studied Rand, and called her two major novels “exciting, powerful, illuminating and thought-provoking” and her “an interesting thinker, worthy of attention” (Nozick 1971, 299). But, by his own account, he

was drawn to philosophy as a teenager by Plato's *Republic* and to libertarianism by the work of Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek., and by conversations with Murray Rothbard. His actual response to Rand's work was to reject it very publicly in his article "On the Randian Argument."

A pleasing aspect of the book is the "Philosophy Today" section where Rand is given three times more space than widely recognized philosophers such as Kuhn, Nagel, Nozick, Quine, Strawson, Popper and Ryle. Here again, however, errors of fact and interpretation mute one's cheers. For example, it is asserted that Rand "studied philosophy" in America, and was a "trained philosopher"—neither is accurate—and that her ideas were expressed in a "regular journal" called the "Ayn Rand Newsletter." The novels are not mentioned. Rand is also referred to as a "dualist," a very mistaken choice of term (Teichman 1999, 261).

Philosophy: Norman Barry

The only full-length discussion of Rand's work by a British philosopher of which I am aware is by a professor of political philosophy, Norman P. Barry, in his book *On Classical Liberalism and Libertarianism*. Rand's ideas are the subject of a 23-page chapter, "Ayn Rand and Egoism" (Barry 1986, 108)⁸ and are also referred to in the Introduction and in other chapters, such as those on Nozick and Rothbard.

Barry begins impartially and accurately: "Although Ayn Rand (1905–82) is scarcely known in Europe either as a philosopher or novelist, for many years her work dominated the small group of libertarian thinkers who operated largely outside the [U.S.] academic social science community." He correctly notes that Rand never wrote a formal treatise on political philosophy, and that her views "while constituting a coherent whole, have to be reconstructed from her essays and occasional pieces" (108). He adds: "This, and her overly combative and extremely dogmatic style, has no doubt contributed to the neglect of her work." Barry also correctly draws attention to the importance of including Rand's novels in any study of her work since they include graphic illustrations of her ideas, and points to "John

Galt's famous speech" as "perhaps the most accessible representation of Miss Rand's philosophical outlook" (109).

Her political philosophy is summarized reasonably well in Part II. Problems begin in Part III. Although he does point to some genuine problems, Barry is neither as objective nor as accurate as his calm presentation suggests. For instance, he writes: "Rand's epistemology defies classification into either empiricist or rationalist categories—although ultimately it could be said that it consists of little more than a series of rationalist assertions. Our knowledge of the world is acquired *through* concepts which are prior to all experience; yet knowledge itself is *a posteriori*; acquired through a cognitive process. There are no innate ideas, even reason itself is an acquired faculty" (112). No references are given for this rather breathtaking muddle. We are led to believe that it represents Rand's thinking but, like other passages in the chapter, it has little to do with Rand at all.

The passage begins with a true enough statement: Rand's epistemology does indeed "defy classification." It is neither purely empiricist nor purely rationalist. But Barry fails to notice that what is so interesting about Rand's epistemology is that it is an *integration* of the two classical, and opposed, systems. She *defies* the analytic-synthetic dichotomy and shows that both inference from observation, or induction, and reasoning from established premises, or deduction, are equally essential elements in the acquisition of knowledge. As Ronald Merrill's brilliant analogy expressed it: "Like the two blades of a pair of scissors, these modes of thinking do together what neither can do alone" (Merrill 1991, 97). To describe Rand's carefully reasoned integration of the two traditionally contending doctrines as "a series of rationalist assertions" is absurd.

Secondly, Rand never said that knowledge was acquired *through* concepts, nor suggested that our concepts were *a priori*. Rand's position is that the building blocks of knowledge are initially obtained from the external world through our *senses*, through observation. The material so gathered is then organized into concepts according to defining characteristics and *stored* as knowledge, but subject to constant accretion and/or revision—concepts are open-ended. New knowledge can certainly be discovered from the analysis of existing concepts, but

that does not imply that knowledge is obtained *through* concepts, as if they were a kind of Kantian sixth sense.

Thirdly, Rand never held that “reason itself is an acquired faculty,” it is a faculty we are *born* with, man’s distinctive means of survival. Lastly, to say “Our knowledge of the world is acquired *through* concepts which are prior to all experience; yet knowledge itself is *a posteriori*; acquired through a cognitive process” besides being totally non-Randian, is a flat out contradiction, something Rand was generally rather good at avoiding.

Barry later asserts that “Rand’s epistemology is *authoritarian*” (115), adding that “absolutist theories of truth encourage absolutism in politics” (116) and concludes that while Rand’s social philosophy is “individualist and liberal,” it is “not difficult to see how a collectivist ethic could be derived from certain premises which are themselves asserted to be *absolutely* true” (116), a charge repeated in different terms later in the essay (129). Barry does not explain why it is ‘easy to see’ this; he just leaves his readers to cope with the insinuation by themselves. An immediate response, of course, is that you cannot derive a collectivist ethic from the law of identity via a noncontradictory process of reasoning. Rand knew how to reason—she was not nicknamed Mrs. Logic for nothing—and her reasoning led to individual rights, not to collectivism.

Although I am as critical of Barry as he is of Rand, I do not wish to leave readers with the impression that his work is valueless. Far from it. The book as a whole is well worth reading and the chapter on Rand shows how difficult it can be for philosophers to get to grips with Rand when they both come from a completely different background and also have to cope with the scattered sources of Rand’s views and the unphilosophical manner in which they are often expressed.

Radio and Television

Besides pamphlets and regular conferences, the Libertarian Alliance often provides speakers for media discussion shows. Chris Tame, Sean Gabb, Brian Micklethwait, and others, have made over 1000 appearances on television and radio during which Rand and her

philosophy have been mentioned regularly. Probably the most significant instance occurred on 22 July 1996 when Tame was the featured guest on a half-hour Channel 4 TV show called “If I Were Prime Minister.” Another important broadcast was Helen Mirren’s 1999 interview on “Women’s Hour,” one of the oldest continuously running shows on BBC radio. Mirren had been nominated for an Emmy for her performance in *The Passion of Ayn Rand* and during her 20-minute slot spoke a great deal about her fascination for Rand. Tame was also a guest on the program, and talked with Mirren about Rand for approximately seven minutes.

Earlier broadcast references to Rand include a ’60s radio interview with Mickey Spillane. The interviewer had been expecting a Mike Hammer tough guy, but Spillane came across as both literate and lucid and, to the delight of every Rand fan in the country, said he made it a practice to re-read *Atlas Shrugged* every year. Another American visitor to sing Rand’s praises while being interviewed on radio was guitarist Duane Eddy.⁹

In the 1980s, while Arthur Seldon was mustering his New Right writers, Channel 4 TV was putting together a six-part television series on the same subject, *The New Enlightenment* (aired 12 November–17 December 1986). It was co-produced by one of Seldon’s contributors, Peter Clarke, and later turned into a book. Chris Tame perhaps set the tone for the series by writing the script outline: Rand and her ideas were introduced in two of the shows, and on three occasions altogether. In the first, Rand was named as a refugee along with Mises, Hayek, Polanyi and Popper: “a remarkable woman . . . who had come from the Soviet Union to the USA in 1926. She found success through her novels . . . which had a great impact in America, and in the 1970s a growing band of young academics started to develop her ideas” (Graham and Clarke 1986, 11). The second reference was: “The novelist Ayn Rand used to call popular films and TV ‘bootleg romanticism,’ by which she meant that they carried profound meanings frowned upon by the intellectual establishment” (82). The speaker then elaborated, siding with Rand against academic critics of popular culture.

The third reference gave Rand several minutes of screen time and

a very fair hearing. It began:

A few people suggest other uses for the moral space that liberalism provides. One of them is Ayn Rand. As we have seen, she was a Russian émigré who wrote popular novels, like *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), which proved astonishingly popular. But she was loathed by most of the academic world. She attempted to reformulate, in her novels and essays, the natural rights of John Locke. Her philosophy is one of “ethical egoism.” It proclaims the “virtues of selfishness,” vindicating the rights of individuals to exist and to act for their own primary good. (84)

Lastly, responding to a big newspaper story we will look at shortly, a ten-minute slot on Rand was broadcast on 13 August 2002 by the BBC’s flagship television news review program, *Newsnight*. The piece, which was accurate and fair, described Rand’s novels and ideas, played music by the Rand-influenced rock band Rush, and briefly interviewed Objectivist philosopher David Kelley.

The Press: Letters to the Editor

Writing letters to newspapers has long been recognized as a useful way of spreading ideas and U.K. Rand fans have made letter writing an integral part of their advocacy of Objectivism and/or of libertarian ideas, succeeding many times in having their letters published. Space permits only one example, when Chris Tame leapt to the defense of Rand who had been unfairly criticized by Desmond S. King in a review of S.L. Newman’s book, *Liberalism at Wit’s End* in the *Times Literary Supplement* (14 June 1985, 657). King wrote: “The main difficulty with Newman’s book is that he treats the different versions of libertarianism with equal intellectual seriousness, which is clearly inappropriate when it means comparing the work of Nozick and Hayek with the rambling novels of Ayn Rand. Where the latter has a dangerously romantic view of the ‘heroic Entrepreneur’ operating in the market place, the former attempt to advance coherent and internally consistent arguments as to why freedom is maximised in the market . . .”

Tame riposted (28 June 1985, 723) by pointing out that “Rand’s thought is probably more ambitious than that of either Hayek or Nozick. . . . Her attempt to construct a neo-Aristotelian system of natural rights and rational egoism . . . is as impressive as anything in either of these writers.” David Ashton also responded, protesting against King’s views with equal force and at much greater length:

Whatever may be thought of [Rand’s] ideas, narrative or style . . . “rambling” must be one of the least appropriate adjectives for the schematic plot-structures and symbolic characterisations so carefully patterned according to strict principles. . . . Her stories have been attacked as melodramatic, grandiloquent, “uncharitable,” evil or merely boring, but the suggestion that they wander incoherently from one episode to another is as ridiculously untrue as the description of her ultra-libertarian philosophy—by a well-known “guide” to twentieth-century authors—as “totalitarian.” (723)

It is interesting to note that Ashton is not an Objectivist, but a Conservative who apparently responded to Rand’s egoism with a certain amount of “intellectual discomfort.” In defending Rand, he was merely acting as an honest and knowledgeable man trying to put right an obvious injustice.

The Press: Melanie McGrath

Out of the blue, on 2 August 1997, a huge article about Ayn Rand—“For life, liberty and the pursuit of money” (8 tabloid pages, 50 percent covered by large photographs)—appeared in the most unlikely place: the weekend magazine of *The Guardian*, a daily newspaper which was one of the main intellectual bases of British Socialism for most of the twentieth century.¹⁰

McGrath evidently did her research thoroughly and treats Rand far more fairly than many American commentators have in the past. Much of the article consists of a lively presentation of Rand’s life, novels and ideas. McGrath is nonetheless ambivalent about Rand. She respects her achievements, but the truths she recounts are sometimes

slanted and her piece is tinged with misleading expressions, jokeyness and occasional ridicule.

McGrath begins with the scene in Rand's apartment when Rand and Nathaniel Branden announce their "rational" affair to their shocked and bemused spouses. She next skims over Rand's impact in the U.S. and lists some of her fans, then comments: "In Britain, she is less well-known—so far. For those who have heard of her, she's either the goddess of *laissez-faire* or a neo-fascist nutter." As to McGrath's own experience: "I first stumbled across Rand by accident about three years ago, researching a book on digital culture. Little snippets from her novels began turning up in the signature files of my e-mail correspondents, who were at that time an unlovely *mélange* of computer hackers, California software developers and lonely boon-dock teens. Struck by the frequency of the references, I ran a routine search on the Internet. Nearly 5000 Rand-related websites spewed onto the screen . . ." (15).

The story then recounts Rand's life and success. McGrath notes that Rand was of the "first generation of women to be enfranchised" and posits this as an underlying element of Rand's interest in politics and philosophy. However, as a thoroughly modern young woman, McGrath evidently finds Rand's view of femininity to be very odd and returns to the subject several times. E.g.: "Rand also claimed to be a 'male chauvinist.' The heroines of her novels are the bruised shop-soiled playthings of brutal men. Rand said femininity was 'hero-worship.' Oh really?" (15). Dominique a shop-soiled plaything? What about 'rape by engraved invitation'? Dagny *neurotic*? McGrath states that she does not like *Atlas Shrugged* (20); one wonders how closely she read it.

There is very little analysis in McGrath's article and what there is, is not very interesting or astute: "So why is it that a ranting, hypocritical extremist¹¹ such as Rand still inspires such diverse and epic devotion? The sweet, dark drama of the maverick and the clear yell of propaganda can only explain a part of it." McGrath's answer is: "As Communism finally waves the white flag, some of the libertarian ideas Rand helped to popularise are beginning to find supporters. . . . Right and left no longer fit neatly into clearly defined boundaries. . . . The

new, pluralist mood leaves space . . . for new ideas and political programmes. Space for oddballs and mavericks to flourish.” She concludes: “Perhaps, nearly a generation after her death, Ayn Rand will finally succeed in becoming . . . the Philosopher Queen of Certainty, a still, strong voice in a flashing world, bringing, as David Kelley says, ‘a secular but objective moral framework’ to an atavistic, uncertain future.” Her last paragraph makes McGrath’s ambivalence explicit: “One thing’s for sure: whenever Ayn Rand really touches down in Britain, I’ll be in the welcoming party. Clapping and cringing” (23).

The Press: John Galt Comes to London

In 2002, Britain’s Conservative Party was chafing under the leadership of Ian Duncan Smith, a quiet family man who was so seldom seen or heard that within a year of his election, rank-and-file Tories were muttering that he’d have to go. As demands for action grew, a story suddenly broke that a faction of younger Tories were planning a new, libertarian, “Start Again Party” under a yet-to-be chosen leader, code-named—John Galt. Alas, the story turned out to be a hoax, but not before Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* and Objectivism had been given a thorough airing in several prominent newspapers and magazines (and on TV, as we have just seen).

The story broke on the front page of the respectable *Daily Telegraph* (13 August 2002), which had been conned by copies of cleverly manufactured email correspondence. The story concluded: “The group has not yet identified a possible leader, but it has given the post a code-name: ‘John Galt’, after a central character in *Atlas Shrugged*, the novel by Ayn Rand, in which the characters frequently ask ‘who is John Galt?’” A follow-up story next day, headlined “Duncan Smith told not to lose nerve” (2), gave a hint of the purpose of the hoax: to push IDS into action by threatening a split in the Party.

As the story gathered pace, three important news organs followed up with major commentaries. First was *The Spectator* on 17 August (10) with a full-page lead article in the “Politics” section entitled “Suddenly the Tories Are Asking: Who is John Galt? The Answer Is: Bad News.” The author was Michael Harrington: “Rand is one of those

strange but intriguing figures who used to hang around in the intellectual underworld of the 20th century and never entirely went away. She is still a hero on the libertarian Right in the United States, but it is rare to hear her name in English Conservative circles.”

Rand, he continued, “achieved considerable notoriety in the 1960s as the prophet of a brand of economic individualism more rigid and extreme than anyone had previously imagined.” The crux of his article was a novel interpretation of Rand’s magnum opus: “*Atlas Shrugged* is a long, inverted and malevolent parody of the New Testament. . . . Galt is an engineer whose miracle is a machine . . . giving mankind unlimited, cheap and environmentally-healthy energy. Galt destroys the miraculous machine so that a corrupt society cannot have it. Jesus in the Gospels used divine power to heal the sick. Galt withholds scientific knowledge knowing that the sick will die. Jesus sent his disciples into the world to heal and preach and save. Galt calls his disciples in from the world in order to bring it down in ruin.”

Harrington later quoted Ragnar Dannekskjöld describing him as the man “who robs the thieving poor and gives back to the productive rich,” adding: “We could take this to be Ayn Rand’s response to the Sermon on the Mount.” Harrington concluded his article with what may be a personal confession. Rand “had real talent, amounting almost to genius, as a mythic storyteller. Because of her storytelling gift she was able to seduce quite intelligent people, for a while.” Evidently Harrington was one of them, for a while. But Jesus seems to have saved him.

A week later (24 August 2002), *The Spectator* printed two letters in response, one a sharp riposte from John Webb, the other from Graham Asher, who suggested that Harrington’s “attack by innuendo” and “inaccurate précis” of Rand and her philosophy “will probably have the opposite of its intended effect and send people to her books. There they will discover much to think about Her ideas and influence . . . helped to knock down the Berlin Wall and destroy the Soviet Union” (24).

A second response to the story came from the LA’s Editorial Director, Brian Micklethwait. Writing (by request) in Britain’s leading weekend newspaper, *The Sunday Times* (News Review section, 18

August 2002), Micklethwait first introduces Rand and her work in a fair and fairly complimentary manner, but then adds: “There is something adolescent about the defiantly bad-mannered intellectual self-sufficiency of Rand’s heroes. So although we pro-capitalists often start by getting excited by Rand, we usually move on to other and better explanations of the superiority of capitalism, supplied by the likes of [Hayek, Mises and David Friedman].”

The ‘adolescent’ comment is disappointing. There is nothing bad-mannered about Rand’s heroes, nor anything bad-mannered about intellectual self-sufficiency. Further, several of Rand’s heroes and heroines are not self-sufficient initially—they grow. Wynand, Rearden, Dominique and Dagny go through huge learning curves. That is why they are so interesting.

A second objection concerns the alleged superiority of Hayek, Mises, etc. Micklethwait is comparing apples with oranges. Rand was not an economist and made no contribution to explaining the superiority of capitalism in economic terms. What she did do was give capitalism a moral basis, her contribution in this regard being vastly superior to Hayekian scepticism or Misesian praxeology. She also *promoted* laissez-faire economics and its proponents, particularly Mises, vastly more effectively than they did themselves.

Micklethwait must have been half aware of the injustice of his comments, because he immediately continues: “we do hold fast to Rand’s proclamation of the moral excellence of capitalism and of the wrongness of those who would oppose it.” However, he then adds, “capitalism is indeed moral, but not because it is ‘selfish.’ It is moral because it’s based on consent” (5). This too is wrong. Capitalism is moral because it is based on *individual rights*, respect for which is the principle underlying the “consent” Micklethwait prefers. He mistakes an effect for a cause.

Micklethwait does say quite a lot more around the theme that “ideas matter” with which one can agree, but I don’t have space to comment further. I should stress too that, flaws aside, “John Galt, the messiah for a Tory revival” is a well-written article in a very important place. The top half of a page in the “News Review” section of *The Sunday Times*, with a full width, inch-high headline plus a still from *The*

Fountainhead, is about as good as it gets.

The third major article to discuss the mythical Start Again Party appeared the same day as Micklethwait's but in the much less high-brow tabloid *The Mail on Sunday*, which serves, with its sister publication *The Daily Mail*, a large chunk of traditionalist, conservative, 'middle England' in an aggressive, often sensationalist fashion. Under the banner headline, "Is this the woman who can save the Tories?," the double-page spread included a large photo of Rand and a still from the movie *The Passion of Ayn Rand*.

The excellent accompanying copy is by Mary Ellen Synon. Having briefly explained the significance of Rand, *Atlas*, and Galt, she writes: "Nothing would stir the soul (well, the libertarian soul, anyway) as much as a party founded on Ayn Rand's philosophy. It would promise a country with no state-owned hospitals, schools or transport, no welfare hand-outs, no council houses and no agricultural subsidies. Rand's philosophy does not regard man as a congenital dependent. There would also be no income tax (You earned it? It's yours)."

The remaining three-quarters of the article consists mostly of a sustained attack on the British Conservative Party, or 'Tories': "one has to wonder what any Tories—disaffected or not—are doing with Ayn Rand and John Galt, for no Tory politician has ever been libertarian. No Tory politician has ever been a radical capitalist. (Thatcher? She abhorred laissez-faire, and said so.)

"It is not possible to imagine any Tory speaking as Galt does when he scorns those who beg: 'What permits any insolent beggar to wave his sores in the face of his betters and to plead for help in the tone of a threat? [. . .] You expect us to feel guilty of our virtues in the presence of your vices, wounds and failures—guilty of succeeding at existence, guilty of enjoying the life that you damn, yet beg us to help you to live.' When a Tory is faced with 'a beggar who waves his sores' he only whimpers: "The NHS¹² is safe in our hands."

Doubting the sincerity of the conspirators, Synon comes close to suspecting the hoax. She asks what these "unnamed, disaffected Tories" are doing, "letting it be known they admire Rand's work and Rand's hero John Galt? One must conclude they are just posing." She goes on to criticize roundly the "concern for the vulnerable" stance of

the then Tory Leader, Ian Duncan Smith: “being vulnerable is easy—anybody who is incompetent, stupid or lazy can qualify.” After more in this vein, she asserts: “The party leadership is so busy trying to straddle both sides of every issue that the Tories have failed to learn what Rand could have taught them: ‘There are two sides to every issue; one side is right and the other is wrong, but the middle is always evil.’”

Synon concludes, “the disaffected Tories who say they admire Rand . . . want her only because they think that by borrowing her strength, they can look strong. But Rand’s intellectual muscle is her own. No man can borrow it. Each man must build his own. As Rand said herself, no man can ask another man’s brain to do his thinking any more than he can ask another man’s lungs to do his breathing. It is a lesson the Tories will never learn” (58).

1982: A British Obituary

After the positive note just sounded, it is regrettable—but probably more apt for the overall picture—to have to conclude this review with the one obituary I was able to find, in an architectural magazine, *Building Design*, dated 19 March 1982. Buried inside, next to an advertisement for plumbing and drainage systems, the piece is very typical of British ambivalence about Rand: honest enough to admit she created something special, yet reluctant to accept her radical stance. After noting the fact of her death, the piece acknowledges that *The Fountainhead* is “probably the most famous example of the architect as hero.” It also confirms that most students of architecture in the U.S. have read it, some choosing their profession because of it.

The piece continues: “The brave and beautiful purity of the hero Howard Roark as he struggles against the overwhelming tide of traditional architecture to a land where a new architecture will rise uncompromisingly is indeed stirring. . . .

“Rand’s philosophy was called objectivism, which . . . had a certain vogue, especially among the far right anti-liberal faction. The glorified self-determination was all that mattered and the implication that without it you are nothing makes her philosophy unpalatable. . . . Her books are full of parodies of people to whom she allows only this one

facet, and generally philosophy makes poor fiction. But somehow in this age of compromise, cutbacks and redundant architects, it is wonderful to read what might have been, and very interesting that she should have chosen architecture as the vehicle” (9).

Conclusion: Why So Little Interest?

Though literary history is not my field, I think I can make a few reasonable guesses as to why Rand’s work has failed to take off in England. First, there is so much home-grown literature in Great Britain, both historical and present day, that British readers grow up with a vast literary smorgasbord of their own—which not unnaturally takes first place. As for students, even if they read for forty years, they would never be able to read everything that has been written about Shakespeare, let alone about all the others they are required to study, from Chaucer to George Orwell. The same is true in philosophy. Like them or not, British philosophers such as Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Smith, Bentham, Mill, Moore, Russell, Ayer, Ryle, or the London-based Karl Popper, and their countless commentators, have left enough interesting thought behind to keep students busy for their lifetimes. In sum, the British Isles have an embarrassment of intellectual riches—which continue to grow. Currently, some 100,000 new titles are published every year in the United Kingdom.

Secondly, while American bestsellers frequently top the charts in London, and vice versa, others mysteriously fail to catch on. John Sutherland, in *Reading the Decades*, notes that American best-selling novels “are not automatically top titles in the UK” (2002, 129). He notes the “perversity” of British readers, and their “unpredictability” (174). Perhaps Rand’s books were too American, too long, too philosophical, or too something else to appeal to the perverse and unpredictable Brits.

My own guess is that her work is too earnest, too black and white, too ‘extreme’ for Albion’s tastes and values. English phlegm or sang-froid and its literary counterpart, understatement, are still highly regarded. It’s cool to be cool in Britannia—pondering over highbrow conjectures, or expressing one’s own surmises with self-effacing reticence. Adamant certainty of the Randian sort is usually regarded

with suspicion, or dismissed as OTT, ‘over the top.’ So *The Fountainhead’s* not-guilty verdict for blowing up public housing, or the declaratory assurance of Galt’s Speech (‘sixty pages my dear’) would have been greeted by many a British reader with a pained, raised eyebrow.

John Sutherland began his entertaining study by saying that for the literary historian, a popular book is a “sociological experiment that has worked. Bestsellers fit their cultural moment as neatly as a well-fitting glove” (7). If that is so, Rand’s two main novels could hardly have hit Britain at worse times. In 1947, when *The Fountainhead* was first published in the U.K., the togetherness and camaraderie engendered by World War II still flourished and Britons were deeply involved in a vast experiment with socialism: public housing was the order of the day. It was the bleedin’ Luftwaffe who’d done the blowing up! Similarly, when *Atlas Shrugged* was published in 1957, Britons were enjoying a belated but nonetheless exhilarating postwar boom: “You’ve never had it so good” as Prime Minister Macmillan famously put it. Economic optimism prevailed, and since the dire consequences of nationalizing industries and health care had yet to become apparent, Rand’s warnings would have fallen on deaf ears. Had *Atlas Shrugged* been published twenty years later, in the grim 1970s, when Britain’s socialist experiment began to collapse, the title might have been on everybody’s lips.

It must also be noted that Rand’s ideas were perhaps even more politically incorrect in Britain than they were in the U.S. Aside from natural benevolence, which is plentiful here, a well-mannered, good-tempered altruism, combined with notions of duty to help the less well off, pervades the British psyche. Charity is a huge industry in the British Isles, even alongside the welfare state—of which most Britons still approve. The passage about beggars in Galt’s Speech quoted by Mary Ellen Synon would have been unintelligible to the vast majority of Britons and shockingly reprehensible to most of those who understood it.

Although our survey of Rand in England has not produced rave reviews, it is pleasing to be able to end on a more optimistic note. The ready availability of Rand’s novels in bookshops is surely indicative of

an abiding presence, while the ten-minute slot on *Newsnight* and the choice of John Galt as a code name in 2002 demonstrate awareness of Rand by influential people. Further, the interest in her work shown by a young writer like Melanie McGrath reveals that Rand has cross-generational appeal. (My daughter Jessica, 20, has read *Anthem* about a dozen times!) It has taken a long time, but just as Rand studies are coming of age in the U.S., so there are hints of a growing interest in her work in a hitherto rather unreceptive Britain.

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Lastly, a note for future researchers: Chris Tame's extensive private collection of British references to Rand, and Curtis-Brown's U.K. records, are both in storage and currently inaccessible. They would certainly merit exploration.

An earlier, much longer draft of this essay is available for anyone who would like greater detail, more discussion, and many more quotations.

Notes

1. Results broadcast on BBC2 TV, 18 October 2003, and discussed in following weeks. Out of 140,000 votes cast in the first round, *The Fountainhead* got 45, *Atlas Shrugged* 59. The minimum necessary to make it into the Top 100 was 180. American titles in the Top 100 were *The Godfather* (91), *On the Road* (90), *Of Mice and Men* (52), *Dune* (45), *The Great Gatsby* (43) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (29). Russian titles included were *Crime and Punishment* (60) and *Anna Karenina* (54). *War and Peace* made it into the Top 21, as did 5 American books: *Catcher in the Rye*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Catch 22*, *Little Women*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Voting increased sixfold for the Top 21. The contest was won by *The Lord of the Rings*.

2. Reference supplied by David Ashton.

3. The essay is available on the LA website, <www.libertarian.co.uk>.

4. Although associated with the Ayn Rand Institute, Webb has none of the aloofness that mars 'official' Objectivist organizations in the United States. He immediately offered help when he heard about my research project.

5. Sutherland's other "heavyweights" were *Doctor Zhivago* and *Lolita*.

6. Pen name of English novelist Mary Mackay (1855–1924), a writer of popular romantic melodramas.

7. One of the young writers “mustered” by Arthur Seldon. Thanks to David Ashton for the reference.
8. Thanks to Chris Tame for the Wilson and Barry references.
9. Dates for the Spillane and Eddy interviews were not available. Rand (1995, 643) actually corresponded with Eddy on 1 June 1967, thanking him for a recording of “Will o’ the Wisp,” which he had sent her as a gift.
10. Thanks to Kevin McFarlane for a copy of the article.
11. That’s as nasty as McGrath gets. Most of the piece is more friendly.
12. The British National Health Service: Labourites usually charge (correctly) that many Tories would like to axe the NHS, while the Tories think (correctly) that they wouldn’t win an election if they did.

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